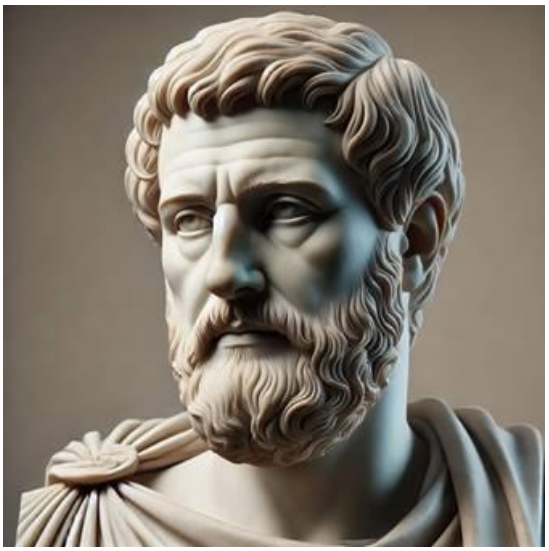
Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 1, Issue 4
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajpia Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 3057-4242 DOI: 10.30958/ajpia



Thucydides' contributions to politics and international affairs are significant. He may be considered the father of political realism in international relations. His work has inspired and influenced many political and international affairs scholars.

December 2025

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajpia Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 3057-4242 DOI: 10.30958/ajpia

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs

Published by the Athens Institute

Athens Institute is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. Athens Institute is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from Athens Institute's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens"…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is Athens Institute's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in Athens Institute's name.

The ***Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs (AJPIA)*** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of politics & international studies. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the conferences sponsored by the Politics & International Affairs Unit of the **Athens Institute**. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement. A journal publication might take from a minimum of six months up to one year to appear.

The Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs
ISSN NUMBER: 3057-4242 - DOI: 10.30958/ajpia
Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025
Download the entire issue (PDF)

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs
Editorial and Reviewers' Board

President's Message

All Athens Institute's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by Athens Institute throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the basic academic standards, which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, Athens Institute will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the fourth of the first volume of the *Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs (AJMS)*, published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

Athens Institute for Education and Research

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

24th Annual International Conference on Politics & International Studies
15-19 June 2026, Athens, Greece

The **Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs** organizes the **24th Annual International Conference on Politics & International Studies, 15-19 June 2026, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies and the Athens Journal of Social Sciences. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics, researchers and professionals in private and public organizations and governments of Politics and International Affairs and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2026/FORM-POL.doc).

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Philip G. Cerny,** Director, Social Sciences Division, Athens Institute & Professor Emeritus, University of Manchester (UK) and Rutgers University (USA).
- **Dr. Kenneth Christie,** Head, Politics & International Affairs Unit, Athens Institute & Professor, Royal Roads University, Canada.
- **Dr. Orna Almog,** Deputy Head, Politics & International Affairs Unit, Athens Institute & Senior Lecturer (Retired), Kingston University, UK.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **24 February 2026**
- Submission of Paper: **18 May 2026**

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

More information can be found here: https://www.atiner.gr/social-program

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€

Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

Athens Institute for Education and Research

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

19th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies
30-31 March & 1-2 April 2026, Athens, Greece

The **Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs** organizes the **19th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies, 30-31 March & 1-2 April 2026, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of Mediterranean Studies, such as history, arts, archaeology, philosophy, culture, sociology, politics, international relations, economics, business, sports, environment and ecology, etc. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2026/FORM-MDT.doc).

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos, President, Athens Institute & Honorary Professor, University of Stirling, U.K.
- Dr. Steven Oberhelman, Professor of Classics, Holder of the George Sumey Jr Endowed Professorship of Liberal Arts, and Associate Dean, Texas A&M University, USA, Vice President of International Programs, Athens Institute and Editor of the Athens Journal of History.
- Dr. Nicholas Pappas, Vice President of Academic Membership, Athens Institute & Professor of History, Sam Houston University, USA.
- Dr. David Philip Wick, Director, Arts, Humanities and Education Division, Athens Institute & Professor of History, Gordon College, USA.
- Dr. Yannis Stivachtis, Director, Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs and Associate Professor, Jean Monnet Chair & Director of International Studies Program, Virginia Tech – Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, USA.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **2 December 2025**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **2 March 2026**

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€

Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

More information can be found here: https://www.atiner.gr/social-program

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs - Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025 –Pages 255-280

Chasing Menelik's Ghost: Why Abiy Ahmed Has failed the Oromo People

By Asafa Jalata[*]

Abiy Ahmed, who claimed to be an Oromo and came to state power in 2018 in Ethiopia mainly because of the Oromo youth protest movement that occurred between 2014 and 2018 to oppose the terrorist policies of the Tigrayan-led government, turned against the objectives of the protest movement, which included democracy, national self-determination, and social justice. He came up with a grand narrative called Ethiopianism, which attempts to rebuild the so-called great ancient Ethiopia with the image of Menelik (the principal architect of the Ethiopian Empire) by glorifying his ghost and justifying colonialism, state- or state-sponsored terrorism and recurrent wars on the Oromo people and the subjugated others. As far as the colonized nations are concerned, Menelik's state-building and empire-building strategies and policies symbolized darkness and horror because they involved terrorism, slavery, colonialism, racism, genocide, and gross human rights violations. In other words, Ethiopianism has justified the Habasha (Amhara-Tigrayan) colonial political project of domination and exploitation of the Oromo and others by any means necessary. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the Oromo national movement led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the development of national Oromummaa as Oromo nationalism has recently shaken the foundation of Habasha supremacy or Ethiopianism for the last half-century. Currently, the Ethiopian state led by Abiy Ahmed is trying to destroy or suppress national Oromummaaa,[1] which means Oromo national identity, culture, and nationalism, and the Oromo national movement, which struggles for Oromia's self-determination and egalitarian democracy of the gadaa/siiqqee system (indigenous Oromo democracy).[2] Following the policies and practices of the Haile Selassie, Mangist Haile Mariam, and Meles Zenawi successive nafxanya (gun-holders and terrorist) governments, Abiy Ahmed has consolidated the nafxanya system, state terrorism, and gross human rights violations in Oromia (the Oromo country) and beyond. First, the paper provides a historical background for the contradictions between Ethiopianism and national Oromummaa. Second, it explains the effects of European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism on the Oromo and the other colonized nations. Third, the piece explains why the Abiy Ahmed government and its supporters are determined to restore Menelik's legacy and maintain the supremacy of Amhara culture, language, history, and Orthodox Christianity in a multicultural and multireligious empire. Finally, it presents a discussion and concluding remarks.

Keywords: *Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopianism, Ethiopian colonialism, Menelik, national Oromummaa, the Oromo National Movement, and Nafxanyas (gun-holders)*

---

[*]Professor, The University of Tennessee at Knoxville, USA.

[1]For further discussion, see Asafa Jalata, *Orommummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism,* Oromia Publishing Company, Atlanta: Georgia, 2007.

[2]Asafa Jalata and Harwood D. Schaffer, "The Oromo Movement for *Gadaa/Siiqqee* Renaissance in the 21st Century," *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, pp. 1-27.

Contradictions Between *Ethiopianism* and *Oromummaa:* Nine Centuries of Contestations

The Abyssinian peoples (Amhara and Tigray), who prefer to call themselves *Habashas*, emerged with a common Orthodox Christianity, political system, tradition, and customs. One must accept Orthodox Christianity, learn at least one of the *Habasha* languages (Amharinga or Tigrigna), and accept their traditions and habits to be Amhara or Tigray. Although they developed through the assimilation of the remnants of the Axumites and other indigenous peoples, such as the Agaw, Qimant, and others, the *Habashas*, particularly the Amhara, later assimilated the other colonized peoples. The monarchical, state, and church institutions have gradually maintained Amhara privileges, supremacy, and ethnonational stratification. Before they colonized the Oromo, the Amhara warlords destroyed or suppressed the Agaw, Qimant, and others by suppressing their cultures, languages, identities, and histories and dispossessing their economic resources, such as land. The Habasha elites have used the ideology and discourse of *Ethiopianism,* which provides false narratives of the successive Amhara state and the ruling class to explain, justify, and glorify the formation of the Ethiopian Empire and to deny the colonization of the Oromo and others.

The ideology of *Ethiopianism* emerged from the name Ethiopia, which originated from the Greek word *Aethiopes,* which means burned face or black.[3] Classical Greek explorers and writers named the territories inhabited by Black peoples, Ethiopia, in Asia and Africa.[4] *Ethiopianism* with broader Pan-Africanism in the contemporary period is linked to the black world that classical Greek writers explained above. However, the Ethiopian colonial rulers have distorted this version of *Ethiopianism* and used it as a racist ideology to legitimize the *nafxanya* (gun-carrying rulers) and the colonial system they created. Even though the historical meaning of Ethiopia applies to all Black peoples, it contemporarily applies to the geographic areas of Abyssinia proper and regions that the Habashas or Abyssinians colonized and created the Ethiopian Empire. Recognizing the political and ideological significance of the name Ethiopia and especially its Christian Biblical connections, Abyssinian leaders have claimed an Ethiopian identity and asserted that their ancient territories included all regions that classical geographers and historians described as Ethiopia.[5] The official adoption of Ethiopia for the Abyssinian Empire occurred in 1931 when Haile Selassie officially changed the name Abyssinia to

[3]A.WallisBudge,*AHistoryofEthiopia*,vols.IandII(London:MethuenandCo. Ltd., 1928), pp. 120-121. Discussing ancient Ethiopia, Budge says, "The descrip- tions of Ethiopia given by Homer, Herodotus, Diodorus, Strabo and Pliny make it quite clear that they indicated by this name the vast tracts of country [regions] in Asia and Africa that were inhabited by dark-skinned and black-faced peoples." See also Jean Doresse, *Ancient Cities and Temples: Ethiopia*, Elsa Coult, (tr.), (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 7-61.

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]For further discussion, see Gadaa Melba, *Oromia: A Brief Introduction,* Finfinnee, 1980; Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992,* Denver, Co., Lynne Rienner publishers, 1993, pp. 3-6.

Ethiopia in his constitution.[6] Gradually, *Ethiopianism* has emerged as a political and ideological construct that Amhara and Tigrayan state elites have used to justify and rationalize Ethiopian settler colonialism, the *gabbar-nafxanya* system (semi-slavery), the racialized state power, and an ethno-racial hierarchy.[7]

Ethiopia has become an empire by claiming the name of ancient Ethiopia and justifying terrorism, enslavement, colonization, and the continued subjugation of Oromos and others through the discourse of race, religion, and *Ethiopianism*.[8] *Ethiopianism*, or Greater Ethiopia's ideology, claims Ethiopia was never colonized like other parts of Africa because of Habashas' bravery and patriotism, making this Empire unique.[9] The false Ethiopian historical discourse claims that Ethiopian boundaries are sacred since they were established 3,000 years ago. Furthermore, it is asserted that Abyssinian "society represented an advanced level of social and economic organization" that enabled it to defend itself from European colonialism by eliminating slavery and protecting "all the peoples of greater Ethiopia from falling prey to European imperialism"[10] and that Ethiopia played a crucial civilizing mission by colonizing and dominating the Oromo and other nations who were considered backward, pagan, destructive, and inferior. These racist mythologies assisted Ethiopia in enjoying more recognition in Europe and North America, and "there was extended public discussion of Ethiopia's place in the world community and a great elaboration of the Ethiopian mythology initiated by European writers for a European public."[11]

As a racist ideology, *Ethiopianism* claims that Habashas are different from other Africans and superior to them lay at the core of the European justification for empowering them to colonize and rule the Oromos and other nations. The Ethiopian Empire was created with the alliance of European imperialist powers, such as France, England, and Italy. Habasha warlords and rulers have maintained their power through a coalition with successive imperial superpowers, namely, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and China, that have protected successive Ethiopian state elites and their governments.[12] The Abiy government also receives substantial financial and military support from the United Arab Emirates.[13] With the establishment of their colonial authority in the colonized states, Habasha settlers "assumed that their innate superiority over the residents accounted for this accomplishment."[14] These essential components of racist discourses have remained intact. "Socialist" and then "democratic" discourses have been introduced by successive Habasha state elites and accepted by their

[6]Gadaa Melbaa, *Oromia: A Brief Introduction* (Oromia: Finfinnee, 1980), p. 32.
[7]Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia:* ibid., pp. 65-93.
[8]Asafa Jalata, *Fighting against the Injustice of the State and Globalization,* New York: Palgrave, 2001.
[9]See Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*, Trenton: NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990.
[10]Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 16.
[11]Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *ibid.,* p. 176.
[12]Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia, ibid.*
[13]ispionline.it/en/publication/the-uaes-rising-military-role-in-africa-defending-interests-advancing-influence-172825; https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/Missions/Addis-Ababa/UAE-Relationships/Bilateral - Relationshipaccessed on 01/05/2025.
[14]Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *ibid.,* p. 111.

global supporters without changing Ethiopian society's colonizing and racist structures.

The Ethiopian state has been owned and controlled mainly by the *nafxanya* (settler) class, which includes Habasha elites, Ethiopianized Oromos, and other collaborators who dominate all aspects of state power and use state terrorism to maintain their power and privilege. The state has been Abyssianized or racialized to exclude non-Habashas peoples from decision-making power. The Ethiopian state has effectively used *Ethiopianism* to hide the crimes against humanity. Therefore, the only way to liberate Oromo society is by building and strengthening the Oromo national movement based on the ideology of national *Oromummaa* (Oromo-centric history, worldview, culture, nationalism, and egalitarian democracy). Rejecting the ideology of *Ethiopianism*, Oromo nationalists have developed national *Oromummaa* to oppose and dismantle the Ethiopian racial/ ethnonational hierarchy and settler colonialism and its institutions. National *Oromummaa,* as an Oromo nationalist ideology and worldview, builds on the best elements of Oromo culture and traditions and advances an indigenous Oromo democracy known as the *gadaa/ siiqqee* system.[15]

Before their colonization, the Oromo had the *gadaa* system of government, which "organized [them] in an all-encompassing democratic republic even before the few European pilgrims arrived from England on the shores of North America and only later built a democracy."[16] The Oromo had an unwritten constitutional government. According to Lemmu Baissa,

> *Gadaa* government comprises a hierarchy of triple levels: national, regional, and local. At the pan-Oromo level, the national government was led by an elected *luba* council [leaders] formed from representatives of the significant Oromo moieties, clan families, and clans, under the presidency of the *abbaa gadaa* and his two deputies . . . The national leadership was responsible for vital matters such as legislation and enforcement of general laws, handling issues of war and peace and coordinating the nation's defense, managing intra-Oromo clan conflicts, and dealing with non-Oromo people.[17]

Gadaa has three interrelated meanings: the grade during which a class assumes politico-ritual leadership, the eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones, and the institution of Oromo society.[18] Discussing the philosophy of Oromo democracy, Asmarom Legesse notes, "What is astonishing about this cultural tradition is how far Oromo have gone to

---

[15]Asafa Jalata Harwood D. Schaffer, "*Gadaa* as the Fountain of *Oromummaaa* and the Theoretical Base of Oromo Liberation," *Journal of Oromo Studies,* Volume 21, Number 1, pp. 1-25.

[16]Bonnie K. Holcomb, "Akka Gadaatti: The Unfolding of Oromo Nationalism-Keynote Remarks." Proceedings of the 1991 Conference on Oromia. University of Toronto, Canada, 3-4 August, 1991: 1-10.

[17]Lemmu Baissa, "The Oromo Gadaa System of Government: An Indigenous African Democracy," edited by Asafa Jalata, *State Crises, Globalisation and National Movements in Northeast Africa*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 101.

[18]Asmarom Legesse, *Gadaa: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, (New York: Free Press, 1973).; Asmarom Legessee*, Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*, (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2006).

ensure that power does not fall in the hand of war chiefs and despots. They achieve this goal by creating a system of checks and balances at least as complex as the systems we find in Western democracies."[19]

The *gadaa* system has the principles of checks and balances (through periodic succession every eight years), division of power (among executive, legislative, and judicial branches), balanced opposition (among five parties), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other system principles have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions, and confederacies, accountability of leaders, settling disputes through reconciliation, and respecting fundamental rights and liberties.[20] All *gadaa* officials were elected for eight years by universal adult male suffrage.

Currently, the Oromo national movement led by the OLF and the OLA is struggling to retrieve popular Oromo democracy through the principle of national self-determination. National *Oromummaa,* as an intellectual and ideological vision, places the Oromo man and woman at the center of analysis and, at the same time, goes beyond Oromo society and aspires to develop global *Oromummaa* by contributing to the solidarity of all oppressed peoples by promoting the struggle for national self-liberation and egalitarian democracy. National *Oromummaa* is a complex and dynamic national and global project. As a national project and the ideology of the Oromo national movement, national *Oromummaa* enables Oromos to retrieve their cultural-centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action, empowering the people for liberation.

The global *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all progressive political and social forces that accept the principles of national self-determination and egalitarian democracy in promoting global humanity free of oppression and exploitation. It is based on mutual solidarity, social justice, and popular democracy. National *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 national *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles embedded within Oromo democratic traditions and culture and, simultaneously, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. The main foundations of national *Oromummaa* are individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation, all of which are built on the concept of *safuu* (moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa/siiqqee* principles. Although national *Oromummaa* emerges from the Oromo cultural and historical foundations, it goes beyond culture and history in providing a liberating narrative for the future of the Oromo nation and other oppressed peoples, particularly those who suffered under the Ethiopian Empire.

As a critical ideology and worldview, national *Oromummaa* challenged the idea of glorifying kings or strongmen or chiefs who collaborated with European

[19]Asmarom Legesse, *Gadaa: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 2.
[20]Lemmu Baisa, *ibid.*

slavers and colonizers and destroyed African peoples by participating in the slave trade and the project of colonization. Successive Ethiopian government elites have built their power on the foundation of an ethnoracial hierarchy rationalized and justified by racism. They have maintained their legitimacy and survival through external connections and domestic political violence. Because they have failed to remove the political obstacles that have facilitated external dependency and state violence, they cannot build multinational democracy, peace, stability, and development. Because the Ethiopian state has been supported by mighty global powers and the imperial interstate system, there have been connections between racism, state violence, and global tyranny. National *Oromummaa* promotes sovereignty in opposition to dependency, sustainable development and self-sufficiency, national self-determination, and egalitarian democracy. As far as the Oromo people are concerned, *Ethiopianism* as an ideology and practice of colonial project of the successive *Habasha* ruling classes started nine hundred years ago, when the Amharas attacked the Oromo subgroups in Menz, northern Shawa, to destroy their religion, culture, language and initiated the dispossession of their lands to subjugate and exploit them.[21]

At the same time, using *Oromummaa* as a resistance ideology and a survival strategy, the Tulama Oromo groups in Menz and its surroundings started to oppose *Ethiopianism* to protect their Oromo identity, culture, history, and humanity and to defend the Oromo country from the Amhara and other invading forces.[22] However, national *Oromummaa* as Oromo nationalism and national cultural and historical restoration started to further develop with Oromo national organizations, such as the Matcha-Tulama Self-Help Association in the 1960s and the Oromo Liberation in the 1970s to restore Oromia's self-determination, sovereignty, statehood, and egalitarian democracy of the *gadaa/siiqqee* system. The power of national *Oromummaa* as self-definition and self-discovery was initiated by a few Oromo organic intellectuals who wrote *The Oromos: Voice against Tyranny* in 1971 and restored the original Oromo name by rejecting the derogatory colonial name, *Galla.* Stokely Carmichael states, "The first need of a [mentally] free people is to define their terms," cultures, names, and objectives.[23] Oromo organic intellectuals and many activist Oromo scholars further developed different forms of *Oromummaa.*

Oromo nationalists paid dearly in restoring the authentic Oromo name, culture, and history, which the neo-*nafxanaya* government of Abiy is working day and night to destroy through its institutions, such as schools, media, the army, security structures (such as *Koree nageenya* (death squad),[24] and other

[21]See, Mekura Bulcha, *Contours of the emergent and ancient Oromo nation: dilemmas in the Ethiopian politics of state and nation-building, Center for Advanced Studies of African Societies, Cape Town, 2011;* Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: 1300-1700,* James Currey, 2015.

[22]See The Oromos: Voice against Tyranny, 1971. The was the first underground Oromo paper to initiate the Oromo national movement.

[23]William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975,* Chicago: The University of Chicago, pp. 29-62.

[24]In Ethiopia, a secret committee orders killings and arrests to crush rebels, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-violence-committee/ accessed 12/29/2025.

agencies. The concept of Oromo self-definition has been central to the Oromo national movement because it promotes *Oromummaa* and the revolution of mind and culture to defeat the ideology and practice of *Ethiopianism* and an inferiority complex in Oromo society. Through self-definition, self-discovery, and self-legitimation, Oromo nationalists have developed a collective consciousness of national *Oromummaa* and Oromo national pride to empower the Oromo people by struggling for liberation, freedom, and egalitarian democracy by attacking and delegitimizing *Ethiopianism* and *Habasha* or Amhara supremacy. The complex contradictions and conflicts between *Ethiopianism* and *Oromummaa* can be addressed and understood by analyzing the antagonistic historical relations between the Oromo and the Amhara for centuries.

Although the colonization of the Oromo during the last decades of the 19th century intensified the conflict between the Oromo and the *Habashas,* their disputes on land, identity, power, religion, culture, and history started in the 12th century, as mentioned above. "From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the [Oromo] were dominant on their territories; no people of other cultures could exercise compulsion over them."[25] However, starting from the last decades of the 19th century, the European intervention on the side of the *Habasha* changed the balance of power by favoring the latter. The Ethiopian colonial state used a document known as the *Kebra Nagast* (Glory of the Kings) that rationalized and legitimized the monarchy by linking its genealogical descent to the ancient King of Israel, Solomon.[26] By tracing "the origin of the Ethiopian state in the era of Solomon, the legend endowed the Ethiopian nation with a notable ancient past. Tradition reckons history, hence the claim to three thousand years of existence."[27]

Based on this myth, the Amhara monarchy considered itself a Solomonic dynasty. The so-called Solomonic monarchy remained in power from 1270 to 1974, when the military government overthrew the Haile Selassie regime and ended the legend that connected the Amhara dynasty with King Solomon. The first Amhara warlord, Yekuno-Amlak, claimed the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270 when he emerged as the first Amhara negus (King) and later shifted the geopolitical center from Lalibela, Lasta, to Menz, the northern Shawan plateau.[28] The successive Amhara ruling classes continued using the Solomonic dynasty's mythical claim and Orthodox Christian ideology to maintain their dominant political economies. "The Solomonic myth, introduced with the decline of the Axumite Empire, when more cement was needed to patch up the cracking wall of unity,"[29] was combined with Orthodox Christianity to shape the behavior of the Amhara-Tigrayan peoples. Claiming their descent from King Solomon and their election by God, the monarchs placed themselves at the

[25]Virginia Luling, "Government and Social Control among Some Peoples of the Horn of Africa," M.A. Thesis: The University of London, 1965.
[26]John Markakis, Ethiopia: anatomy of a traditional polity, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 19974, p. 29.
[27]J. Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 29.
[28]R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History*, p. 64.
[29]Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes, the Challenge of Islam, and the Re-Unification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), pp. xviii-XVIII-xix.

top of the secular and ecclesiastic hierarchies; they had the absolute right to appoint and dismiss church and government officers.[30]

From the 15th century onwards, the monarchies maintained political order through their loosely organized army, Orthodox Christian ideology, the monopolization of imported firearms during the 19th century, their control over the appointment and dismissal of officials, and the ability to mobilize human and economic resources in the kingdom through their officials. The monarchs' primary duties were defending the Amhara or Tigrayan people from their enemies and expanding their colonial territories to find more land, enslaved people, cattle, ivory, and other commodities. The colonial government also forced the conquered peoples to provide men as a fighting force and product for the monarchs and their followers. In search of land, enslaved people, serfs (g*abbars*), cattle, and other resources, the Amhara warlords, who called themselves kings, expanded their colonial territories to the Oromo communities of northern Shawa. Mekuria Bulcha writes, "The Gaalaan and the Amhara fought in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. The Gaalaan, who the Tuulama Oromo consider as *angafa* (the senior *gosa* or the firstborn), is numerically the largest Oromo *gosa* [clan] cluster."[31] He considers the northern Shawan plateau the ancient country of the Oromo nation and refutes the claim that the Oromo came to Oromia/Ethiopia from another place. Bulcha characterizes the Shawan plateau as the "*cradle of Oromo civilization and springboard for Amhara expansion"* to the larger Oromo country. He argues that Amda Tseyon first conquered Shawa between 1314 and 1344.[32]

The Shawan plateau was called a 'pagan' territory in the chronicle of Amda Tseyon. The people that the Amharas called 'pagans' were the Oromo. The Amhara group that later called itself Menz "remained as a pocket of resistance in a rugged mountainous area, located in the northern horn of Shawa. As early as the 17th century, the Menz, under the leadership" of Kristos Warada Qal (1696-1703) and later Sahle Selassie (1813-1847) intensified attacking the neighboring Oromo clans.[33] Bulcha notes that Menz is not an Amhara name but was usurped from the Oromo. As a territory, Menz includes Geera Meder, Laalo Meder, and Mamaa Meder when the Amhara king conquered it, and they are Oromo names.[34] The name Shawa was usurped by Sahle Selassie as the name of his kingdom when he established it in 1814. Isolated Christian communities from northern Wallo trickled down to the South between the 9th and 13th centuries and gradually reached Menz within the Shawa plateau and formed a Christian kingdom.[35] Christian Amhara priests moved into neighboring Oromo communities. As described in *The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny*:

---

[30]Allan Hoben, "Social Stratification in Traditional Amhara Society," *Social Stratification in Africa,* Arthur Tuden and Leonard Plotricov (eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 218.
[31]Mekuria Bulcha, *ibid*., pp. 221-222.
[32]*Ibid*., pp. 142-151.
[33]The Oromos, *ibid,* p. 14.
[34]Mekuria Bulcha, *ibid.,* pp. 149-150.
[35]The Oromos, *ibid.,* 11.

> Under their Abbaa Boku and other politico-religious leaders, the Oromo people tried hard to save their homelands from invasion by resisting Christianity, which the imperialists used as a vanguard force of aggression. The Oromos, true to their love of freedom and dignity, burnt the Christian villages that were newly established among them. The Christian priests began compromising their religious practices with the Oromos to overcome this problem. [They started celebrating] the Maskal and the Timket, simultaneously [with] the Oromos' annual ceremonies. Besides this, the Christian kingdom sent troops to settle in areas where Christian churches started evicting the Oromos [by] building monasteries to defend priests.[36]

Furthermore, Mohammed Hassen also notes that "some Oromo groups already living in the region of Shawa before the formation of the Shawan Amhara Empire during the first half of the fourteenth century remained an integral part of that empire during and after the fourteenth century."[37] During the reign of Amda-Sion, the Christian Amharass intensified their expansion into the neighboring Oromo communities in two ways. First, they annexed the Christian communities settled among the Oromo in some parts of Shawa.[38] Second, they forcefully converted some Oromos to Christianity by killing confident Oromo political and religious leaders. As one source noted, "If a Christian kill ... [Oromos] either with a spear or with another weapon…[the Oromo] which he kills shall be considered for him as an offering to God."[39] The neighboring Oromo communities fought against the invading Christian kingdom until the rise of Imam Ahmad, a Muslim leader who conquered and dominated the Christian Empire and other communities between 1527 and 1543.[40] The Oromo suffered immensely from the *jihadi* war because they were involved in both sides of the conflict against invading Christians and Muslims.[41]

When the Christian and Muslim forces were contesting in the Horn of Africa for power and control over resources, the northern and southern Oromo branches fought to liberate their territories and the conquered Oromo communities from the two invaders. When the Amhara Christian kingdom attacked the Tulama Oromo clans, such as the Gaalaan, Yaya, Waji, Abichu, Lalo, and Warra Qaalluu, the Muslim Somali and Afar invaders attacked the Oromo groups living in the area that currently called Somalia and other regions.[42] Starting with the Metta Oromo, Sahle Sellasie, the King of Menz from 1813 to 1847, raided and butchered 4,500 Oromos, enslaved the remaining men, women, and girls, looted grains and herds, and burned and destroyed Oromo communities.[43] "The raids offered Sahle Selassie and his butcherers an opportunity to enrich themselves with booty and enslaved people. This account of Sahle Selassie's campaign is only one of the numerous similar campaigns

[36]*The Oromos: ibid.,* pp. 11-12.
[37]Mohammed Hassen, *ibid*., p. 63.
[38]*Ibid.,* p. 12.
[39]*Ibid.*
[40]Faqi, *The Conquest of Abyssinia: Futuh Al Habasa*< Tsehai, 2005.
[41]Mohammed Hassen, P. 88.
[42]Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century (2nd ed.). Finfinnee: Berhanena Selam Printing Enterprise, 2006.
[43]Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & Ethiopia,* Denver, Lynn Reiner Publishers, 1993, pp. 12-13.

against the Oromo and other groups butchered by Sahle Selassie's ancestors and successors."[44] As a religion and state ideology, Orthodox Christianity created a bridge between European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism during the first half of the 19th century. European missionaries, explorers, and merchants convinced their respective governments to support the *Habasha* warlords against the Oromo and others they considered "pagan" and "savage."

But whenever the Amhara soldiers established their settlements among the Tulama Oromo, the Oromo collectively chased the settlers away or killed them. The result was that the Amaharas could not effectively occupy any Oromo land during this period. Furthermore, between 1855 and 1868, under the leadership of Tewodros, the Amaharas started major campaigns to either colonize and convert the Wallo and Yejju Oromos to Orthodox Christianity or expel or exterminate them. The Oromo branches from northern Shawa and other places had political and religious institutions of *gadaa* and *qallu* that helped them defend their culture, identity, territory, and economic resources. The *gadaa* centers were established at places such as Odaa Mormor (near the Blue Nile), Odaa Nabee (in Shagar), Odaa Roba, and Madda Walaabuu in Bale. In these centers, two different institutions, *gadaa* and *qaaluu,* "served as the center of politics and religion for the Oromo clans living in the areas."[45] The renewal and centralization movement of the *gadaa* system occurred at Odaa Roba by replacing Odaa Nabee, a politico-religious center, for several hundred years. Subsequently, "Odaa Roba [became] a new holy politico-religious center of the Oromo people at large that the various representatives of Oromo groups periodically visited from all directions for such celebrations like *Jilaa Gadaa* [pilgrimages.]" Later, the politico-religious center of Odaa Roba moved to Madda Walaabuu (spring of freedom), likely because of the pressure from the Muslim empire-builders of Afar and Somalia.[46]

With the support of other Oromo branches, the Bale Oromo living around Madda Walaabu reorganized and reconsolidated their political power and the *gadaa* system starting from the fourteenth century.[47] Between 1518 and 1519, the general assembly of the Oromo people was held for six months at Madda Walaabuu to deliberate on how to liberate and defend the Oromo country from the Christian and Muslim invaders; delegates from different parts of the Oromo country participated in this assembly.[48] The main question Walaabuu Jiloo, *Abbaa Gadaa* of Madda Walaabuu, asked at the general assembly was, "Maal Taana?" ("What are we going to be?"[49] After thorough discussions and deliberations, the general assembly defined the main enemies of the Oromo people as Christian and Muslim empire builders. These enemies were attacking the Oromo people by killing them, taking their land and other resources, and

[44]*Ibid.*
[45]Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, *ibid., p. 56*
[46]See Asafa Jalata, "Politico-Cultural Prerequisites for Protecting the Oromo National Interest," *Sociology Mind (2018), https://works.bepress.com/asafa_jalata/94/,* accessed on 07/25/2021, 95-113.
[47]*Ibid.,* p. 104
[48]*Ibid.*
[49]*Ibid.*

forcing them to abandon their culture, religion, and identity.[50] The history of Madda Walaabuu demonstrates that the most significant revival and reorganization of the *gadaa* institution occurred at the beginning of the 16th century.[51] Since this century, the renewal and reorganization of the *gadaa* system have involved fundamental changes, including establishing political objectives, the rules of the game, and specific rules and regulations.

The assembly passed three primary political objectives: The first objective was to strengthen the institution of the *gadaa* system to defend the Oromo people from the wars of Christian and Muslim empire-builders. The second one was consolidating the Oromo military power by recruiting and training *qerroo* (Oromo youth) between 18 and 24 to regain the old Oromo territories lost due to the constant wars. The assembly formulated new rules and regulations, which were important in realizing the objectives. The third objective was to strengthen the *Muuda* religious pilgrimage to the seat of *Abbaa Muuda,* the chief *qaallu,* every eight years. In the indigenous Oromo religion known as *Waaqeeffana, Abbaa Muuda* established an ethical and moral order, which defined the relationship among *Waaqa* (God), society, and nature in a balanced way. In 1522, the Oromo intensified their defensive struggle to recover their lost territories and liberate the conquered Oromo groups. Darrel Bates notes, "The [Oromo] … had suffered in their time from both parties and were waiting in the wings for opportunities … to recover lands taken from them."[52] As mentioned, between 1257 and 1543, the Muslims destroyed the Christian rule and established their own under Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi. The Imam was defeated and beheaded in 1543.

The wars between the Christians and the Muslims endangered the Oromo's survival as a people. With the renewal and reorganization of *gadaa,* the Oromo carried out *butta* wars every eight years, when power transferred from one *gadaa* grade to the next. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, when they intensified their territorial recovery through the *butta* wars, many Oromo branches were under one *gadaa* government. The *gadaa* system strengthened and enabled them to recover their lost territories and accommodate their increased population and stock.[53] The Oromo fought twelve *butta* wars between 1522 and 1618, recovering and reestablishing the Oromo country called Oromia today.[54] According to *The Oromos: Voice Against Tyranny,* "the sixteenth century's so-called 'Galla'[55] invasion' was neither an invasion nor a migration. Instead, it was a national movement of the Oromo people incited by the southern Oromos and supported by the northern Oromos under the domination of the

[50]*Ibid.*
[51]*Ibid.,* p. 96.
[52]Darrell Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty: The Emperor Theodrorus and the Maqdala Campain, (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), P. 7.
[53]Asmarom Legesse, *Gadaa: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, (New York: Free Press, 1973).
[54]Tesema Ta'a, T. The Political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia: From the Mid-16th to the Early-20th Centuries, (PhD Dissertation, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University., 1986)
[55]Galla is a derogatory name given to the Oromo by their enemies; it connotes primitiveness or backwardness.

Abyssinians with the specific goal of liberating themselves and their territories from colonial domination."[56]

Before the rise of Tewodros between 1855 and 1868, there was a balance of power between the Oromo and the Abyssinians, and sometimes the former influenced the Abyssinian kingdom of Gondar."[57] According to J. Spencer Trimingham, "Tewodros capitalized on the Abyssinian concerns and set in motion a series of events that led to the establishment of the modern Ethiopian Empire. During the leadership of Tewodros, some of the Abyssinians engaged in a series of campaigns to colonize and convert the Wallo and Yejju Oromos to Orthodox Christianity or expel or exterminate them. Before this time, the Wallo, Yejju, Azabo, and the Raya Oromo groups had accepted Islam 'as a bulwark against being swamped by Abyssinian nationalism.'"[58] Despite his brutal campaigns and the attempt to deport the Wallo Oromo *en masse* to western Abyssinia, Tewodros ultimately failed to control them effectively. The Ethiopian rulers had long feared both Islam and the Oromo "and the thought of the two in combination [were] their recurring nightmare."[59] On October 29, 1862, Tewodros wrote two identical letters to Queen Victoria of England and Emperor Napoleon III of France expressing his hate for the Oromo: "My fathers, the emperors, having forgotten the creator, He handed over their kingdom to the Galla [Oromo].… But God created me, lifted me out of the dust, and restored this Empire to my rule. He endowed me with power and enabled me to stand in the place of my fathers. By this power, I drove away the Gallas."[60]

After Queen Victoria ignored the letter, Tewodros mistreated and imprisoned British diplomats in Abyssinia. As a result, Great Britain sent an expeditionary force to release them. Yohannes of Tigray and Menelik of Amhara, rivals of Tewodros, then allied themselves with the British to destroy Tewodros. Yohannes provided logistical support for an expeditionary force of Great Britain that was sent to release those British whom Tewodros imprisoned. Tewodros was defeated by the British expeditionary force and committed suicide in 1868 without completing the process of the creation of the modern Ethiopian state. The death of Tewodros was followed by fierce competition and conflict between various centralizing warlords, such as Gobaze of the Amhara, Wag, and Lasta, Kasa of Tigray alias Yohannes, and Menelik of Shawa. On July 11, 1871, with the military and political assistance he received from the British Kasa defeated Gobaze at the battle of Assam and proclaimed himself Emperor Yohannes IV on January 21, 1872.

He also established his suzerainty over Menelik of Shawa and Adal Tassama (Takla Haymanot of Gojjam) and began to collect taxes. Between 1872 and 1889, Yohannes faced three external political pressures during his reign. As

---

[56]The Oromos, *ibid.,* pp. 2-13.
[57]*Ibid.*
[58]J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia,* (New York: Barner and Noble., Inc., 1965), p. 106.
[59]P. W. Baxter, "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromos," *African Affairs*, Volume 77, Issue 308, July 1978, Pages p. 286, pp. 2283–296,
[60]Richard Greenfield and M. Hassen, "Interpretation of Oromo Nationality," Horn of Africa, 1980. p. 8, 3/3: 3-14.

the Italians expanded their colonial territory from the Red Sea coast into Tigray, they allied with Menelik in Shawa, who was consolidating his power. During this period, the Egyptians and the Mahdists of Sudan were also fighting Yohannes.[61] On March 9, 1889, at the battle of Matamma, the Mahdists killed Yohannes, creating the requisite political space for Menelik to expand his power and control. With the support of Great Britain, France, and Italy, Menelik's colonization of non-Abyssinians, particularly the Oromo, allowed him to gain access to the abundant human and material resources that he mercilessly exploited so that he could purchase the modern weaponry and expertise necessary to create and maintain the Ethiopian Empire.[62]

Imperialism and Colonialism and their Consequences

The partitioning of the Horn of Africa was part of the Scramble for Africa, after which European colonial powers divided Africa among themselves. France, Britain, Italy, and Abyssinia/Ethiopia divided the Horn region during the second half of the nineteenth century. The alliance between the European imperialists and the Ethiopian colonialists enabled the Abyssinian warlords to build their Empire by colonizing their main enemy, the Oromo, and other nations. The French, Italians, and British continuously supplied Menelik with various weaponry, ammunition, and technological expertise,[63] all which Menelik parlayed into the foundation of the central state. The firearms from European powers made the Ethiopians "by far the strongest native power in Africa" and the "best armed native race in Africa."[64] With Oromo resources, Menelik "rewarded his generals, paid his soldiers, and bought, first from the French and then from the Italians, huge supplies of arms and ammunition wherewith to equip his ever-growing armies."[65]

"To obtain the necessary finances," Marcus says, "Menelik and his advisors decided to organize a caravan to carry various . . . products to the coast for transshipment to Europe."[66] Czeslaw Jesman notes that Menelik "personally controlled most of the trade of his state. . . . he was a merchant King, besides being a millionaire."[67] In a letter to European powers, Menelik expressed his intention to participate in the scramble for Africa: "I have no intention of being an indifferent spectator if far distant Powers make their appearance with the idea of dividing Africa."[68] Explaining how Menelik began to establish his

[61]Asafa Jalata, *Oromia & E Ethiopia, ibid.*
[62]*Oromia & E Ethiopia, ibid.*
[63]Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941-1974* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1983), p. 13.
[64]Richard Pankhurst, "Menelik and Utilisation of Foreign Skills in Ethiopia," *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. v, no. 1(1967), pp. 65-66.
[65]The Early Lytton, *The Stolen Desert* (London: 1967), p. 160.
[66]Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II, Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 44.
[67]Czeslaw Jesman, *The Russians in Ethiopia* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 60.
[68]Quoted in Robert P. Skinner, *Abyssinia of Today* (New York: Negro Univ. Press, 1969), p. 145.

administration in Oromia, John Murray writes, "Convinced that much more was to be made out of the helpless [Oromo] by their permanent exploitation, he began in the early [18th] seventies to occupy the districts that he overran with permanent garrisons of his troops, providing at the same time for their administration under a hierarchy of his officials."[69] Menelik sent a large expedition to the Oromo country (Oromia) to solve Abyssinia's economic and famine problems. Marcus argues that "Expeditions were often organized during times of famine when numerous refugees went along to settle in newly conquered lands with the soldiers who stayed behind to garrison the fortified villages (*katamas*) erected as control points."[70]

Menelik and his soldiers terrorized and colonized the Oromo and other peoples to obtain enslaved people and commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, and lands. Menelik controlled the slave trade (an estimated 25,000 enslaved people per year in the 1880s), owned with his wife 70,000 enslaved Africans, and became one of the wealthiest capitalists in the region and the world: "The Abyssinian ruler had extended the range of his financial operations to the United States and [was] a heavy investor in American railroads … with his American securities and his French and Belgian mining investments, Menelik [had] a private fortune estimated at no less than twenty-five million dollars."[71] The colonialists used guns (nafxi) and established a system of dispossessing mainly Oromo lands and exacting their labor and agricultural products. The colonial settlers—soldiers, clergypersons, and administrators, all known as *nafxanyas*—exploited *gabbars* (semi-slaves) who were coerced to provide them food, labor, tribute, and tax revenues both in cash and kind.[72] The Ethiopian colonial expansion resulted in mass killings, destruction, and expropriation of property, plundering, enslavement, and genocide.

Some of the Oromo groups openly resisted and fought against the colonialists. For instance, between 1882 and 1886, the bloodiest colonial wars were conducted against the Arsi Oromo because they resisted Ethiopian colonialism under their *gadaa* government. Menelik colonized them in 1886 after conducting six savage campaigns. In addition to mass killings, the hands of thousands of Arsi Oromo men were cut off, and the breasts of thousands of women were mutilated by the order of Menelik at Annole in 1886. About the

[69] John Murray, "Abyssinia Under Menelik and After," p.35.

[70] Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, pp.64-5.

[71] https://www.nytimes.com/1909/11/07/archives/king-menelik-has-investments-here-abyssinias-ru ler-said-to-be-a.html, accessed on 01/05/2025."King Menelik has Investment Here,"

[72] A *ras* (a head of a group) or *dajazmach* (war leader) could receive 1,000 *gabbars,* a sub-governor 200 or 300, a *fitawrar* (another war leader) 300, a *kangazmach* (lower war leader) 150, and ordinary soldiers, depending on their ranks, 20, 15 or 10. The Amhara-led colonial government claimed absolute rights over three-fourths of the Oromo lands and provided portions for its officials and soldiers in lieu of salary. One fourth of the land was granted to the Oromo collaborators, who became the agents of the *nafaxanya* state. Even though some changes occurred in the Ethiopian Empire during 1974, 1991, 2018, the *nafxanya* of all kinds have come to power and continued to protect the same system. The current regime led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is characterized as the neo-*nafaxanya* government because it tries to modernize the Ethiopian state by glorifying Menelik.

colonized regions, Harold Marcus says, "Not only were these territories effectively occupied and policed, but they were also being economically and politically integrated into . . . Ethiopia."[73] Ethiopian settler colonialism developed five types of social arrangement: the *katanas* (garrison of towns), slavery, the *balabat* system (the collaborator class), the *nafxanya-gabbar* system, and the colonial landholding system. The colonial settlers hierarchically organized the *katamas* in Oromia as their main geopolitical centers for practicing political domination through various control agencies, wealth and capital accumulation, and religious and cultural dissemination.[74] The *katamas* served as nerve centers of the Ethiopian colonial system through which colonial political, economic, and ideological programs were formulated and implemented; they were hierarchically organized as the principal, provincial, and subdistrict towns so that chains of command would flow from the center to the local level without any interruption. These garrison towns were established strategically and politically secured places and became centers of regional rule and trade networks connecting parts of Oromia to Ethiopia and Europe. As such, they constituted nodal points of a more extensive countrywide network of towns that, woven territorially, organized the relational structure of Ethiopia's political economy, including the colonialist rule and the flow of products.

The garrison cities were geopolitical headquarters from which Ethiopian soldiers were dispatched to impose colonial rule through enslavement, subjugation, and expropriation of the essential means of production, such as cattle, land, and other valuables. Through these centers, expropriated goods flow to local consumption and international markets. The Oromo branches who resisted colonialism were massacred or fled or became enslaved people, servants to, or manual workers of the colonialists. Still, a few who accepted Ethiopian dominance were culturally assimilated and incorporated into the Ethiopian colonial system. Centralizing their political power in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) with the help of their modern army and communication networks, the colonialists continuously expanded their territories until they reached areas effectively occupied by Britain, France, and Italy. The Ethiopians raided the crops and the cattle of the Oromo and other peoples to feed the famine-stricken Ethiopians. By colonizing the Oromo country, the Ethiopian ruling class transplanted their fellow Ethiopians, mainly Amharas, to Oromia and forced the Oromo to work for them. The Ethiopian "migrant soldier-peasant had formed the flesh and sinew of ... armies of expansion in the south and west, but revenues from northern [Ethiopian] peasant farms never were a significant source of revenue for Ethiopia's growth into a modern state."[75]

Abyssinian soldiers and other famine-stricken Ethiopians continuously occupied the Oromo lands, devastated their properties and lives, looted their grain and cattle, and enslaved those whom they captured in fighting or those who

[73]Harold G. Marcus, "The Black Men Who Turned White: European Attitudes Towards Ethiopia," *Archiv Orientalni 39 (1971), Academia, nakladatelstvi*, Ceskoslovenka Akademie ved, p. 165.
[74]See Asafa Jalata, Oromia &Ethiopia, pp. 88-93.
[75]James McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900-1935* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. 57-58.

could not pay taxes. The institution that entitled the colonialists and their intermediaries to exact labor and agricultural products from the Oromo and others was the *nafxanya-gabbar* system. The Ethiopian settlers—soldiers, clergypersons, and administrators (all known as *nafxanyas*)— exploited *gabbars*[76] who were coerced to provide them food, labor, tribute, and tax revenues both in cash and in kind.[77] Stahl states, "The lords demanded one-third to one-half of the harvest. In addition, they had to provide chicken, eggs, sheep, and beer for lords' banquets on important holidays."[78] The Oromo farmers and herders were also forced to work on estate farms, building roads, and other construction projects. The control of *gabbar* labor and the expropriation of lands were inseparable phenomena. Initially, land without labor had no value, so the colonialists needed *gabbars* who would work for them. The state expropriated the best lands and appointed stewards (called *misilenes*) to manage *hudads* (estate farms) and *gabbar* labor.

In addition to paying tributes, taxes, and tithes, the *gabbars* produced food and raised cattle, horses, and other animals for the emperor and his officials. The emperor and royal households owned extensive tracts of the best lands that supplied necessary provisions. Local and regional state officials had estate farms that were worked by the *gabbars.* These farms produced all the required products for consumption and market. The rural household economy remained the basic production unit despite such farms and a few concession farms. In Oromia, the primary sources of revenue gradually became *gabbar* labor and land for the colonial state and its officials. The survival and evolution of the Ethiopian client state depended mainly on the dual bases of landownership and articulation with European imperialism. Initially, this colonial state financed itself with revenues obtained from looting, enslavement of the colonized peoples, and control of trade. However, *gabbar* labor and land gradually became the primary state revenue sources. "The system of land ownership was crucial to the country's economic and social life," writes Richard Pankhurst, "for besides determining questions of social class, it was the basis of administration, taxation, and military service."[79]

Oromo lands were turned over to the state's governors, military commanders, soldiers, and settlers to safeguard Ethiopian control and produce extraction. The Ethiopian colonialists settled fellow villagers in Oromia to perpetuate their dominance. The colonial state claimed absolute rights over three-fourths of the Oromo lands and provided portions for its officials instead of salary. The Ethiopian nobility and ecclesiastical, civil, and military officers were rewarded with grants of lands called *maderia* and *rist-gult*. The *nafxanyas* and foreign mercenaries who participated in the colonization of Oromia as soldiers,

---

[76]*Gabbars* were treated as serfs and, in some instances, as enslaved people. They provided labor, tribute, and tax revenue to their new lords.

[77]McClellan, *Reaction to Ethiopian Expansionism: The Case of Darasa, 1895-1935*, (Ph.D. dissertation: Michigan State univ., 1978), p. 121.

[78]Michael Stahl, *Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development* (Stockholm: Raben & Sjogern, 1974), p. 46.

[79]Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia,1800-1935* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I Univ., 1968), p. 135.

settlers, messengers, priests, spies, and correctional officers were also granted land as a reward for their service. The amount of land (whether granted temporarily or permanently) depended on rank or position. An ordinary soldier received from one to three *gashas* (a *gasha* is approximately forty hectares), a captain of fifty soldiers was granted up to five *gashas*, and a leader of three hundred soldiers received up to twenty *gashas* of land. The state also commodified and sold some lands to individuals. The Oromo farmers and pastoralists faced a similar fate everywhere. One-fourth of the land was granted to the Oromo collaborators, and one person from each subgroup took charge. Such persons collected taxes and then paid them to the colonial settlers and the state. Gradually, they developed into landlords and collaborated with the colonialists for the oppression and exploitation of the Oromo.

Successive Habasha regimes have engaged in terrorism and genocide[80] and exploited the resources of the Oromo, Afar, Anuak, Nuer, Shinasha, Berta, Gumuz, Sidama, Walayita, and others, and racialized and suppressed their national movements to maintain a racial/ethnonational hierarchy and continue exploitation and subjugation. While engaging in state terrorism in the form of war, torture, rape, and genocide to control the Oromo and others and loot their economic resources, the Ethiopian state elite, and their collaborators have recently claimed that they have been promoting democracy, multinational federalism, and national self-determination. Of course, Amhara elites are even against these cosmetic changes and accuse these subjugated groups, particularly Oromo activists, as "narrow nationalists," or "racists," or "terrorists."[81] The Ethiopian state elites have used various techniques of violence to terrorize the Oromo, who have been engaged in the struggle for liberation and democracy. The Ethiopian soldiers and security networks have committed the following crimes against Oromo activists. They have been whipped or tortured; locked in steel barrels, or forced into pits where the fire was made on top of them; fixed large containers or bottles filled with water to men's testicles; or, if their victims were women, bottles or poles were pushed into their vaginas.[82]

In addition, the soldiers have openly shot thousands of peaceful people in Oromia, leaving their bodies for hyenas, burying them in mass graves, or throwing their corpses off cliffs. Other methods of killing included burning, bombing, cutting throats or arteries in the neck, strangulation, and burying people up to their necks in the ground. For example, as Mohammed Hassen estimates, between 1992 and 2001, about 50,000 killings and 16,000 disappearances (euphemism for secret killings) occurred in Oromia alone.[83]

---

[80]"Two Liberation Movements Compared: Oromia & Southern Sudan," *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order,* Vol. 27, No. 1: 152-174.

[81]https://yooyyaa.com/2019/11/26/10-glaring-irrationality-of-nafxanyaas/, accessed on 2/16/2021; https://zehabesha.com/delusion-of-oro- mo-and-pseudohistorical-of-emperor-menelik/, 2/16/2021.

[82]Fossati, B., Namara, L., and Niggli, P. 1996. *The new rulers of Ethio- pia and the persecution of the Oromo: Reports from the Oromo refugees in Djibouti*. Frankfurt, Germany: Dokumentation, Evangelischer Pressedienst Frankfurt am Main.

[83]Mohammed Hassen, "Is Genocide against the Oromo in Ethiopia Possible," Paper Presented at the Fourth International Biennial Conference of the Association of Genocide Scholars, Radisson Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 10, 2001.

Furthermore, he estimates that 90% of the killings were not reported. To hide these state crimes from the world community, the government did not "keep written records of its extrajudicial executions and the prolonged detention of political prisoners."[84] The regime killed or imprisoned thousands of Oromo students because they engaged in peaceful demonstrations. Saman Zia-Zarifi, the academic freedom director at Human Rights Watch, notes, "Shooting at unarmed students is a shameful misuse of government power" in Ethiopia.[85]

The political agenda of the destruction of Oromo society is not a new phenomenon. The West has been supporting this political agenda. With the emergence of 9/11 terrorism in the U.S., the U.S. government and other Western governments have used the discourse of Islamic fundamentalism to support the Ethiopian regime and to suppress the struggles of the Oromo and others for self-determination, social justice, and democracy. This implies that since some Oromo are Muslims, they are "Islamic fundamentalists" and are not entitled to democracy and national self-determination. In the past, the colonization of the Oromo and others was rationalized and justified by various ideological discourses. It was explained that since these peoples were "pagans" and "uncivilized" and that Habashas were Christians and "civilized," the Habashas were entitled to colonize these peoples and impose their civilization and Christianity on them. State terrorism, hidden genocide, and massive human rights violations are used to keep the Oromo and other peoples subordinated and exploited.

Today, the Ethiopian colonial settlers have dominated cities and towns in Oromia. They have segregated the Oromo people both in urban and rural areas and have kept them under "Ethiopian political slavery" by using the army, modern weapons, the media, the telephone, the fax, the Internet, and other communication and information apparatuses and networks, as well as global connections. Using political violence, the Ethiopian government has denied the Oromo and others the freedom of expression and organization, as well as access to the media and all forms of communication and information networks. Consequently, the Oromo are denied the privilege of self-definition and self-development and are forced to provide their economic and labor resources to the Ethiopian colonizers and their supporters while living under deplorable conditions in the twenty-first century.

The Neo-*nafxanya* Government and Why Menelik's Ghost Devastates the Oromo People

After becoming prime minister in 2018, Abiy Ahmed positioned himself as a man of peace and democracy who would transition Ethiopia from its troubled past to democracy. This initially won him many supporters, both domestically and internationally. He was also applauded for signing a peace deal with Eritrean

[84]Quoted in Mohamed Hassen, *ibid.,* p. 33.
[85]Zia-Zarifi, S. (2004) 'Ethiopia: Halt Crackdown on Oromo Students', Human Rights Watch [http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/05/ethiopia052202.html].

President Isaias Afwerki, granting amnesty to political prisoners, and reducing press censorship. As a result, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. But, within a short time, Abiy reversed most of the reforms he had introduced. He started to show his second and real face, one of cruelty, manifested in state terrorism and massive human rights violations. While much attention was given to his administration and allies' atrocities in Tigray, state terrorism in Oromia has become rampant.

Within months in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed organized a clandestine committee called *Koree N*ageenyaa (Security Death Committee).[86] The prime minister created the committee and assigned Shimelis Abdisa, Abiy's former chief of staff and the president of Oromia, to lead it; members of the committee included Fekadu Tessema, Oromia's Prosperity Party leader, Ararsa Merdasa, head of security for Oromia, Awalu Abdu, vice president of Oromia, and many political and security officials. The security committee "has ordered extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions to crush" the leadership of the Oromo national movement led by the OLF and the OLA, which have struggled for Oromia's self-determination and democracy for almost a half-century.[87] Fearing the revolutionary potential of the Oromo youth, the clandestine security committee cracked down on new protests in 2019, displacing hundreds of thousands in Oromia. It also killed or arrested hundreds of people and tortured them.

The security committee "not only eliminates suspected enemies. It also acts preemptively to keep protesters off the streets. In 2019, the committee ordered that people deemed a security threat be arrested or their prison terms prolonged."[88] The Abiy government has violated its laws, arrested people without a warrant, and blamed its violent crimes on the OLA.[89] Abiy's brutal repression in Oromia and against Oromos is not new. Oromo nationalists have believed that Abiy, like many of his predecessors, is running a neo-*nafxanya* administration that exalts the glories of Ethiopia's imperial history and seeks to continue its oppressive, brutal, and exploitative practices. Defining what a neo- *nafxanya* administration requires understanding the historical *nafxanya-gabbar* system. As discussed above, Menelik and his collaborators created the *nafxanya-gabbar* system as a form of settler colonialism during the last decades of the 19th century by settling Amharas, Tigrayans, and other groups—mainly highlander Orthodox Christians— in Oromia and beyond.

The colonizing army looted cattle and grain and committed horrifying acts of mutilation, such as cutting the breasts of women and the male organs and the hands of men.[90] The Menelik's army then established a system of control over the rest of the population by dispossessing them of their land, exploiting their

1.1.1.1.1.1 [86]https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-violence-committee/, "A REUTERS INVESTIGATION: In Ethiopia, a secret committee orders killings and arrests to crush rebels," accessed on 02/27/2024.
[87]*Ibid.*
[88]*Ibid.*
[89]*Ibid.*
[90]https://brill.com/display/title/24518?crawler=true&lang=en&language=en&mimetype=application%2Fpdf

labor, and taking their agricultural products. Emperor Haile Selassie's government expanded and consolidated the *nafxanya-gabbar* system before changes occurred in the Ethiopian empire-state in 1974. Although the failed 1974 revolution nationalized land and changed the status of the *gabbar* in the central and southern regions, the fundamental nature of the state was not changed. The new militarized socialist state intensified the brutalization of marginalized groups, including Oromos. The same is true about the change of government in 1991. Despite the Tigay-dominated government adopting some aspects of multinational federalism, it primarily existed only on paper. This government was never committed to the self-determination rights it gave lip service to.

The Tigrayan elites and their collaborators from other ethnonational groups were dominant and, in line with their neo-*nafxanya* predecessors, exploited marginalized groups. Therefore, the Abiy government is considered as "neo-*nafxnaya*" because it tries to modernize the Ethiopian state by glorifying imperial leaders and the history of the Empire while denigrating the history of marginalized communities, particularly that of the Oromo. Habesha elites under successive regimes have denied the colonization of the Oromo and presented them as "invaders" of Ethiopia, referring to the so-called Oromo migrations of the 16th and 17th centuries. The neo-*nafxanya* system defenders use portrayals of Oromos as expansionist invaders to justify the brutal colonialism of the Ethiopian state. In his various historically void speeches, Abiy lectures the long-marginalized peoples of Ethiopia to forget how the Ethiopian empire-state brutalized the Oromo, Sidama, Somali, Qimant, Agew, Wolayta, Gambella, Berta, Gumuz, and others.[91]

When Abiy articulates the greatness of Ethiopia and its leaders, what comes to mind for many members of these groups is brutality, state terrorism, and human rights violations. Despite Abiy and the Ethiopianist camp that supports him trying to discredit the historical narrative of these victimized groups and legitimize the crimes of successive Ethiopian governments, the people will never forget their actual history. Abiy's neo-*nafxanya* administration has also started ideological warfare on *Oromummaa* (Oromo nationalism) by glorifying Amhara nationalism disguised as *Ethiopianism*. As the Abiy administration tried to revive the assimilationist nation-building project, one aspect of the strategy involved the systematic attack on Oromo's political and cultural institutions. Despite his administration giving lip service to the importance *of Gadaa/Siiqqee* leaders, it is oppressing *Gadaa* leaders who are the custodians of Oromo culture, institutions, and democracy. For instance, on 1 December 2021, federal and Oromia government forces attacked a *Gadaa* religious ceremony in Karrayu, East Shewa Zone.[92] They beat and abducted the *Abbaa Gadaa*—the traditional head of spiritual, social, legal, and economic affairs—other community leaders and innocent young men. The bodies of fourteen people,

[91]https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2020/10/08/why-did-ethiopias-prime-minister-blame-african-americans-for-their-victimization/

[92]https://addisstandard.com/news-abba-gadaa-union-says-missing-member-of-karrayyu-gadaa-leadership-dead-dozens-under-custody/#google_vignette

including the *Abbaa Gadaa*, were found the next day, while 25 others were unaccounted for and are believed to be dead.

Abiy's government has been centralizing power in a way reminiscent of Ethiopia's imperial past. Abiy used his Oromo cultural affinity, the *Qeerro/ Qaarree* (Oromo youth) movement, and the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP, formerly the OPDO) to manipulate the Tigrayan-led government and become prime minister. Once he took power, he used the narrative of democracy, reconciliation, and transition to convince the wider public.[93] These conditions gave him time to establish his total control of state structures and consolidate power by surrounding himself with loyalists and creating an alliance against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and Tigray's regional government— all perceived to be threats to his centralization plans. Like its predecessors, this administration has effective control over the country's political economy and uses the military, police, and other security forces to suppress dissent. Ethiopian prisons are now mainly filled with *Afaan Oromoo* and Tigrigna speakers, and the offices of many private media, such as the Oromia Media Network (OMN), are closed in Ethiopia.[94] Abiy's government has continued the policy of land dispossession from farmers and pastoralists in Oromia and the other colonized regions.[95]

Any Oromo who does not conform to the neo-*nafxanya* revisionist history, cultural destruction, economic exploitation, and land dispossession is liable to be subject to state violence. That violence has been used to impose fear on the public as a ploy to change their political behavior of resistance and make them support the current administration. The Ethiopian government has never refrained from attacking the OLF and OLA, along with the Oromo public, to destroy the Oromo struggle for self-determination. Starting in 2018, when Abiy came to power, members of OLA and the *Qeerroo/Qarree* movement have been hunted and killed or detained in many places across Oromia.[96] Soon after he came to power, Abiy established military command posts in some parts of Oromia, such as Wello, Wallaga, Guji, and central Oromia, giving them a free hand to kill Oromo youth and other civilians who were suspected to be Oromo nationalists and sympathizers of the OLF and the OLA.

To destroy the OLA, the Abiy government has intensified state terrorism and genocidal massacres in Wallagga, Tulama, Guji, Wallo, and other areas.[97] Government forces and security agents have focused on identifying and executing people related to OLA and *Qeerroo/Qarree* in politics and blood,

[93]https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/25/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-qeerroo-oromia-betrayed/

[94]https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2021-sub-saharan-africa-amid-democratic-turbulence-deep-seated-corruption

[95]https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/regionalprofile/english-version-country-profiles/318392/the-ethiopian-path-to-development-land-grabbing-displacement-and-internal-migration/

[96]https://oromoliberationfront.org/english/the-prosperity-party-regime-of-ethiopia-must-stop-inhuman-and-cruel-massacres-and-detentions-of-family-members-of-oromo-opposition-parties-particularly-the-olf/

[97]Oromia Support Group (2021) Report 56. https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Report-56-June-2021.pdf Oromia Support Group (2021). Empire Strikes Back: Catastrophic Consequences. Report 54. https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Report54-January-2021.pdf

claiming they support or sympathize with them.[98] The Abiy government and its political party, the Prosperity Party, do not hide their plans and actions of "ethnic cleansing" in Oromia. Fekadu Tessema, Prosperity Party head, Oromia branch, was heard at the Oromia Regional Parliament meeting, Adama, on February 27, 2021, saying, "If you want to get rid of the fish completely, you need to dry up the ocean."[99] He meant that to eliminate the OLA, the government needs to destroy the Oromo people who are supporting the organization. Having declared war on Oromia and the OLA, the administration massacred or imprisoned mainly Oromo students and farmers in Wello, Wallaga, Guji, central Oromia, and other areas.[100] The Prosperity Party system also has given at least tacit support for Amhara Fano militias attacking Oromo civilians.

Regional forces from Amhara, Somali, and other regions, and Eritrean troops, have engaged in brutality against the Oromo people.[101] Amnesty International notes, "Ethiopian security forces committed horrendous human rights violations, including burning homes to the ground, executions, rape, arbitrary arrests, and detentions… in response to attacks by armed groups and inter-communal violence in Amhara and Oromia."[102] Public executions have also taken place. These actions are intended to terrorize Oromos so that they abandon their struggle for self-determination. However, the opposite is happening across Oromia as Oromo nationalism has further developed. More and more young people have joined the OLA, and many support the fight for survival and freedom, including many youths who were part of the *Qeerroo/Qarree* movement. Abiy has ordered the defense forces, security, police, and government officials to openly fire at suspected Oromo nationalists and relatives or friends of OLF members at public or secret places and display their corpses to the public.[103] Recently, the fano militia has cut the throats of young Oromos in Wallaga and Salale in northern Shawa and bragged and danced, butchering Oromos.[104] The government and Amhara media, religious and civil institutions, and political parties have said nothing about this barbarism and heinous crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, as soon as it came to power, the Abiy government started state terrorism and genocide in Oromia, and later, it continued in Tigray and Amhara regions. Its effective weapons of warfare have been drones from Turkey, Iran, China, and the United Arab Emirates.[105] These countries have ignored human

[98]Oromia Support Group (2021). Sacrilege in East Showa: Ethnic Cleansing by Amhara Supremacists as Ethiopia Collapses into Chaos. Report 58. https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Report-58.pdf

[99]Oromia Support Group (2021). If You Want to Get Rid of the Fish Completely, You Need to Dry up the Ocean. Report 57. https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Report-57.pdf

[100] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp0y5ezZjo0

[101] https://eritreahub.org/report-eritrean-troops-despatched-to-oromia

[102]https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/ethiopia-security%20forces-must-face-justice-horrific-human-rights-violations-new

[103]See all volumes of Oromia Support Group, https://oromiasupport.org/, accessed on 01/06/2025.

[104]*Ibid.*

[105]Zekaria Zelalem, "Deadly skies: Drone warfare in Ethiopia and the future of conflict in Africa," https://ecfr.eu/publication/deadly-skies-drone-warfare-in-ethiopia-and-the-future-of-conflict-in-africa/, accessed on 3/6/2025.

rights and only cared for money. "Since the government began deploying drones in November 2020, aerial strikes have ravaged communities, including in ruthless civil war in Tigray (2020-2022) as well as lower-scale ongoing conflicts in the regions of Oromia (2019) and Amhara region (2023-)."[106] 5.1 million people were displaced in 2021 alone in Ethiopia.[107] About 600,000 people were killed by the war in Tigray from 2020 to 2022;[108] at least 120,000 Tigrayan women and girls were raped to hamulate and dehumanize the Tigrayan people.[109] Since international organizations, powerful governments, and human rights organizations gave less attention to atrocities in Oromia, we do not have data on the crimes against humanity in Oromia.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Abiy government has continued the *Habasha* settler state, which Menelik started by maintaining its main features. Successive Ethiopian governments have built and maintained this settler state without changing its essence through fostering the supremacy of the Amhara language, Amhara-Tigray culture, Orthodox Christianity, and the colonial ideology of *Ethiopianism* by using the colonized population groups, such as the Oromo, as raw material and firewood. Abiy Ahmed boasts on TV and social media that he is ready to kill anybody who tries to restructure and change the current Ethiopian state. He calls the Tigrayan and Oromo movements "the cancer of Ethiopia," which must be militarily destroyed.[110] Abiy is continuing the colonial nation-building project initiated by Menelik and continued by Haile Selassie and others.

The 2018 regime change was more disastrous than the previous two regime changes of 1974 and 1991 for the Oromo because Abiy Ahmed opened a new war on them as soon as he captured state power. When the *Qeerroo/Qarree* protest movement destabilized the Tigraya-led government, the leaders of its puppet organizations appointed Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, as the prime minister to replace Haile Mariam Desalegn to introduce a cosmetic change and keep the system the way it was. Even though Abiy Ahmed became Ethiopia's prime minister mainly because of his relation to and the Oromo youth movement that dislodged the Tigrayan-led government and the assumption that he was an Oromo, he first targeted the movement for destruction.[111] Abiy has attacked the Oromo national movement to suppress Oromo nationalism and obliterate Oromo's history, culture, and

[106] *Ibid.*
[107] *Ibid*
[108] *Ibid.*
[109] HUMAN RIGHTS, AFRICA, "The ordeal of Tigrayan women in Ethiopia: 'Whether you shout or not, no one is going to come and rescue you', https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/09/06/the-ordeal-of-tigrayan-women-in-ethiopia-whether-you-shout-or-not-no-one-is-going-to-come-and-rescue-you_6126301_12, accessed on March 6, 2025.
[110] https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=123146#ref01
[111] M. M. Gemechu, (2022). How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia. https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/25/abiy-ahmed-ethiopia-qeerroo-oromia-betrayed

identity.[112] Considering the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) as an integral part of the Oromo youth movement and the Oromo national struggle, Abiy Ahmed's government has labeled the OLA "*Terrorist Shanee*" to dehumanize and destroy Oromo nationalists and others who manifest Oromo cultural markers, such as clothing, hairstyles, Oromo belief systems, *gadaa* values, and identity.

By using the name *Shanee,* the Abiy government and all its *nafxanya* supporters have attacked all Oromo independent political, religious, and civic organizations to make the Oromo a people without leadership and institutions. Naming Oromo nationalists *Shanee* to target and destroy the Oromo organizations and leadership to disorganize and massacre them demonstrates the intentions and actions of the Abiy government and the Amhara elites and organizations that have allied with this government until recently. There are *nafxanayas,* or Ethiopianized Oromos, who have become a base for the Abiy government to accumulate wealth and enjoy luxurious lifestyles at the cost of the ordinary people. The Abiy government invited OLF leaders to return to Oromia from exile and jungle, claiming they could peacefully continue their national struggle for democracy and self-determination. But, within a short time, it betrayed them. The neo-*nafxanaya* government almost outlawed the OLF, the liberation front leading the Oromo national movement since the early 1970s.

The Abiy government had prevented the OLF and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) from participating in the elections in Oromia and Ethiopia. Abiy's Prosperity Party claimed to win most parliamentary seats in its fake polls. As a result, the neo-*nafxanya* government has stopped the peaceful struggle, and the only option remaining is the OLA's approach, which is the protracted armed struggle. The Ethiopian political system has no space for Oromo nationalists who struggle to dismantle Ethiopian settler colonialism and its decadent institutions and ideology. The government has implemented brutal policies to maintain absolute power.[113] It arrested thousands of people for several months without charging them by violating national and international human rights laws under conditions that amounted to torture; it provided 'training' for detainees for a few months on the constitution, the rule of law, and the so-called history of the Oromo people's struggle.[114] Government soldiers and security forces have committed many crimes, including extrajudicial killings, burning houses, raping, forced evictions, brutal beatings, and burning people alive or corpses.

The Oromo national movement has engaged in a liberation struggle to recreate an Oromia sovereign democratic state and Oromo freedom by demolishing the combined forces of the colonialists and the Ethiopianized Oromo collaborative class. The brutality and criminality of the Ethiopian colonial state, the deplorable living conditions of Oromo society, international law, and the violations of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples justify the rebirth of the sovereign and democratic Oromia state. Even though the Oromo

[112]*Ibid.*
[113]Oromia Support Group (2021). Empire Strikes Back: Catastrophic Consequences. Report 54. https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Report54-January-2021. pdf
[114]*Ibid.*

have abundant economic resources, they live under the darkness of ignorance, abject poverty, and political slavery and are exposed to state terrorism and massive human rights violations. They are denied the freedom of expression, the media, organization, and the freedom of self-development. They are forced to provide their economic and labor resources to the Ethiopian colonizers and their supporters while living under deplorable conditions in the twenty-first century.

Oromo nationalists are convinced that the only way for the Oromo to get out of these deplorable political, economic, cultural, and social conditions is by intensifying the political and armed struggle led by the OLF and OLA. In the capitalist world system, might is right. The *neo-nafxanaya* government, the imperial interstate system, the African Union, the U.N., and Western and other states cannot stop the Oromo if they rise in unison to eliminate all political forces that deny them their universal human rights and capabilities. Most colonized nations worldwide have achieved their freedom and sovereignty by engaging in protracted political and armed struggles, which are self-defense rights. The OLF and OLA need to build national organizational capacity by integrating political and military activities and preparing a ground for the rebirth of the sovereign and democratic Oromia state.

Furthermore, all Oromos should pay the necessary prices of knowledge, logistics, human power, and money to support the OLF and the OLA. The Oromo youth should also join the OLF and OLA rather than become the colonial government's mercenary and kill their citizens or die while running away from Oromia to foreign countries or being massacred by the Abiy government. The Oromo deserve popular sovereignty, statehood, egalitarian democracy, and membership in the U.N. to restore their human freedoms and build their capabilities to achieve security, peace, and sustainable development. The human rights of the Oromo people will be protected if they defend themselves by any means necessary from their executioners by organizing and struggling to form their sovereign government and other essential institutions.

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs - Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025 –Pages 281-294

Integral Federalism and Degrowth: Comparative Perspectives on Regionalization and Localization

*By Mehmet Cevat Yıldırım**

Integral federalism and degrowth are two currents of thought that share remarkable intersections. This study explores their similarities and differences concerning regionalism and localization. On one hand, the emphasis on regions within integral federalism stems from its opposition to nation-state building, with European integration viewed positively in this process. On the other hand, the degrowth movement's advocacy for open relocalization arises from its struggle against the environmental degradation brought about by globalization. Despite their differences, both currents share a strong commitment to decentralization. Rooted in Proudhonian anarchism, integral federalism and degrowth share similar conceptions of humanity, community, and the relationship between humans and nature.

Introduction

Integral federalism and degrowth are two radical intellectual movements that emerged in the 20th century, approximately thirty years apart. Both propose normative approaches that encompass political, economic, and social spheres, envisioning a better world. It can be argued that while integral federalism moves from politics towards economics and ecology, degrowth evolves from ecological and economic concerns towards political action.

This study focuses on a particular point of convergence between federalism and degrowth: the emphasis on regionalization and localization. Decentralization is central to both perspectives. The aim of this paper is to identify the similarities and differences between integral federalism and degrowth concerning their approaches to regionalization and localization.

Integral federalism belongs to the European federalist tradition. Developed predominantly after the World War II, particularly in France, Belgium, and Switzerland, it conceptualizes federalization as the decentralization of power, differentiating it from American-style constitutional (or Hamiltonian) federalism. According to integral federalism, nation-states are unsuitable forms of governance due to their authoritarian structures and inadequate scale for addressing local needs and problems. In contrast, federations are envisioned as alternative—and even opposite—forms of organization compared to nation-states. Anarchist philosophers such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Pyotr Kropotkin proposed federation as an alternative to the nation-state (Grimaldi, 2012: 308). Proudhon's *Du Principe fédératif* (1863) stands as the founding document of integral federalism. He writes:

*Associate Professor, Gaziantep University, Turkey.

> "The contract of federation, the essence of which is to reserve always more for citizens than for the State, for municipal and provincial authorities more than for the central authority, could only put us on the path to truth." (Proudhon, 1863: 77)

Proudhon opposed the unitary and standardizing nature of the nation-state, considering it contrary to human nature. For him, human life and identity are naturally rooted at the regional level, rather than the national level. The imposition of a centralized, abstract national identity appeared to him as a form of oppression. Instead, he proposed:

> "Let us be ourselves, if we want to be something; let us form, if necessary, with our adversaries and rivals, federations, never fusions." (Proudhon, 1863: XV)

Integral federalists adopted the ideas of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, and developed a coherent school of thought, particularly in the French-speaking world. Scholars such as Henri Brugmans, Alexandre Marc, and Guy Hérauld contributed to the theoretical debate on European integration while actively participating in the federalist movement under the Union of European Federalists from the late 1940s onward.

Henri Brugmans, founding rector of the College of Europe in Bruges and a leading figure in the integral federalist movement during the 1950s and 1960s, shared Proudhon's understanding of human nature. Brugmans stated:

> "Federalism does not envision a society of philosophers or a republic of virtuous citizens. But neither does it share the pessimistic view of some, such as Hobbes, who saw humanity as a monstrous failure. Federalism places blind trust neither in rulers nor in the ruled. It does not seek to create a 'new man,' but merely to better organize life as it already exists." (Brugmans and Duclos, 1962: 21)

Denis de Rougemont, another founder of the integral federalist movement, argued that Proudhon's prediction about the rise of federations and the return of Europe to a regional structure proved accurate (De Rougemont, 1994: 71). De Rougemont's work on "Europe of Regions" became instrumental in shaping the regionalist dimension of integral federalism.

Another normative approach, which emerged a few decades later (beginning in the late 1970s), is "degrowth." Degrowth is a school of thought that critiques the dependence on economic growth from environmental, economic, and social perspectives. According to Demaria and others, degrowth can be defined as "the democratically led, redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being" (Demaria et al., 2013). On the other hand, Giorgos Kallis describes degrowth as "an ecological-economic perspective advocating a socially sustainable and equitable reduction (and eventual stabilization) of society's throughput." (Kallis, 2011: 874)

Degrowth criticizes any activity aimed solely at GDP growth for contributing to environmental degradation, increasing economic inequalities, and fostering social alienation. The movement's initial roots lie in ecological sciences, particularly in the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, who argued that unlimited economic growth

is impossible within a closed thermodynamic system such as our planet (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). Only a year later, the Club of Rome published the report *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), further reinforcing the ecological critique of growth.

Leading degrowth scholar Jason Hickel argues that reducing material use and emissions can only be achieved through a deliberate decrease in production (Hickel, 2020). Hickel and other proponents of degrowth do not oppose basic production and consumption; instead, they advocate for their reorganization on a local scale. The concept of "relocalization" stands at the heart of degrowth thinking, both in terms of reducing production and minimizing carbon emissions associated with global supply chains.

The second source of degrowth lies in its critical economic perspective. According to degrowth theory, dependence on economic growth is the primary driver of economic inequalities. D'Alisa and colleagues note: "From a degrowth perspective, the current economic crisis is the result of systemic limits to growth. It is not a cyclical crisis or fault in the credit system" (D'Alisa et al., 2015). Since neoliberal capitalism is inherently dependent on continuous economic growth, degrowth is fundamentally incompatible with it. As a solution, degrowth envisions a type of state intervention that diverges sharply from neoliberal principles.

The third intellectual foundation of degrowth is its critique of consumer society. According to Ivan Illich (1973), consumerism has weakened local social ties while strengthening global market connections. Instead of purchasing handmade goods from local producers, consumers increasingly turn to distant factories, leading to alienation among consumers and labor exploitation among producers. Degrowth scholars, particularly Serge Latouche, combine this social critique with third-worldist thought, emphasizing the need to free societal imagination from the ideological grip of growth (Latouche, 2005).

Integral federalism and degrowth are two normative approaches aiming to solve the political, social, environmental, and economic challenges of contemporary societies. Although they share common roots in traditions like Proudhonian anarchism, it must be noted that they each also incorporate elements from different intellectual streams. The emphasis on regionalization is not universal among all federalists; for instance, Hamiltonian federalists consider federalism a centralizing rather than decentralizing process. Similarly, within the degrowth movement, some scholars are closer to anarchism, while others are critical of it. The similarities between integral federalism and degrowth are most evident in their anarchist strands.

It is important to note the difference between federalist "regionalization" and degrowthist "localization." A "region" typically refers to a geographical area larger than a city but smaller than an entire country, serving as an intermediary governance level between the central government and the citizens. In contrast, "localization" often refers to even smaller units, such as neighborhoods, where economic activities are envisioned to be scaled down. Nevertheless, federalist regionalization and degrowthist localization share important principles, which will be analyzed under three headings: their political, economic, and social aspects.

Methodology

This paper employs a comparative theoretical approach to examine the conceptual and political convergences between integral federalism and degrowth, with a particular focus on how both frameworks understand and advocate for regionalization and localization. Rather than relying on empirical data, the study is rooted in normative political theory and critical literature analysis.

The comparative method used here is thematic and structural. The analysis is organized around three central dimensions: political organization, economic principles, and social perspective. Within each of these thematic domains, key ideas, normative assumptions, and institutional preferences from each tradition are extracted and juxtaposed to identify both points of alignment and divergence.

Primary and secondary sources were selected purposefully based on their centrality to the intellectual development of each framework. For integral federalism, the analysis draws on foundational texts by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Alexandre Marc, and Murray Bookchin, while the degrowth perspective is explored through the work of key figures such as Serge Latouche, Giorgos Kallis, and Jason Hickel. These authors were selected due to the representative nature of their contributions to the internal coherence and public articulation of each paradigm.

The methodological objective is not to empirically test or rank these approaches, but rather to develop an interpretive and normative dialogue that helps clarify how each framework addresses the tension between centralization and local autonomy in the context of ecological and economic transformation.

This study expects to demonstrate that despite emerging from distinct intellectual and political traditions, both integral federalism and degrowth share key normative commitments to decentralization, ecological limits, and participatory governance. It is anticipated that their overlapping advocacy for regionalized and localized structures may offer a coherent alternative to centralized, growth-driven development models. Furthermore, the comparison aims to reveal complementary mechanisms of territorial organization that challenge hierarchical and growth-driven forms of statehood and economic planning.

While this approach enables a focused theoretical comparison, it also carries certain limitations. Both traditions contain internal diversity, and this study does not aim to exhaustively represent all positions within them. Rather, the goal is to construct a structured conceptual lens through which their respective visions of territorial reorganization and post-growth political order can be better understood.

Political Aspects of Regionalization and Localization

Integral Federalism

As stated in the *Ventotene Manifesto* (Spinelli et al., 1941), all currents of European federalism blame the nation-states for the devastation of the Second World War. According to integral federalists, regions were the historical and natural building blocks of Europe, which were marginalized by the rise of nation-states in

the 18th and 19th centuries (Yıldırım, 2016: 95). Newly drawn national borders divided regions and reshaped their status based on centralist criteria, making some regions appear either "close" or "distant" relative to the national center.

Henri Brugmans noted, "Since the Medieval Age, European regions were interconnected independently from national borders" (Brugmans, 1950: 83). For integral federalists, European integration, by diminishing the importance of national borders, offers a historic opportunity to reverse the damages inflicted upon regions.

Alexander Langer—a federalist, peace activist, and former president of the Greens parliamentary group in the European Parliament—believed that European integration should be fundamentally based on localism. According to Langer, nation-states are "too big and too small at the same time" (Grimaldi, 2005: 167): too big for participatory democracy to function properly, and too small to address global challenges such as securing peace or combating climate change.

Integral federalists' vision for European integration focuses primarily on the subnational level. They see globalization and supranational integration as strategic tools to weaken the grip of nation-states and thereby liberate the regions, considered the authentic political units. For integral federalists, other levels of governance—national and supranational—are secondary in importance compared to regions. As De Rougemont put it:

> "It seems that political federalism (...) finds its most original expression in the reality among regions, rather than being boiled down to inter-state or international alliances." (De Rougemont, 1969: 78)

De Rougemont's contribution lies not only in emphasizing regions but also in connecting federalist and ecological struggles through a regionalist-localist perspective. Surprisingly, this tendency intersects with an early critique of growth-centered policies. As Grimaldi observes:

> "De Rougemont [had] ecological concerns signaled by the fact that the federation of regions had to simultaneously develop concrete and local solutions to ecological problems in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity and build a level of European and global governance capable of tackling environmental issues through incisive, sustained, and radically alternative action to the methods that had characterized growth policies. (...) Environmental policy could only take place on a local and regional scale, while continental and global problems required the intervention of continental authorities created on a regional basis." (Grimaldi, 2020: 255)

Thus, for integral federalism, political regionalism represents not the creation of new units but the restoration of historical and natural governance levels. From this perspective, regions have never truly disappeared; they continue to exist within the underlying political reality.

Degrowth

Emerging from the ecological movement, the degrowth perspective initially lacked a strong political dimension compared to its environmental and economic

critiques. During the 1970s and 1980s, political disengagement was a common feature of many ecological movements. However, from the early 1990s onward—especially by the time the degrowth movement gained momentum in the late 2000s—ecological activists became increasingly politically engaged, particularly in Europe.

Thinkers like Serge Latouche contributed to strengthening the political outlook of degrowth by linking it with anti-globalization thought. Unlike integral federalism, degrowth is critical of globalization, viewing it as a force that fosters excessive value chains and dependency relationships between the Global North and South. Similarly, degrowth critiques the nation-state, associating it with growth-oriented economic policies that it fundamentally opposes. In contrast, degrowth envisions a new way of life organized at the local level, not merely as an economic shift but as a profound political transformation.

Romano explains the political dimension of degrowthist localism as follows:

> "Re-localizing does not only concern the economic field. It also includes the 'local political utopia.' For degrowthers, in general, the local dimension is not only a space for the reconstruction of social ties and lost DIY ('do it yourself') production practices; it is the main 'institutional' container and the preferable scale of application of the degrowth alternative." (Romano, 2020: 40)

Another political ambition of degrowth is to revive democracy in its most participatory form (Yıldırım, 2024). As Fitzpatrick and others note:

> "Most degrowth theory rests on the assumption that the local level is the optimal scale for societal transformation because it is there that direct democracy is more easily exercised." (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022: 9)

Latouche similarly affirms his belief that "Democracy can only really work at the local level" (Latouche, 2005: 69), reminding readers that Plato once considered 5040 the ideal number of citizens for a functioning democracy (see also Papanikos, 2017 and Papanikos 2022).

For degrowth, democracy is not merely desirable but essential for achieving social and economic autonomy. Once communities secure local democratic control, it is expected they will naturally adopt the values associated with degrowth—such as sobriety, moderation, and community-centered living. Romano describes this expectation:

> "Anyway, consistently with the goal of relocalizing, political action is more often staged in the local arena. (...) The underlying trust is that a specific political–territorial frame (the 'localist' one) necessarily generates and reproduces a specific political agenda: once a local community is democratized and autonomous, it will spontaneously choose the 'good' values of sobriety, measure, 'small is beautiful,' etc." (Romano, 2020: 42)

Economic Aspects of Regionalization and Localization

Integral Federalism

The territorial limitation of authority, a central goal of integral federalism, naturally leads to a vision of economic decentralization. Integral federalists advocate for scaling down both political and economic organization to human-scaled levels, a perspective that strongly resonates with the degrowth emphasis on localized production and consumption. Remarkably, many integral federalist thinkers had already begun advocating for a model of localized and ecologically balanced economies long before the degrowth movement gained momentum.

Denis de Rougemont, for instance, referred to the findings of the *Limits to Growth* report by the Club of Rome and described the ideology of economic expansion as a kind of "growth religion" (De Rougemont, 1977a: 15). His critique of economic growth did not arise from ecological theories but from a federalist political position: he saw the nation-state as an "industrial aggression unit" that drove economic growth at the expense of both regional diversity and ecological balance (De Rougemont, 1977b: 94; De Rougemont, 1979: 103).

De Rougemont associated nation-states with the pursuit of unsustainable industrialization, whereas he saw regions as the natural loci of more balanced and sustainable economic activities. It is also important to note that he was not only a federalist philosopher but also a pioneer of ecological activism, being one of the founders of the *Action Ecologique Européenne*.

Alexander Langer, writing in the early 1990s, similarly envisioned a simpler lifestyle characterized by reduced consumption and waste:

> "(…) our civilization, as it appears, is not compatible with nature because, if we continued only with this production of waste, the planet we have would not be enough. The same thing could be said for energy and for all other fields. (…) There are some things that can already be said, though. One is the strong revaluation and revitalization of local communities.
> (…) Even small choices like riding a bike instead of driving a car have consequences for everything, not just our lungs." (Langer, 2019: 150)

Thus, Langer's vision aligns with degrowth in promoting the principle of self-limitation. As Grimaldi notes, quoting Langer:

> "a Europe intent on paving the way for that self-limitation, both *consumerist and productive*, which today is the condition for the planet to have a future" (Grimaldi, 2023: 120; Langer, 1991: 146) [emphasis is mine]

In addition to these integral federalist figures, Murray Bookchin deserves mention as someone who, though outside the European federalist tradition, combined federalist principles with ecological thinking. Bookchin criticized American-style federalism as overly centralized and instead proposed a model of confederalism based on regional and municipal autonomy. His project of democratic confederalism aimed to promote direct democracy and ecological sustainability at the local level.

Bookchin explicitly opposed growth-centered capitalist economies and argued for "limiting growth" to preserve ecological systems (Bookchin, 1996: 44).

Thus, both European integral federalists and thinkers like Bookchin independently contributed to the conceptual foundations that would later converge with many ideas central to the degrowth movement.

Degrowth

The degrowth perspective on the economy is rooted primarily in its critique of globalization. Degrowth thinkers argue that globalization has extended economic activities beyond ecologically sustainable limits, leading to unsustainable supply chains, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic inequality. Consequently, they advocate for a significant scaling-down of economic life through the principle of "relocalization."

The concept of "relocalization," first widely popularized by Serge Latouche, calls for reversing the globalization process and rebuilding local economies. Latouche states:

> "We must revitalize the local fabric. This is not only necessary because we live locally even in a virtual world, but also because we need to escape the ideologies of development and economic growth and actively resist globalization." (Latouche, 2005: 116)

The first reason why degrowthers advocate for localization is environmental. According to degrowth theorists, business organization at the global level is closely tied to the "exchange value" of goods and is inherently driven toward continuous growth. This growth process depletes natural resources and generates waste and environmental degradation. In contrast, local economic activity operates within natural limits, focuses on the "use value" of goods, and involves entrepreneurs who are content with maintaining stable operations over time. Hickel illustrates this difference by comparing a local restaurant, where "the owners are content with the same profit year after year," to global corporations that are "putting local shops out of business" and exhibit "no identifiable end point to the process of accumulating exchange-value" (Hickel, 2020: 82). Similarly, Liegey and Nelson argue:

> "Degrowth is about localizing production and consumption, which often means 'relocalizing' in practice. It is clearly desirable in ecological terms to minimise the transport of people, goods and services. It is totally absurd to have to travel to shop for goods and services that could be produced and consumed locally." (Liegey & Nelson, 2020: 217)

The second major reason for supporting localization is socioeconomic. Degrowth theorists believe that the global neoliberal economy has exacerbated inequality. Local economies, by contrast, provide more equitable access to resources and foster democratic control. As Kallis explains:

> "Those of us who write about degrowth envision a future wherein societies live within their ecological means, with localized economies that distribute resources more equally through new forms of democratic institutions." (Kallis, 2011: 10)

Thus, the degrowth economic model is rooted in both environmental sustainability and social justice, achieved through the relocalization of production and consumption.

Social Aspects of Regionalization and Localization

Integral Federalism

From the perspective of integral federalism, regions are not merely administrative units; they are the historical and natural environments in which human societies have evolved. According to Denis de Rougemont, the nation-state building process inflicted significant damage upon these original social ecosystems. As an example, he cites Lille—a French city geographically distant from Paris but historically closer to Belgium and the North Sea. Within the framework of the nation-state, Lille was marginalized and relegated to a peripheral status. Yet, historically, it served as a dynamic hub linking Britain, France, and Belgium. Today, as national borders lose some of their significance, Lille has once again become a regional center.

Nation-building not only disrupted political and economic balances but also undermined social and cultural identities. Nation-states attempted to forge national identities by suppressing or even erasing regional ones. As De Rougemont explains:

> "Nationalism attempted to recreate community from above... But we see it clearly today: we cannot decree a feeling, a life, or community vitality… So it is with the social community: it is rooted in the very condition of man and not elsewhere, in his fundamental needs and his most personal ends. It pre-exists the individual in the sense that each one is born from a union formed in the network of social relations, and it lasts beyond the person." (De Rougemont, 1977a: 220)

Federalist thinkers such as Guy Hérauld and Alexandre Marc built upon this understanding, emphasizing the deep social and ecological grounding of federalist thought. Hérauld described integral federalism as the political-legal dimension of what he termed "realistic humanism." Referring to Marc's famous phrase, "Become what you are" (*deviens ce que tu es*), Hérauld stressed the importance of respecting both human individuality and the natural environment (Hérauld, 1969: 40).

Similarly, Luigi Zanzi views human communities as an integral part of nature. According to Grimaldi, Zanzi offers "an autonomous and systematic re-evaluation of the history of nature in a local key from which he draws specific and operational indications that permeate his proposal for a federal Europe" (Grimaldi, 2005: 112). Zanzi argues that the genuine historical regions of Europe were actually "environmental regions," encompassing multiple nations and transcending the borders of today's nation-states. These regions included both human communities and natural ecosystems. One example Zanzi provides is the Alpine region, which forms a vast cultural and environmental ecosystem but is now divided by numerous national frontiers. Zanzi's aspiration is to revive these environmental regions through the European integration process and to build a European federation based upon them. According to Zanzi, as Grimaldi notes, "it should be the 'natural nations' founded in the Middle Ages and

at the dawn of the modern age on ethnic-linguistic-cultural communities, that constitute the fundamental substratum of European unification" (Grimaldi, 2023).

Thus, integral federalism views regionalism not merely as a political ideal but as the natural and historical framework for authentic human community life.

Degrowth

The degrowth movement's emphasis on localization also finds a strong expression in the social sphere. Like integral federalism, degrowth critiques modern development for eroding meaningful social ties and alienating individuals from their communities and environments. In *Survivre au développement* (Latouche, 2004), Serge Latouche argues that the ideologies of development and economic growth have disrupted people's natural relationships with both their social and ecological environments.

To counteract this alienation, degrowth advocates for "convivial relocalization" — the rebuilding of genuine human relationships and ecological connections at the local level. Rather than seeing individuals as isolated consumers and producers embedded in global value chains, degrowth envisions people as community members participating in cooperative and face-to-face interactions. Liegey and Nelson define open relocalization as follows:

> "Open relocalisation places humans and ecosystems at the centre, as substitutes for where monetary value and capitalist enterprises stand within capitalism. Human needs and ecological limits are key determinants of degrowth practices, which revolve around human relations with one another and with nature, and where coexistence is central." (Liegey & Nelson, 2020: 269)

In addition to rebuilding social ties, degrowth places great importance on local democracy as the political foundation for this renewal. Degrowth theorists critique national and supranational institutions as overly bureaucratic, technocratic, and disconnected from people's everyday realities. Instead, they advocate for grassroots democracy, emphasizing the need to embed political institutions within specific cultural and ecological contexts. Romano articulates this vision:

> "For degrowth advocates, the local dimension provides two conditions without which a democracy is unmanageable and deprived of any sense: the personalization of citizens' relations (…) and the embedding of institutions within a specific cultural context, achievable only at a local scale. Of course, the proposed bio-units are not supposed to be closed, autistic monads, but connected to one another within bottom-up confederations." (Romano, 2020: 40)

Romano also highlights Fotopoulos' contribution, noting the strong compatibility between degrowth principles and the model of libertarian municipalism. Echoing the ideas of Proudhon and Bookchin, Fotopoulos asserts:

> "It is therefore compatibility with direct and economic democracy, that is, the feasibility of decision-making in face-to-face assemblies, that should be the basic determinant of the size of the self-reliant community. On these grounds, the municipality (the demos)

> emerges as the most appropriate economic unit that could constitute the nucleus of an inclusive democracy." (Fotopoulos, 1997: 244)

In his later work, Fotopoulos further argues that a confederal democracy can only emerge from decentralized, local levels of organization and characterizes degrowth as a natural "by-product" of such a political system (Fotopoulos, 2010: 3).

Thus, from the degrowth perspective, social reconstruction is deeply tied to relocalization, participatory democracy, and the revitalization of community life at the human scale.

Conclusion and Results

As explored in this study, integral federalism and degrowth—despite emerging from different historical and intellectual backgrounds—converge on a central idea: decentralization, whether understood as regionalization or localization. Both frameworks are rooted in a shared anarchist tradition, particularly in Proudhonian thought, which envisions society as naturally cooperative and decentralized.

Integral federalism views regional autonomy as a way to challenge the authority of nation-states and promote a "Europe of Regions," where political structures are more human-scaled and culturally grounded. Degrowth, on the other hand, advocates for localization to confront the ecological and social crises caused by globalization and economic growth. Despite these different starting points, both approaches question the dominant paradigms of governance and economic organization by proposing smaller-scale, participatory, and ecologic alternatives.

A key distinction between the two lies in their respective attitudes toward globalization. Integral federalists often see globalization and supranational institutions as opportunities to weaken the nation-state and empower subnational regions. Degrowth theorists, however, perceive globalization as an extension of the very growth-oriented logic they seek to overcome. For them, localization is not only an ecological necessity but a path toward autonomy, democracy, and community resilience.

Discussion

The potential for alignment between these two frameworks is significant. Integral federalists like Denis de Rougemont and Alexander Langer expressed environmental concerns and advocated self-limitation well before degrowth emerged as a formal intellectual movement. Their critiques of industrialization, consumerism, and centralization resonate strongly with the core values of degrowth.

Although integral federalism literature has long emphasized the critique of growth, it is striking that there is little interest in political federalism in contemporary degrowth literature. We may think that contemporary degrowth literature has overlooked the similarities and differences emphasized in this study for various reasons. As degrowth evolves into a more politically articulated movement, it

increasingly turns to the kinds of organizational principles found in federalist tradition. Approaches such as democratic confederalism and libertarian municipalism offer blueprints for constructing decentralized, participatory political systems that are capable of realizing the goals of degrowth in practice.

In sum, while integral federalism and degrowth maintain distinct theoretical foundations, their shared emphasis on autonomy, participatory democracy, and ecological responsibility points toward a common horizon. Should degrowth continue to develop its political dimension, integral federalism may prove to be one of its most natural allies.

References

Bookchin M (1994) *Özgürlüğün Ekolojisi* [*The Ecology of Freedom*, in Turkish]. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.

Bookchin M (1996) *Ekolojik Bir Topluma Doğru* [*Toward an Ecological Society*, in Turkish]. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.

Brugmans H (1950) *La cité européenne (programme fédéraliste)* [*The European City – Federalist Program*, in French]. Paris: Le Portulan.

Brugmans H, Duclos P (1962) *Le fédéralisme contemporain* [*The Contemporary Federalism*, in French]. Leyden: Sythoff.

D'Alisa G, Demaria F, Kallis G (2015) *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. London: Routledge.

Demaria F, Schneider F, Sekulova F, Martinez-Alier J (2013) What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement. *Environmental Values* 22(2): 191–215.

De Rougemont D (1969) "Vers une fédération des régions" [Toward a Federation of Regions, in French]. In *La Révolution fédéraliste* [*The Federalist Revolution*]. Paris: Presse d'Europe.

De Rougemont D (1977a) *L'avenir est Notre Affaire* [*The Future is Our Duty*, in French]. Paris: Stock. Available at: https://www.unige.ch/rougemont/livres/ddr19770721aena.

De Rougemont D (1977b) *Rapport au peuple européen sur l'état de l'union de l'Europe* [*Report to the European People on the State of the Union of Europe*, in French]. Paris: Stock. Available at: https://www.unige.ch/rougemont/livres/ddr19790423rpe.

De Rougemont D (1994) *Dictionnaire Internationale du Fédéralisme* [*International Dictionary of Federalism*, in French]. Brussels: Bruylant.

Fitzpatrick N, Parrique T, Cosme I (2022) Exploring degrowth policy proposals: A systemic mapping with thematic synthesis. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 365: 132764. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.132764.

Fotopoulos T (1997) *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*. London: Cassell. Available at: https://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/brtid/IDBook.pdf.

Fotopoulos T (2010) Direct democracy and degrowth. *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* 6(4): 1–6.

Georgescu-Roegen N (1971) *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grimaldi G (2005) *Federalismo, ecologia politica e partiti Verdi* [*Federalism, Political Ecology, and Green Parties*, in Italian]. Torino: Giuffrè Editore.

Grimaldi G (2012) Prospects for ecological federalism. *L'Europe en formation* 363: 301–323. https://shs.cairn.info/article/EUFOR_363_0301/pdf?lang=en.

Grimaldi G (2020) "Appunti per un itinerario dalla persona all'ecologia: Denis De Rougemont e l'Europa federale delle regioni" [Notes for an itinerary from the person to ecology: Denis De Rougemont and the federal Europe of the regions]. In D Preda & F

Velo (eds) *A Settant'anni dal Congresso d'Europa a L'Aja: Unità Ideale e Unità Politica* [*Seventy Years After the Congress of Europe in The Hague: Ideal and Political Unity*]. Bari: Cacucci Editore.

Grimaldi G (2023) "Sviluppi e proposte per un federalismo ecologico o eco-federalismo" [Developments and proposals for an ecological federalism or eco-federalism]. *Politics – Rivista di Studi Politici* 19(3): 111–133.

Hérauld G (1969) "Les principes du fédéralisme et la construction de l'Europe" [*The Principles of Federalism and the Construction of Europe*]. In *La Révolution fédéraliste*. Paris: Presse d'Europe.

Hickel J (2020) *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. London: Random House.

Illich I (1973) *Tools for Conviviality*. London: Marion Boyars.

Kallis G (2011) In defense of degrowth. *Ecological Economics* 70(5): 873–880. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2010.12.007.

Langer A (1991) "Per un coraggioso ed innovativo federalismo europeo" [For a brave and innovative European federalism]. *Il Dibattito Federalista* 4(2): 146–148.

Langer A (2019) *Alexander Langer: Una Buona Politica per Riparare il Mondo* [*A Good Policy to Repair the World*, in Italian]. Eds M Marzorati & M Valpiana. Florence: Edizioni Interno.

Latouche S (2004) *Survivre au développement* [*Farewell to Growth*, in French]. Paris: Mille et une nuits.

Latouche S (2005) *Décoloniser l'imaginaire* [*Decolonization of the Imaginary*, in French]. Lyon: Paragon.

Liegey V, Nelson A (2020) *Exploring Degrowth*. London: Pluto Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15d81qc.

Meadows D H (1972) *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New York: Universe Publishing.

Papanikos G T (2017) *Democracy in ancient Athens and in the contemporary world.* Opening speech at the 4th Annual International Conference on Humanities & Arts in a Global World, 3–6 January 2017, Athens, Greece. Available at: https://bit.ly/3ib4PFk.

Papanikos G T (2022) The five ancient criteria of democracy: The apotheosis of equality. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9(2): 105–120.

Proudhon P J (1863) *Du Principe Fédératif* [*The Principle of Federation*, in French]. Paris: E. Dentu. Available at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2205237.texteImage.

Romano O (2020) *Towards a Society of Degrowth*. London: Routledge.

Spinelli A, Rossi E, Colorni E (1941) *Il Manifesto di Ventotene* [*The Ventotene Manifesto*, in Italian]. Available at: www.italialibri.net/contributi/0407-1.html.

Yıldırım M C (2016) *AB'de Federalist Yaklaşımın Bütünleşme Perspektifine Etkisi* [*The Impact of the Federalist Approach on the Integration Perspective in the EU*, in Turkish]. London: LAP Lambert.

Yıldırım M C (2024) On growth and democracy. *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 10(1): 39–48. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajms.10-1-2

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs - Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025 –Pages 295-312

Russia-Ukraine War and Defense and Security Priorities of NATO in the Context of the Establishment of New World Order

By Nika Chitadze[*]

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) occupies a special place in ensuring international security. This largest international organization has existed for more than seven decades, and during this time it has not lost its global significance. Many believed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO lost its raison d'être. Still, it is obvious that NATO has not only lost its raison d'être, but has also significantly expanded, become stronger, and its "open door" policy provides democratic states with a unique opportunity to be members of NATO and protect fundamental human rights and values, as well as contribute to resolving global security issues. NATO today is a military-political alliance of 32 states, the purpose of which is to ensure peace and stability in the North Atlantic region and freedom and security of its members. The Alliance strictly protects and respects such values as sovereignty, territorial integrity, democracy, individual freedom, human rights, and the rule of law of its member states. At the present stage, when the process of forming a new world order is underway after the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, it is important to determine the role and place of NATO in the modern world, as well as what type of world order will be formed and how events will develop in the short, medium and long term. Based on the above, the purpose of the study is to analyze the basic principles of NATO, the main aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the role of NATO, as well as why the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine represents a global confrontation, as well as a discussion of both pessimistic and optimistic scenarios of possible developments and their reflection in the formation of a new security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic space.

Keywords: *NATO, Ukraine, Russia, Euro-Atlantic security, world order.*

Introduction

Recent events have demonstrated to us the scale of the nature of the conflict and the need for a broader understanding of security. In the modern digital age, the number of state defense forces and the diversity of military equipment are of decisive importance. In addition, current events have highlighted the diversity of information warfare and its importance. Due to the expansive nature of states, the international regime is no longer based on rules and the factor of force has once again come to the fore. It is at such moments that international security is of paramount importance, which must ensure international stability and peace in the world. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) plays an important role in ensuring all this. This largest

[*]Professor, International Black Sea University, Georgia.

international organization has existed for more than seven decades, and during this time it has not lost its military and political significance. Many believed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO lost its purpose. But it is clear that NATO not only did not lose, but also significantly expanded, and became stronger, and its "open door" policy provides democratic states with a unique opportunity to be members of NATO and protect basic human rights and values, contribute to the solution of global security issues and ensure the protection of their territorial integrity.

NATO is a unique alliance, as evidenced by the fact that it still exists today, and its responsibilities have grown in line with global challenges. No other alliance can boast such longevity. This can probably be explained by the fact that NATO is not a typical military alliance. NATO is an international organization by its organizational structure. Representatives of member states (ambassadors) and representatives of partner countries are permanently present at NATO headquarters. NATO has a huge apparatus with civilian and military structures and other departments that are engaged in thousands of different activities, including non-military ones. For example, NATO even funds scientific research. Another secret of NATO's longevity is probably that it is an alliance of like-minded people and a club of democratic countries. Member states are united not only by security concerns but also by common values. Perhaps this explains the fact that during the Cold War, other alliances similar to NATO were created, the purpose of which was to protect against communist aggression, but none of them lasted long. NATO is the North Atlantic Alliance, the member states of which retain full sovereignty and independence. The decision-making process in NATO is based on the principle of consensus, based on the equality of member states. The decision-making body is the North Atlantic Council, chaired by the NATO Secretary General. The North Atlantic Treaty, consisting of 14 articles, undertakes to jointly defend freedom and security by political and military means (Chitadze 2008).

Nowadays, it is rare, but still possible to hear discussions about whether NATO enlargement was a mistake, but if you look at the facts, it becomes clear that stopping the enlargement was a mistake. NATO member countries are peace-loving, economically developed, and democratic. Unfortunately, there is no peace in Ukraine, which is not a NATO member state. The occupied part of Georgia, which in 2008 was excluded from the Membership Action Plan (MAP) (Chitadze 2011), which is an important component of NATO membership. In the West, after the Russian aggression, sensible people probably once again became convinced that the creation of NATO at the time, and then its preservation and expansion, was not only the right step but also necessary.

Recent events have clearly shown that the world is much smaller than it seemed a decade ago. In the modern era, there is no longer an idea that a conflict or unrest is limited to the borders of a particular state. It is precisely because of the global nature of conflicts that can occur on the territory of one state, but the content of which goes beyond the borders of a particular state, that an analysis of international security is necessary, which should ensure international stability and peace.

The **purpose** of the study is to analyze the role of NATO in the process of forming a new world order against the background of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The relevance of the research topic is due to the purpose, mission, and role of NATO, the most important international organization in the world, in international relations and in the process of forming a new world order.

NATO's strategic documents and summits have often emphasized the importance of the international order in ensuring stability. The guarantors of the rules-based order were to be large and powerful states, ensuring compliance with the principles of international law. While in the early years, NATO's policy focused exclusively on the security of its member states, today the organization has assumed an international obligation to protect allied states and democracy. To achieve this goal, NATO implements various programs in the field of defense and institution building.

The Alliance, whose main goal is to ensure the security of its member states, takes these challenges into account in its Strategic Concept and changes its approach to security policy, which is becoming more flexible, broad, and focused on strength.

For the first time since the Cold War, the need to increase armaments and strengthen special security measures is back on the agenda. In connection with the increased threats, armaments are being built up and a strategic defense policy is being developed, which should ensure greater strategic security and stability in the international arena.

Object and subject of the study: Definition of the role and purpose of NATO in the context of modern challenges and the formation of a new world order, in particular the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is determined by the military-political nature and dimensions of the alliance's security.

Research goals and objectives: The purpose of this research topic is to present the role and significance of NATO in international relations. To demonstrate its military-political essence and security guarantees in the ongoing process of forming a new world order.

Methodological foundations of the study: The research used a proven and well-established research methodology in the modern scientific field, arising from the goals of the research object, its essence, and objectives. The study will present a systematic analysis of NATO.

There have been distinguished: historical, systemic, comparative and scientific research (inductive, deductive, analytical) methods.

The use of the historical research method is associated with the dynamics of the formation and development of NATO. With the help of this method, the reasons for the transformation of the military-political essence of NATO were identified and key historical processes were identified. The systemic method that we used, on the one hand, for the direct analysis of the system of international relations, and on the other hand, from the point of view of understanding NATO as one of the elements of the global security system.

Theoretical basis: The theoretical basis of the study covers the period from 1949 to 2025.

The article uses various theoretical approaches and perspectives, including:

The principle of historicism - consideration of an event in the process of its development (birth, formation, escalation, de-escalation). The use of this theory became necessary to demonstrate the stages of NATO development from its

foundation to the present day. Issues of escalation and de-escalation were discussed during and after the Cold War, as well as after Russia invaded Ukraine (2014-2022).

Deterrence theory (George Kennan). According to this theory, NATO policy is negotiated in response to current challenges, especially to contain Soviet expansion during the Cold War. And to understand NATO's deterrence and defense policies in the modern period.

Balance of Power and Combined Force Theory (Kenneth Waltz) - Great powers are always wary of their adversaries' intentions, which creates a kind of insecurity syndrome in the international arena, due to which all powers try to strengthen their defensive capabilities. According to the combined force theory, the pooling of capabilities is an effective response to global challenges in the long term, as evidenced by NATO's politico-military defense strategies.

Collective Security Theory (Kenneth Waltz): a political, regional, or global security arrangement in which each country in the system recognizes the security of others and commits itself to a collective response to conflicts, threats, and breaches of the peace.

As it is known, Balance of power theory ia a core concept in international relations, posits that the stability of the international system is enhanced when power is distributed relatively evenly among nations, preventing any single state from becoming dominant and threatening the independence of others. This theory suggests that states will act to prevent any one state from achieving hegemony (dominance) through various means, such as building up their own military, forming alliances, or even aligning with a threatening power (bandwagoning). In this regard, NATO was founded to balance and prevent the possible military, ideological and geopolitical expansion and of Soviet empire during the Cold war period and for today the purpose of Alliance (together with other purposes) is again the balancing imperialistic policy of Russia, taking into account the military intervention of Russia in Ukraine.

With regard to the term **"Combined Force theory",** it doesn't refer to a single, universally recognized scientific theory. Instead, it encompasses various concepts where multiple forces are considered together to understand their combined effect. Thus, In military strategy, "combined arms" refers to the coordinated use of different military branches (infantry, artillery, armor, etc.) to achieve a common objective. Each branch has its own strengths and weaknesses, and combining them maximizes their overall effectiveness and minimizes risk. This approach aims to create a synergistic effect where the combined force is greater than the sum of its parts. As it is known, NATO used the combined forces of its member states during the military operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Libya.

With regard to the **Collective security theory, it** posits that states can achieve greater security by cooperating and committing to a collective response against aggression, rather than relying on traditional alliances or individual defense. In essence, it's a system where an attack on one state is considered an attack on all, necessitating a united response from the entire group. This approach aims to deter potential aggressors by creating a strong disincentive, as any act of aggression would face unified

opposition. This factor is taken into account according to the 5-th article of the NATO Charter.

New World Order Theory: a political concept that implies the idea of world governance through new cooperative initiatives to identify, understand, or solve global problems that exceed the ability of individual countries to solve. Balancing and complicity theory (Stephen Wolt): Balancing means maintaining the existing distribution of power, while complicity is an alliance with a strong state.

Research Questions

- What is NATO's current security policy?
- What are the current challenges facing the Alliance in light of the current events in Ukraine?
- What could be the new world order and what is the role of the Alliance?

Scientific novelty of the work: The scientific novelty of the work lies in understanding the modern essence of NATO against the background of modern challenges and the author's vision. Displaying the dynamics of development from ensuring the security of member states to creating an international regime based on rules.

NATO Security Policy, Theoretical Foundations

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military-political alliance consisting of two North American and 30 European states, created on April 4, 1949 (Chitadze 2024). NATO's primary goal is to ensure the freedom and security of its member states - both politically and militarily. The Alliance strictly protects and respects such values as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, individual freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The history of NATO is associated with the desire for stability and the prevention of further conflicts after World War II. It is widely believed that the Americans needed to create NATO to keep their troops in Europe (Harutinyan 2020). However, history confirms that the Americans not only avoided sending troops to Europe but also avoided interfering in European affairs. American troops appeared in Europe only at the end of World War I, after Germany sank American civilian ships and forced the American government to enter the war. Immediately after the end of World War I, the Americans left the continent. The United States did not intend to intervene in World War II until Japan attacked it, and then Germany declared war. America entered the war and made a significant contribution to the defeat of both Germany and Japan, but US President Roosevelt intended to withdraw troops soon after the end of the war. He believed that peace in Europe would be maintained by Great Britain and the Soviet Union (Harutinyan 2020).

NATO Regional Approaches and Security Theories

The formation and development of democratic values in NATO has its historical foundations, the beginning of which is the Washington Treaty of 1949. The basis for the formation of the military alliance "NATO", the main goal of which was collective defense and security. The creation of NATO was described by its first Secretary General Lord Ismay as follows: "To keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" (Goldstein 2014). However, the situation that existed 73 years ago has changed radically, and the Alliance has expanded its capabilities. Today, the fundamental values of the Alliance are democracy and democratic values, which are a guarantee of peace and security. The initiatives of the Alliance aimed at strengthening strategic security are permeated with the theory of strategic alliance, according to which common interests are a priority. The main task of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is to ensure the freedom and security of the member states of the alliance, both politically and militarily (Khachapuridze 2016).

In the Alliance, the meetings of the North Atlantic Council are chaired by the Secretary-General, who has three main functions: 1. He is the Chairman of the North Atlantic Council, the Nuclear Planning Committee, the Defence Planning Committee, the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine Councils, and the Mediterranean Dialogue. 2. He represents and acts on behalf of the organization: and expresses NATO's position on certain issues: 3. He is the highest representative and chief executive of the Alliance (Khachapuridze 2016). The NATO Secretary General does not have the right to vote, since one of the member states, represented by the Secretary-General, has two votes. In NATO, all member states have a single and equal vote. The NATO Secretary General is appointed by the member states for a term of four years. To date, NATO has had 12 Secretaries General. Currently, the top post of the Alliance, the post of Secretary General, is held by the Dutch diplomat and politician Mark Rutte (Chitadze 2024).

When we talk about NATO and its political prospects, it is necessary to focus on NATO's "Open Door Policy", which is defined in the Washington Basic Treaty. NATO's enlargement policy aims to invite new states to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and ensure higher security standards (Shubitidze 2022). NATO's "Open Door Policy" is based on Article 10 of the alliance's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty (1949). The treaty states that NATO membership is open to any "European state that can continue to adhere to the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area" (Stivachtis 2014). It states that any decision on enlargement must be taken "by unanimous consent of the Member States" (Cancian 2021). NATO enlargement has contributed to greater stability and prosperity in Europe. Its goal is to promote stability and cooperation and build a Europe united by peace, democracy, and shared values. "NATO does not pose a threat to any country; the purpose of the enlargement of the Alliance is to strengthen stability and cooperation, build a common and free space, and defend peace and shared democratic values. NATO's door is open to any state prepared to meet the commitments required for membership and to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area" (NATO Information Centre). Since 1949, the number of NATO member states has increased from 12 to 32 countries. On 27 March 2020, North Macedonia became the

30th member state of NATO, followed by Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024 (Chitadze 2024). NATO respects the right of all countries to choose their security arrangements and guarantees. Every sovereign country has the right to choose whether to join a treaty or alliance. This fundamental principle is enshrined in international agreements, including the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. NATO membership is not mandatory for countries; Article 13 of the Washington Treaty explicitly grants allies the right to withdraw if they wish (Kratsashvili 2022).

European countries wishing to join NATO are initially invited to engage in an intensive dialogue with the Alliance regarding their aspirations and related reforms. Applicants may be invited to participate in a Membership Action Plan (MAP), a program that helps countries prepare for possible future membership. Participation does not guarantee membership but is one of the main preparation mechanisms. (The Annual Action Plan (AAP) applies to Georgia) (Gvenetadze 2022).

To join the Alliance, countries must respect the values of the North Atlantic Treaty and meet certain political, economic, and military criteria set out in the Alliance's 1995 enlargement study. These criteria include a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; fair treatment of minorities in the population; a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts; Ability and readiness to contribute militarily to NATO operations; and commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutions (NATO 2023). NATO, as an organization promoting security and stability, has a responsibility to ensure the security of both its Member States and NATO Allies.

NATO and its Role in the providing International Security

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, occupies a special place in ensuring international security. As noted, the existence of this largest international organization has been going on for more than seven decades, and during this time it has not lost its global significance. Many believed that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO lost its purpose of existence, but it is clear that NATO has not only lost it, but has significantly expanded, become stronger, and its "open door" policy provides democratic states with a unique opportunity to be a member of NATO and protect fundamental human rights and values, contribute to world security issues and ensure its territorial integrity. Also, together with other member states, to enjoy the opportunities and privileges that are determined by the common policy of NATO member states.

NATO is today a 32-nation military-political alliance whose goal is to ensure peace in the North Atlantic area, freedom and security of its member states, both by political and military means. The alliance strictly protects and respects values such as the sovereignty of member states, territorial integrity, democracy, individual freedom, human rights, and the rule of law.

In order to analyze the new world order, it is necessary to note that transatlantic relations have experienced significant tensions, especially over the past decade. Despite the absence of direct military conflicts between major powers, actors in the international system seem to be inclined to use force or to declare the use of force in

conflicts. However, at the same time, "soft power" is now more important than ever in international politics. In addition to international security, it is necessary to analyze NATO's regional approaches, the logic of which for regional security cooperation is clear: by properly pooling resources, like-minded countries can more effectively strengthen their own security.

NATO will never be a global alliance, but its new strategy reflects the realization that the security of its allies depends not only on eliminating the Russian threat to Europe, but also, increasingly, on transboundary challenges such as emerging technologies and climate change, including China. Within the framework of the core task of cooperative security, NATO partnerships offer a way to broaden the Alliance's global approach to security while strengthening its military and political dimensions.

NATO's new Strategic Concept reaffirms that NATO's primary goal is to ensure collective defense based on a 360-degree approach. It defines three main tasks of the Alliance: a) deterrence and defense. b) crisis prevention and management. c) Cooperative security.

NATO Interests in the Black Sea Region

In turn, NATO's interest in the Black Sea region, where the Russian-Ukrainian war is currently taking place, is determined by the security of regional states. The Black Sea has always been a place of confrontation between regional powers and great empires and remains an important geopolitical point to this day. It is located at the economic and cultural crossroads of Eurasia and represents a connecting line between the Mediterranean, Caspian, and Aegean Seas, as well as an important corridor to the Middle East. The Black Sea region, among other things, includes gas and oil resources, transit routes, and key energy pipelines (Chachkhiani 2022).

Due to the geopolitical position of the Black Sea, it is at the center of attention and political prospects of major powers (Chachkhiani 2022). Based on the above, given the interests of Russia, the democratization of the countries of the region and cooperation with NATO member states are unacceptable to it. As well as the development of alternative gas and oil projects so that Russia can maintain control over the conflicts in the region. Based on this, NATO views the Kremlin's actions as a threat to both the region and the Euro-Atlantic space (Gabelia 2019).

Prerequisites for the Outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian War and the Role of NATO

In 2013, in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to reject an agreement on closer economic integration with the European Union led to protests (Chachanidze 2022). The protests spread, the conflict escalated, and in February 2014, President Yanukovych fled the country. A month later, in March 2014, Russian troops took control of the Crimean region of Ukraine (Fitzwater 2019). Russian President Vladimir Putin called for the protection of the rights of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking people in Crimea and southeastern Ukraine.

Russia then formally annexed the peninsula after Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation in a controversial local referendum. The crisis exacerbated ethnic divisions, and two months later, pro-Russian separatists held independence referendums in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine (Dzneladze 2019).

Armed conflict quickly erupted in the regions between Russian-backed forces and the Ukrainian military (Dzneladze 2019). Russia denies military involvement, but both Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have claimed that Russian troops and equipment have been amassing near Donetsk and that shelling has been carried out from within the country since the annexation of Crimea. The conflict has entered a stage of active confrontation, with regular shelling and clashes along the front line dividing the eastern border regions controlled by Russia and Ukraine (Global Conflict Tracker 2022). Since February 2015, France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine have attempted to negotiate an end to the violence through the Minsk Agreements. The framework agreement included provisions for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, and full control of the Ukrainian government in the conflict zone. However, attempts to reach a diplomatic settlement and a satisfactory resolution have largely failed (Global Conflict Tracker 2022).

In response to events around Ukraine, in April 2016, NATO deployed four battalions to Eastern Europe, rotating troops in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to deter possible future Russian aggression elsewhere on the continent, particularly in the Baltic states. In September 2017, the United States also deployed two US Army tank brigades to Poland to further bolster NATO's presence in the region (Global Conflict Tracker 2022).

In January 2018, the United States imposed new sanctions on twenty-one individuals, including several Russian officials, and nine companies linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In March 2018, the US State Department approved the sale of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, the first sale of lethal weapons since the conflict began (Johnson 2019). In October 2018, Ukraine joined the US and seven other NATO countries in a series of large-scale air exercises in western Ukraine. The exercises followed Russia's annual military exercises in September 2018, the largest since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In October 2021, based on months of intelligence gathering and monitoring of Russian troop movements, a White House briefing of the heads of U.S. intelligence, military, and diplomacy announced that a massive Russian invasion was almost certain. Questions remained about when the attack would occur and whether the United States could convince allies to act early.

Russia and Ukraine War - Global Confrontation

On February 24, 2022, Russian forces invaded a largely unprepared Ukraine after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a "special military operation" against the country. In his statement, Putin said the goal of the operation was to demilitarize and disarm Ukraine and stop the alleged genocide of Russians on Ukrainian soil. Before the Russian invasion, the Joe Biden administration made the unconventional decision to relax restrictions on information sharing and allow the intelligence and findings to

be widely shared with allies, including Ukraine, and publicly. The goal of this strategy was to strengthen the defense of allies and deter aggressive actions by Russia (Global Conflict Tracker 2022).

Earlier, in mid-December 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry called on the United States and NATO to cease military activity in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, not to further expand NATO against Russia, and not to allow Ukraine to join NATO in the future. The United States and other NATO allies rejected these demands and threatened Moscow with serious economic sanctions if Russia took aggressive actions against Ukraine (Martel 2019).

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has seriously strained relations between the United States and Russia, as well as NATO, and increased the risk of a wider European conflict. The war will also have broader implications for future cooperation on such critical issues as arms control; cybersecurity; nuclear non-proliferation; global economic stability; energy security; counterterrorism; and political decisions. Moreover, Russia's growing isolation has not only destabilized global energy and resource markets but has also pushed the country to seek stronger strategic ties with states (such as China) that still want to cooperate with it, in many ways in opposition to the West. The war has also exacerbated other global crises: military operations and violence have made it difficult to deliver and distribute much-needed aid, including food, and have exacerbated the already acute shortage of available global humanitarian aid and resources.

Ukraine has long played an important, if sometimes underestimated, role in the global security system. Today, the country is on the front lines of a renewed great-power rivalry that many analysts believe will dominate international relations for decades to come. It is the Russia-Ukraine war that is defining the rules and terms of the new world order, the spheres of influence, and the interests of the great powers.

Ukraine was the cornerstone of the Soviet Union, the United States' main rival during the Cold War. After Russia, it was the second most populous and industrialized republic of the fifteen Soviet republics, with a developed agricultural and defense industry, and was home to the Black Sea Fleet and the bulk of the country's nuclear arsenal. Over three decades of independence, Ukraine has attempted to forge its path as a sovereign state while also seeking closer ties with Western institutions, including the European Union and NATO. However, Kyiv has struggled to balance its foreign relations with deep internal divisions. The more nationalist Ukrainian-speaking population in the country's western regions generally supported integration with Europe, while the predominantly Russian-speaking community in the east favored closer ties with Russia (Masters 2023). Some Western analysts see Russia's 2022 invasion as the culmination of growing Kremlin discontent with NATO's expansion into the former Soviet sphere of influence since the end of the Cold War. Russian leaders, including Putin, argue that the United States and NATO have repeatedly broken promises made in the early 1990s not to expand into the former Soviet bloc. Weeks before the 2008 NATO summit, President Vladimir Putin warned American diplomats that moves to bring Ukraine into the alliance "would be a hostile act against Russia" (Masters, 2023). Famously, before invading Ukraine, Russia carried out military aggression against Georgia in 2008, demonstrating Putin's willingness to use force to defend Russia's imperialist ambitions and interests (Masters 2023).

Although Ukraine is not a NATO member, it strengthened its ties with NATO before the full-scale Russian aggression in 2022. Ukraine conducts annual military exercises with the alliance and became one of six Enhanced Opportunities Partners in 2020. Moreover, Kyiv reaffirmed its goal of eventually gaining full NATO membership. In the weeks leading up to the invasion, Russia made several key security demands of the United States and NATO, including ending the alliance's expansion, obtaining Russian consent for certain troop deployments by NATO member states, and removing US nuclear weapons from Europe. Alliance leaders responded by maintaining their commitment to the Open Door policy (Chitadze 2024).

NATO perceives Putin's Russia as a revanchist power seeking to regain its former power and prestige. "Putin's goal has always been to restore Russia's status as a great power in northern Eurasia," writes Gerard Toal, a professor of international relations at Virginia Tech, in his book Close to Abroad (2016).

In July 2021, Putin wrote an article that many Western foreign policy experts viewed as scathing, outlining his conflicting views on the shared history of Russia and Ukraine. Among other comments, Putin called Russians and Ukrainians "one people" who occupy "the same historical and spiritual space" (Toal 2016).

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington's priority was to ensure that Ukraine, as well as Belarus and Kazakhstan, no longer had nuclear arsenals, so that only Russia could retain the former Soviet Union's weapons of mass destruction. Some prominent observers at the time believed that the United States had engaged with Russia prematurely and should have done more to promote geopolitical pluralism in the former Soviet Union (Socor 2016). Former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, writing in Foreign Affairs in early 1994, described a healthy and stable Ukraine as a critical counterweight to Russia. The United States remains committed to restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It does not recognize Russia's claims to Crimea and other regions illegally annexed by Russia (as confirmed by US President Joe Biden's visit to Kyiv on 20 February 2023). However, before the 2022 invasion, the United States supported the settlement of the conflict in Donbas through the Minsk agreements. Western powers and their partners have taken several steps to increase aid to Ukraine and punish Russia for the 2022 invasion. As of February 2023, the United States had provided more than $50 billion in aid to Ukraine, including expanded military assistance.

Meanwhile, international sanctions against Russia have expanded significantly to cover much of its financial, energy, defense, and technology sectors, and target the assets of wealthy oligarchs and others. The U.S. and some European governments have also banned some Russian banks from using the Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, a financial messaging system known as SWIFT; placed restrictions on Russia's access to its vast foreign exchange reserves; and blacklisted the Russian Central Bank. Moreover, many influential Western companies have closed or suspended their operations in Russia (Dzandzava 2022).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine also led to the cancellation of the long-awaited Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. Many critics, including US and Ukrainian officials, opposed the pipeline during its development, arguing that it would give Russia more political influence over Ukraine and the European gas market. In August, Russia

indefinitely suspended operations of Nord Stream 1, which supplied a third of its natural gas to the European market.

Despite the grave consequences of the war, the West has provided a range of economic, political, and military aid that has helped Ukraine on the battlefield and contributed to Russia's isolation from the West. Politically, the EU has not only accepted millions of Ukrainian refugees but also welcomed Ukraine as a candidate for EU membership (Herman 2015).

NATO has condemned Russia's war in Ukraine in the strongest possible terms, calling it "the greatest security challenge of all." The alliance calls on Russia to immediately cease hostilities, withdraw all its troops from Ukraine, and work toward a peaceful, diplomatic solution. The supply of weapons and equipment to Ukraine (by individual NATO allies) and the imposition of unprecedented sanctions are largely taking place outside the framework of NATO (Herman 2015). To deter further Russian aggression and reassure its allies, NATO has significantly strengthened its deterrent posture by deploying large forces and equipment on the eastern flank of the alliance's territory (Herman 2015).

NATO's Role in the Russia-Ukraine War

NATO has always emphasized its role as a defensive alliance and that it does not seek war with Russia, as reaffirmed in NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. "NATO does not seek confrontation and does not pose a threat to the Russian Federation. We will continue to respond to Russia's threats and hostile actions with shared responsibility. We will significantly strengthen the deterrence and defense of all Allies, enhance our resilience to Russian coercion, and support our partners against malign interference and aggression. In light of its hostile policies and actions, we cannot consider the Russian Federation a partner. However, we are ready to maintain open channels of communication with Moscow to manage and mitigate risks, prevent escalation, and enhance transparency. We seek stability and predictability in the Euro-Atlantic area and between NATO and the Russian Federation. Any change in our relationship is conditional on the Russian Federation ceasing its aggressive behavior and fully complying with its obligations under international law" (NATO 2022).

Despite Russia's attempts to stop NATO's expansion policy and show everyone that it will retain control over its sphere of interest, Russia welcomed NATO's approach to its borders (Japaridze 2021). In addition to increasing its numbers and defense capabilities, Russia's aggressive policy in Eastern Europe has led to the process of NATO accession of neutral states Sweden and Finland, where Finland has now become the 31st member of the alliance and Sweden the 32nd. Western states are united in their policy towards Ukraine and are ready to support it as long as necessary. Russia is also accused of violating the international order and disregarding international law, which has long-term negative consequences for the world order and system (Japaridze 2021).

New World Order and Scenarios for the Development of Events

The events of the last decade have revealed the instability of the international system, where climate, technology, hunger, health care, and many other issues have become secondary issues. When considering security issues and in the face of the destructive system that has been created, NATO also needs to address the issue of expansion; This process is seen by some as a source of stability, while by others it is seen as a subject for further escalation and controversy. The debate over NATO expansion has been going on since the end of the Cold War. The most controversial aspirant countries are Georgia and Ukraine, often referred to as "transitional states"; that is, states that are somewhere in between, fully separated from the Soviet past, but unable to fully transition to the Western world (Japaridze 2021). The lack of consensus on the admission of Georgia and Ukraine leaves open the question of how NATO should engage with these states while maintaining organizational credibility. As a rule, states should be free to determine and choose their security policies, but Russia has made its position clear in Georgia by starting a war in 2008, and in Ukraine, first by annexing Crimea in 2014 and then directly demanding confirmation of non-expansion of NATO, before invading Ukraine in 2022 (Kipiani 2022). Today, we live in an era in which a new world order is emerging. In international relations, this word has different meanings. Depending on the context (in Latin, PAX), it means peace, as well as the order resulting from the influence of a certain dominant country or countries - global or regional rules of conduct established by great powers. Of these two meanings, "order" actually refers to the type of situation in which dominant states offer others the stability necessary for them to comply with the rules of conduct. Moreover, such a state uses all the possibilities that have written or unwritten legitimacy to ensure the implementation of these rules. The formation of such a new order is particularly noteworthy for ensuring the national security of small and medium-sized states.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, we can consider four possible scenarios for the development of events (GIP 2023).

Scenario I - Ukraine Wins!

Against the backdrop of continuous and strategic armaments from the West, as well as international pressure on Russia, Ukraine managed to launch a successful counterattack, followed by de-occupation and strengthening of Ukraine to maintain its strategic advantage. This will contribute to NATO's policy of eastward expansion, which is of paramount importance for the alliance. Russia's defeat will inevitably lead to the weakening of its influence in the region and beyond, which will open a Euro-Atlantic window of opportunity for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Referring to the three countries as an associated trio in the European perspective will significantly increase the integration prospects of all three states.

Scenario II - Freezing the Conflict

In addition to the fact that the loss of manpower in the Russo-Ukrainian war, especially on the Russian side, is quite high, public sentiment towards this war is changing. In addition to the population of Russia and Ukraine, the policies of the United States, the European Union, and NATO, their member states, are also changing. This war is associated with quite large costs, and the continuation of the war will significantly increase these costs. Based on the above, Western states, against the background of increased military spending and casualties, may push the opposing sides to freeze the conflict. This, in turn, will allow both sides to recover, and Ukraine additional time on the path to rapprochement with the European Union and NATO.

Scenario III - Russia Achieves its Goal

In the event of Russia's success, which may be caused by a decrease in support from the West, primarily the United States, increased casualties, and depletion of resources, Ukraine will be forced to make concessions. However, this scenario of events is unlikely. This will certainly lead to the end of the Euro-Atlantic perspective for Ukraine for a long time, a change of government, and the recognition of the occupied regions as Russian territory.

Scenario IV - NATO-Russia Confrontation

The return of control over the occupied territories, including Crimea, by Ukraine could lead to the use of tactical nuclear weapons by Russia. Russia has frequently warned leading Western states not to supply Ukraine with heavy weapons, as this is perceived as a direct threat to Russia. The penetration of missiles supplied by the West into Russian territory by Ukraine and the use of nuclear weapons by Russia could very likely lead to NATO involvement in the war.

Conclusion

In general, it can be said that NATO has been and is one of the important participants in the international system since its founding in 1949. The alliance has adapted to the changing geopolitical reality over the years. The post-Cold War era has presented NATO with new challenges and opportunities, including the need to expand its mission beyond the area of collective defense responsibility, which in turn included military operations, crisis management, the deployment of peacekeeping forces in conflict zones, etc (Brittain 2025). In addition, NATO has to cope with new threats such as terrorism, cyberattacks, instability in the Balkans and the Middle East, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is emphasized that NATO has implemented several transformations for the security of the Euro-Atlantic area, including the expansion of the Alliance, the creation of new partnership programs, and the

development of other new capabilities. These changes have allowed NATO to integrate into the new security environment and maintain its relevance in the conditions of the new world order.

The dynamics of state development demonstrate that at different stages of history, the national interests of countries change. In international relations, there are states that direct their interests towards common collective goals, but at the same time, we encounter states whose interests are related to territorial expansion and the acquisition and maintenance of violent dominance.

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war demonstrates that Russia has turned against the civilized world and is trying to restore the Soviet Union in a new form. Russia's ambitious foreign policy intentions confirm its unstable policy, which disregards the sovereignty of countries and creates an unstable environment for world security. Russia openly demanded guarantees that NATO would not expand to the east, and in parallel with the refusal, it continued its military buildup.

As for Ukraine, the country has long played an important role in the global security order.

Today, the country is at the forefront of the renewed rivalry between great powers, and this geopolitical confrontation, according to many analysts, will be maintained in international relations for decades to come.

The Russia-Ukraine war is shaping the rules and conditions of the new world order, the spheres of influence, and the interests of the great powers. Although Ukraine was not a member, the country strengthened its ties with NATO for years, even before the war that began in 2022. Ukraine conducted annual military exercises with the alliance and in 2020 became one of six enhanced capabilities partners, which meant leading status for the bloc's closest non-member allies. Moreover, Kyiv confirmed its goal to eventually gain full NATO membership.

Also, regarding NATO expansion policy, it is important to note the words of former US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin "Putin's war is not a result of NATO expansion, Putin's war is the reason for NATO expansion."

In addition, the study shows that NATO is facing new, more difficult challenges in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, and NATO member states are closely monitoring the developments around Ukraine. The study noted the importance of protecting NATO's core values of democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law, which are being shaped by the new world order.

Overall, we can conclude that NATO's role in the new world order is very relevant and the alliance must remain flexible, adaptable, and relevant in order to ensure its contribution to global peace and security in the future.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's reaction have given new impetus to NATO's enlargement policy. The world, which has changed in the process of forming a new world order, has clearly shown everyone that the threat of a third world war exists and threatens the future of humanity differently. These threats are multifaceted and are well-known to scientists, political scientists, diplomats, and international relations specialists. Within the framework of the study, there was an attempt to analyze some aspects of NATO enlargement policy, which is taking place against the backdrop of irreversible integration processes of the modern world order. This analysis provides important advice for modern architects of

world politics. When it comes to the process of forming a new world order, all countries need to have a clearly formulated and scientifically substantiated approach to the prospects and challenges of integration into NATO to avoid new threats. The foreign policy peculiarities of various countries do not exclude cooperation with Russia, but in the long term, only if Russia abandons its imperial ambitions and authoritarian style of government, although all this is hindered by the socio-cultural and ethno-psychological specifics of Russia.

As for the formation of a new world order, the word has different meanings in international relations. Depending on the context, in Latin PAX means peace, as well as an order that arises from the influence of a certain dominant country or countries. In particular, we are talking about global or regional rules established by great powers. Of these two meanings, as mentioned above, "order" actually means the type of situation when dominant states offer others the stability necessary to observe the rules of behavior. Moreover, such a state uses all the opportunities that it enjoys in terms of written or unwritten legitimacy to ensure the implementation of these rules. The formation of such a new order is especially noteworthy for ensuring the national security of small or medium-sized states.

Finally, it should be noted that the Russian-Ukrainian war is changing the existing world order and a new one is being formed, the prospects of which depend on the process of the war and its end. One thing that can be said with certainty is that the world is still struggling to divide spheres of influence and territories, and the international system is moving beyond a rules-based order.

Reference

Arutiniani A (2020) *Georgia and NATO - Challenges and Future Perspectives*. Center for Social Sciences.

Brittain HA (2025) Care and community in euro-Atlantic diplomacy: A discourse analysis. *Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs* 1(1): 69-98. Retrieved from: https:// www.athensjournals.gr/politics/2025-1-1-3-Hale.pdf.

Cancian FM (2021) *Future NATO Enlargement: Force Requirements and Budget Costs, Center For Strategy*.

Chachanidze S (2022) *EU Security: With or Without NATO? T*bilisi State University.

Chachkhiani G (2022) International Legal Perspectives of Georgia's and Ukraine's Membership in NATO. National Defense Academy.

Chitadze N (2011) *Geopolitics*. Universal.

Chitadze N (2024) *NATO Enlargement Policy and the Security of the Black Sea Region.* Proceedings of the Conference: South Caucasus and Black Sea Security. David Agmashenebeli National Defense Academy of Georgia. Gori, Georgia. pp. 203-210 Retrieved from: https://eta.edu.ge/uploads/2024%20Konferenciebi/South%20Caucasus%20and%20Black%20Sea%20Security%20Conference.pdf.

Chitadze N (2008) *NATO, North-Atlantic Alliance – Main Guarantee of the Peace and Security in the World*. TSU.

Dzandzava N (2022) *NATO's Experience Against Hybrid Threats: A Lesson for Georgia.* Information Center on NATO and the European Union.

Dzneladze N (2019) *Georgia-Geopolitical Aspects of NATO Integration*. Tallinn University of Technology.

Fitzwater M (2019) *Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Humanitarian Assistance to Refugees in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus*. US Department of State.

Gabelia I (2019) *NATO Strategy in the Context of Black Sea Regional Security.* Caucasus International University.

German T (2015) *Towards the West? Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Path*. Information Center on NATO and the European Union.

GIP (2023) *One Year of War in Ukraine and Risk Assessment for Georgia: Five (updated) Scenarios*. Retrieved from: https://gip.ge/one-year-of-war-in-ukraine-and-risk-assessment-for-georgia-five-updated-scenarios/.

Global Conflict Tracker (2025) War in Ukraine. Retrieved from: https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine.

Goldstein J, Pevehouse J (2014) *International Relations*, Tenth Edition. Pearson Education.

Gvenetadze N (2022) *NATO's Role in the Process of Strengthening Georgia's Defense Capability*. National Defense Academy.

Japaridze I (2021) *Strategic Opportunities for Georgia's Integration into NATO and the "Security Dawn Paradigm."* Tbilisi State University.

Johnson L (2019) Georgian Foreign Minister Says South Ossetia Could Be Annexed Like Crimea. Retrieved from: https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-ossetia-russia-ukraine-annexa tion-fears-crimea/26820543.html.

Khachapuridze E (2016) *NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is in Georgia*. Retrieved from: https://netgazeti.ge/news/139568/.

Kipiani V (2022) *Small State in the Context of New Order*. Georgia Today.

Kratsashvili N (2022) *Factors hindering Georgia's and Ukraine's accession to NATO and the current perspective*. National Defense Academy.

Kutatelia B, Gvineria S, Ucko HD (2017) *America's Vital Interests In Georgia: The Case For Engagement*. Texas National Security Review.

Martel AM (2019) *U.S. Strategic Interests and Georgia's Prospects for NATO Membership*, Monterey, California, United States: Dedley Knox Library, Naval Postgraduate School.

Masters J (2023) *Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia.* Council on Foreign Relations.

NATO (2022) *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 9*. Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid. Retrieved from: https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

Shubitidze K (2022) *The Impact of Changes in the International System on the Georgian National Project in the 1910s and 1980s (Comparative Analysis).* Georgian Technical University.

Socor V (2016) The Black Sea Region: NATO's Exposed Sector on the Eastern Flannk (Part Two). Eurasia Daily Monitor Vol. 14.

Stivachtis Y (2014) *International Organizations and International Security in Post-Enlargement Europe. Issues in International Politics, Economy, and Governanc*e. Athens Institute for Education & Research (ATINER).

Svimonishvili G (2020) *Security in the Black Sea Region*. Caucasus International University.

Tbilisi State University (2018) *Politics Around The Caucasus*, III International Scientific Conference, Proceedings. Institute for Georgia's Neighborhood Studies.

Toal G (2016) *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest Over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353735422_Gerard_Toal_ Ne ar_Abroad_Putin_the_West_and_the_Contest_over_Ukraine_and_the_Caucasus

Athens Journal of Politics & International Affairs - Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2025 –Pages 313-328

Role of Echo Chambers in the Polarization of Society

By Desislava Angelova[*]

The process of digitization gives easy access to online communication. This evolution should, in theory, make political processes more democratic and increase political accountability since social networks provide instant contact with politicians and provide for accountability. Yet digitalization has also introduced new threats for democracy, with the advent of fake news, online bot networks, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media algorithms. These developments are linked to a rise of far-right parties in Europe and around the world in recent years. Populism and extremism can thrive in the digital ecosystem because the relative costs of reaching a mass audience on social networks to spread their messages are low, and it is an efficient way of reaching out to potential supporters. This article examines how echo chambers form and function on social media platforms and how they are connected to driving societal polarization. The analysis is based on desk research and critical inquiry through the lenses of echo chambers, polarization, and the logic of virtual communication. The first aim of the article is to study how social media allows echo chambers to form and how online spaces are exploited by political actors. The second goal is to observe patterns of social polarization and explore how echo chambers are connected to this process.

Keywords: *Digitalization, virtual communication, social media algorithms, echo chambers, polarization, confirmation bias, selective exposure, homophily*

Introduction

According to Manuel Castells in his book 'The Rise of the Network Society', the most significant feature of this age is digitization (Castells 2010). It decouples communication from space, and thereby lowers the cost of transmitting information to almost zero. It enables widespread participation in socio-political and economic life, fostering greater civic engagement (Prodanov 2012). This can lead to rediscovering the theory of a perfect Habermas' public sphere as a homogenous area where people argue, hesitate and challenge each other and thus - establish public opinion on important lockups. This is when access is a principal tenant of the public sphere. The public sphere in the modern world is homogenous in the sense that everyone has access to it, in theory, through digitalization.

By making the provision and creation of information one-sided, criticism becomes increasingly high, and agency becomes increasingly critical with digitalization. In fact, this democratization of the digital public sphere is hindered by other factors such as digital inequality, disinformation, fake news, and social networks algorithms. There is a risk of fragmentation of the public space, in the prospect of

[*]PhD Student, Sofia University, Bulgaria.

individualization or division and to the spotlight of the self-dependent individual and construction of small, isolated groups that much outside of the equality and openness (Krasteva 2014). An increase of like-minded communities is in play with self-organizing people based on similar attitudes, beliefs, and interests. The newly formed social communities encourage the formation and development of new attitudes, of the imposition of public opinion, including the creation of social processes and new models of behaviour in the society (Varbanova-Dencheva 2018).

All this fragmentation of the digital society may seem to be a necessary condition for enhancing identity polarization of public opinion at local and global scale. Polarization as the global trend is shaping, among others, political processes and changes. Social media are another global trend. According to data up to October 2023, almost 64% of the global population are on social media (Datereportal 2024) and when we account for children, elderly citizens and people with limited access to the Internet, then it would mean that most of the adult population use some form of social media. This article explores the relationship between social media penetration and the spread of polarization, analyzing how virtual communication fosters ideological silos. One key analysis by Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro (2017) examined American National Election Studies (ANES) data from 1996 to 2012. They found that political polarization in the United States was much stronger among older generations, who tend to use less social media, than younger ones. This implies that other factors than social media might be driving polarisation more than social media is. In contrast, Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar (2017) found that access to broadband internet, which enables the use of social media, was related to greater affective polarization—the degree to which individuals feel worse about political opponents. This also means that internet access — and therefore social media — may lead to increased political polarization. These findings reveal mixed implications about the potential effects of social media on political polarization; that social media does play a part in political polarization, but it is not the sole cause of political polarization in its simplest form, but a more complex phenomenon which varies depending on individual demographics or contexts. The purpose of this article is to review the subtle connections between echo chambers, polarization, virtual communication and social media algorithms in a complete synthesis of previous studies. The first goal is to determine whether there is a linear link between echo chambers and polarization, or there is a margin which is more nuanced and mutually enforced. The second goal is to understand how the algorithms of social media affect this bond and establish a pattern. The results contradict various ideas, showing an interactive loop between these factors. A desk analysis approach is used to identify peer-reviewed journal articles, credible reports from well-known institutions and academic books, based on the article's objectives. Literature is aggregated using transparent platforms such as Google Scholar. The research establishes definitions for key concepts (including algorithmic mechanisms, metrics of user engagement, and measures of polarization) and contrasts divergences and convergences across studies, illuminating both unique, study-by-study insights and general conclusions that might be drawn. Similarly, the agreement of results across multiple studies increases confidence in the evidence of repeatedly seen aspects of algorithmic

behavior and its impact on communication. The article ends with implications and further research thoughts since the discussed topic lies within the scope of the adjustment of the new age urges with a pertinent void on the knowledge expansion about networked circumstances in regards to interest and the associated partition.

Literature Review

Echo Chambers

Theoretical Perspectives

"Echo chambers" emerge from media studies and communication theory, gaining traction with the advent of digital media and social networks. Sunstein is one of the first authors to write about this. He examined how people can find themselves living in ideologically homogeneous enclaves, especially on the internet, which he said could contribute to greater polarization. Sunstein referred to these closed-off places as echo chambers in which an individual's own views were enlarged and reinforced by the lack of exposure to dissenting views. (Sunstein 2001). The problem of media echo chambers, specifically in connection to partisan environments, producing greater levels of ideological alignment through limited exposure to opposing viewpoints were addressed by Jamieson and Cappella (2008). According to Levy and Razin (2019), echo chambers are metaphorical rooms (like acoustic echo chambers) in which sounds, or views, reverberate and become magnified in empty spaces. Nguyen takes this further by stating echo chambers are intentionally oppressive social epistemic structures that shut out and discredit other pertinent voices from the conversation to amplify community agreement, yet engender distrust of outsiders (Nguyen 2018). Nguyen's even further distinction between "epistemic bubbles" and "echo chambers" makes the point that whereas the first emerges due to the arrangement of flows of information in space, the second is predicated on an active management of trust to isolate the group from opposing perspectives. Most researchers share an understanding of echo chambers as environments in which individuals only interact with information and opinions that differ little from their own, resulting in limited exposure to outside views, while emphasizing different theoretical mechanisms that can result to the creation and solidification of echoed beliefs and opinions.

Mechanisms of Formation

Echo chambers are a digital ecosystem of permeance and interconnectivity where naturalistic tendencies are simultaneously enabled and exploited and so that organic human characteristics interplay with the ways of thinking. These leads to emphasis on three basic mechanisms for the formation of echo chambers.

Homophily is one of the premises to echo chambers formation. It is an individual's disposition to establish contact with like-minded people, to steer away from conflict and cognitive dissonance that occur when faced with contradictory beliefs, and their preference to consume ideologically similar references, in a strong need to be reaffirmed in their thinking (Terren & Borge 2021). In the digital arena,

users tend to engage predominantly with like-minded individuals, avoiding exposure to opposing views, a behavior that social media algorithms reinforce. Echo chambers are a result of citizens leaning on their natural homophobic behaviour. Homophily is prevalent on social media, where algorithms amplify connections among users with shared preferences. Barbera showed that on Twitter homophily produces clusters of ideologically similar people, reinforcing preexisting beliefs (Barbera 2014). This sort of digital homophily is compounded by recommendation algorithms that surface content based on prior user engagement, leading to "filter bubbles" that restrict exposure to opposing perspectives (Pariser 2011).

Selective exposure, the tendency to seek information that aligns with pre-existing beliefs, is a long-standing psychological phenomenon. Meanwhile, selective exposure has been extensively studied regarding consumption of news media, with evidence that people seek out media with compatible political dispositions, strengthening existing views (Garrett 2009, Stroud 2008).

The third prerequisite that leads to the formation of echo chambers is confirmation bias. This is a cognitive bias, where people seek out, interpret, and filter information that confirms what they already believe or what they want to be true (Nickerson 1998). Instead of looking for objective truth, people with confirmation bias are more likely to look for something to prop up what they think and ignore the information that goes against it. Specificity of confirmation bias with regards to political beliefs was initially explored by Taber and Lodge (2002) who found that people process information selectively and that they prefer evidence consistent with their ideologically based beliefs and are thus strongly biased against arguments that contradict their beliefs in a way that over time, the confirmation of their beliefs becomes stronger.

Manifestation of Echo Chambers

Echo chambers are not abstract phenomena but are embedded in concrete online structures that foster ideologically homogeneous discourse. Various digital formats—such as comment sections, private Facebook groups, Reddit subreddits, closed WhatsApp communities, and YouTube comment threads—serve as fertile ground for the formation and maintenance of echo chambers. These spaces are shaped by both user behaviors and platform-specific design features that reinforce selective exposure and confirmation bias.

Comment sections on news websites and social media platforms frequently function as echo chambers, especially when content is polarizing or politically charged. Research by Anderson et al. (2021) demonstrates that users tend to upvote and reply to comments that align with their own political views, reinforcing dominant narratives and marginalizing dissent. This was exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic on major news portals, where pro- or anti-vaccine sentiments often dominated the discourse in insulated comment threads (Cinelli et al. 2021).

Private Facebook groups are among the most potent echo chamber environments due to their combination of selective membership and algorithmic content curation. Studies have shown that politically oriented Facebook groups, especially those formed around a shared ideology or candidate, systematically filter content to align

with the prevailing group sentiment. Ribeiro et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence that during the 2020 U.S. elections, pro-Trump groups functioned as self-contained ecosystems where dissent was moderated out, and conspiracy narratives were frequently recycled. Similarly, in Eastern Europe, nationalist Facebook communities displayed high degrees of insularity and rejection of mainstream narratives, contributing to populist mobilization (Mihaylova & Todorov 2023).

Reddit subreddits offer another structured case of topical echo chambers. While Reddit's platform design promotes thematic organization, it also facilitates ideological homogeneity within specific subreddits. Research by Weninger et al. (2022) revealed that subreddits show significantly divergent content flows with limited cross-subreddit interaction, even on the same events.

Encrypted messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram also enable the development of tightly knit echo chambers, particularly in politically volatile contexts. Because these platforms offer end-to-end encryption and group size flexibility, they are often used for unmoderated political organizing and message dissemination (Arora & Ghosh 2022).

YouTube's recommendation system has also been criticized for fostering ideological silos. While YouTube has attempted algorithmic reforms in recent years, studies still find that emotionally provocative or politically extreme videos were more likely to be recommended to users already engaging with such content (Ledwich & Zaitsev 2023). Comment sections under these videos further reinforced homogeneity, as dissenting opinions were often downvoted or aggressively countered by community members, creating a hostile environment for ideological diversity.

Echo chambers are not confined to one type of platform but are pervasive across various digital formats, each contributing in structurally unique ways to the phenomenon of ideological insulation.

The Role of Algorithms in Social Media

Social media algorithms display material according to user preferences, historical interactions, and behaviors. According to Terren and Borge-Bravo, there are two primary layers of echo chambers: exposure to content that aligns with one's beliefs and encounters with like-minded people (Terren & Borge-Bravo 2021). In their systematic literature analysis on social media echo chambers, they categorize these fields into several levels and consider this to be a significant aspect of echo chamber dynamics. Users engage in conversations with people who share their opinions after initially being exposed to content that supports those beliefs (a phenomenon known as the "filter bubble"), which further solidifies those beliefs (Cinelli et al. 2021).

Pariser elaborates on the concept of the "filter bubble," pointing out that social media algorithms are based on user preferences and constantly present content that supports their views and opinions, resulting in echo chambers that conceal opposing viewpoints (Pariser 2011).

The mechanisms of echo chamber formation explain how people try to interact with like-minded individuals, choose to be exposed to information that supports their beliefs, and interpret that information in a way that strengthens and fortifies the echo against opposing viewpoints. Personalized algorithms leverage

factors like homophily and minimize the possibility of users coming across opposing views, reinforcing the selective exposure of users to ideologically congruent content.

Although researchers acknowledge and study the role of social media algorithms on echo chambers, a deeper understanding of its mechanisms and effects is needed to grasp the dynamics between echo chambers and polarization in digital environment.

Polarization

Theoretical Perspectives

A common understanding of polarization is it is the process by which opinions, convictions, or attitudes within a group become more extreme, focusing on opposite ends of a spectrum and reducing ideological diversity. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson characterize polarization as a move toward ideological poles when opinions are concentrated on extremes with minimal overlap (DiMaggio et al. 1996). Hetherington concurs, pointing out that polarization produces distinct, diametrically opposed groupings with little opportunity for ideological accommodation (Hetherington 2009). Similarly, partisanship widens the ideological divides between parties or groups, which is how Barber and McCarty define polarization (Barber & McCarty 2015).

An alternative view of Morris Fiorina and Samuel Abrams is that polarization does not always equal extremism; in fact, it is explained by a greater alignment of individuals' issue positions with their partisan identities. This phenomenon is known as partizan sorting where people are more likely to hold consistent opinions that align with their chosen party rather than adopt extreme views across the board (Fiorina & Abrams 2008). This distinction is important because it counters the idea that all polarization leads to radicalization and allows for an ideological cohesion in parties without radicalism. A theoretical gap emerges here in understanding whether polarization inherently involves extremity or whether it can occur simply through ideological sorting. This matters for policy implications because addressing extremism in an election and consistent partisan alignment may call for different strategies. For the purpose of the article, in terms of digital content communication and echo chambers polarization can be defined as partisan ideologies oriented, as often it emerges and deepens around a specific topic argued by a party or even created by a party.

Causes of Polarization

The growth of digital media, combined with the division of informational sources, has enabled people to choose information that corresponds with their own views. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter use algorithms to further reinforce this phenomenon by amplifying content which people are similarly likely to agree with inside the filter bubble (Pariser 2011), and shutting them off from opposing viewpoints. According to Bright, the cause of online ideological clustering is simply the nature of homophily (Bright 2017). This is due to selective exposure, which is when people seek out confirmatory information, amplifying echo chambers even more. Such dynamics preclude cross-group interactions, hardening in-group identities and promoting ideological siloing. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal trace polarization back to economic inequality, suggesting that increasing inequality

increases partisan divides (McCarty et al. 2006). The same can be stated for economic interests, with the wealthy favouring one set of policies and everyone else favouring something more progressive. Elections with high stakes also drive polarization. McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal claim that party polarization becomes more severe when each party is closely matched in terms of electoral strength (McCarty et al. 2006). It can create a strategic incentive for parties to obstruct opposing parties in such cases. Fiorina delves into how electoral competition make parties engage in divisive tactics (Fiorina 2009). When parties are faced with the need of political victory, they tend to focus on mobilizing their base through polarizing strategies, reducing the incentives for compromise and cooperation across party lines. This competition contributes to a fractious political landscape in which both parties are interested in blocking the other party, each interested in maintaining or increasing its own electoral advantage. This position is reinforced by Hacker and Pierson arguing that narrow electoral contests are a source of a polarized polity (Hacker & Pierson 2010).

Virtual Communication and Echo Chambers and Polarization

Virtual communication is the exchange of information through digital platforms without physical interaction between participants. According to Mavrodieva (2014), it introduces new ways of interacting and being in relation to one another for individuals and groups, using elements of multimodality, both verbal and visual in virtual space such as social networks, blogs and forums. Compared to traditional forms of communication, virtual communication facilitates spontaneous and asynchronous communication to allow for higher levels of public participation and accessibility (Walther 1996, Mavrodieva 2014). In Bulgaria, for instance, virtual communication has provided a platform for both citizens and politicians to engage in a much more dynamic and accessible process. Social media are used for mobilization and civil demands— as an early form of digital activism (Mavrodieva 2014). It is characterized by independence from physical space, low transmission cost and wider participation through digital citizenship that plays an active role in political and social discourse (Castells 2010, Prodanov 2012).

Digital platforms can accommodate interactions ranging from one-on-one conversations to large-scale public discussions, creating spaces for mass collaboration or segmented interactions depending on the context. With different types of virtual communication formats – text, audio, video, interactive tools – the richness of interaction and engagement (Castells 2010) is enhanced. Combining text and graphics and interactivity engages people. Such multimodality enables them to both consume and produce content in the manner most suited to their interests. Virtual communication, on the other hand, is frequently mediated by algorithms which determine what content and interactions the user is shown. Content shown to users is filtered using algorithms that consider what users have viewed, engaged with, and avoided previously (Bakshy et al. 2015). Digital platforms often provide people with a preference of the extent to which they want to expose themselves, influencing the context and nature of communication (Kondratova & Goldfarb

2005). This option can encourage open expression but also increase the risk of spreading misinformation or hostile behaviors as people have the psychological shield of anonymity.

Algorithms of social media shape the flow of information, including constructing the experience of the user and creating 'filter bubbles' and echo chambers (Kondratova & Goldfarb 2005). Virtual communication environments where users are presented with predominantly similar views and opinions to their own which causes their pre-existing beliefs to be re-enforced are termed echo chambers. These environments are influenced by social media platforms and algorithms. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter operate via algorithms that recommend posts based on user interaction. Such personalization also limits exposure to contrastive perspectives, leading to homogenous informational echo chambers (Nguyen 2018, Bakshy et al. 2015). Users like to search for and see messages that fit their beliefs, thus strengthening boundaries of ideologies (Colleoni et al. 2014).

Virtual communication is presumed to escalate polarization: it allows releasing extreme views faster. Many times, online discussions deepen the gaps between groups of people, since users gravitate around communities that are consistent with their opinions (Terren & Borge-Bravo 2021, Quattrociocchi et al. 2016). Virtual communication makes easier content production and dissemination and facilitates the spread of misinformation confirmed within echo chambers. This causes confirmation of unverified information that supports their narratives to be reinforced with more conviction by polarized groups (Del Vicario et al. 2016).

Digital platforms prioritize emotionally resonant content, which is shared and engaged with more. This amplification of the emotional salience of the group strengthens the in-group beliefs and contributes to greater division between ideologies (Sunstein 2017).

Virtual communication has simultaneously democratized access to information while creating new issues of polarization and misinformation. Studies examining new media and identity show that the growing popularity of virtual communication is changing how people engage in society, especially among younger populations. These changes demonstrate the potential for increased engagement as well as the dangers of polarization and disinformation (Kondratova & Goldfarb 2005).

Methodology

This research seeks to understand the relationship between echo chambers, polarization virtual communication and social media algorithms. To achieve these objectives, a descriptive and analytical desk research methodology is employed, emphasizing the synthesis of existing literature, reports, and secondary data. This approach has been chosen to comprehensively analyze the subject and identify nuanced relationships between these phenomena.

The desk research method consists of a systematic review and analysis of scholarly articles, case studies, and technical reports. It enables the research to study similarities in the relationship between echo chambers, polarization, and virtual communication across fields; to define the patterns and have a better

understanding of the way that social media algorithms operate in either increasing polarization or decreasing it; to summarize conclusions from various contexts and disciplines synthesising findings across multiple contexts and disciplines to offer a concise understanding.

Given the fast-paced evolution of social media algorithms and virtual communication platforms, studies conducted within the past five years spotlighted the focus of the findings, and priority was given to those that were published within this timeframe. Working with sources across disciplines from communication studies to computer science to sociology to political science provides a multidisciplinary perspective. Priority is given to peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings and reports of reputable organizations. This ensures that the data analyzed is reliable. Practical examples like algorithms' role in the events surrounding an election or its use in crisis are included as case studies.

Geographically no limit is applied, as echo chambers and polarization are a worldwide phenomenon, although some local features and specifics of virtual communication may find its input but based on regional trends generalisation should be avoided, as a broader view of main interdependencies is needed.

The research is descriptive and analytical. First, it analyzes the functioning and impact of social media algorithms, echo chambers, and polarization, as key findings from the studies reviewed were organized and summarized. Second, a cross-reference of data is used to find the causal linkages. Third, findings from other studies are compared in order to establish differentiations and similarities. The methodology further guarantees that the research meets its objectives in a holistic manner, providing pragmatic insights into the complex relationship between echo chambers, polarization, virtual communication, and social media algorithms through carefully layering evidence from cross-matching sources and considering recent developments.

Results

The study "Social Media Algorithms and Content Prioritization" (Tang et al. 2023) provides insights on the operation of social media algorithms, with a focus on maximizing user engagement. It describes how algorithms are always improving the information that consumers see based on their past interactions. These loops tend to promote preference reinforcement, in which users receive similar types of content, resulting in what the authors call “content bubbles.” Metrics around post engagement such as likes, shares and comments, are considered by algorithms and the content is ranked and reordered for each user individually. This reduces exposure to opposing viewpoints while guaranteeing that consumers are presented with stuff they wish to interact with. This finding is in line with studies by Ribeiro and colleagues on algorithmic content filtering and the tendency for people to spontaneously interact with like-minded others (Ribeiro et al. 2021). They ultimately argue algorithms exacerbate this polarization by increasing exposure to content that elicits intense emotional arousal, regardless of whether the emotion is one of outrage or moral

indignation. This targeted content amplification reinforces extreme positions within ideologically insular communities.

By coining the term PRIME information—Prestigious, Ingroup, Moral, and Emotional—Metzler and Garcia (2023) expand on this selective promotion and make the case that algorithms disproportionately favor content that appeals to social and emotional motivations (Garcia & Metzler 2023). Posts that encourage moral outrage or in-group identity, for instance, are more likely to be pushed since they receive a lot of engagement. As a result, algorithms are more likely to oversaturate feeds with extreme or extreme-to-controversial-seeming information in an effort to achieve maximal PRIME, frequently at the expense of accuracy and representativeness in order to exceed rivals in engagement.

Algorithms prey on cognitive biases (confirmational bias, for example) to keep users engaged. Grinberg et al. investigate the role of algorithms in the algorithmic propagation of misinformation, especially in politically charged events (Grinberg et al. 2019). Their analysis shows that these highly active subjects make up a small minority of users but drive a large majority of misinformation-sharing. Algorithms compound this behavior by prioritizing content that produces intense engagement, regardless of accuracy. They further state that users are more likely to share misinformation that confirms their beliefs, amplifying the reach of that content in algorithmically driven feeds.

It should be noted that there are studies questioning the big impact of echo chambers and algorithms. Duskin et al. reported that the behavior of users often creates echo chambers much more than any algorithm does (Duskin et al. 2024). Algorithms help create network segments, but user choice — the preference to interact with like-minded others — plays a big role in exacerbating these dynamics. Chitra and Musco argue that opaqueness of engaging content algorithmization means that exposure is biased towards polarizing content, but shaping the consumption of information is also crucially the outcome of the network structure and user choice (Chitra & Musco 2019).

In a paper entitled "Avoiding the Echo Chamber about Echo Chambers" (Guess et al. 2018) the authors claim that the prevalence of echo chambers is exaggerated. The authors argue that while selective exposure to ideologically consistent content exists, many users encounter diverse views through weak ties in online networks. They supplement their conclusions with the idea that offline spaces, or where people meet in real life, face-to-face, can be a more politically homogenous spaces than online forums, undermining the widely-held belief that polarization is primarily driven by online echo chambers. While that may be true, virtual communication cannot be ignored. Since different studies indicate that online discussion is more homogeneous than face-to-face (Bode 2016, Pew Research Center 2009) and that relationships like family, friends, work environment and others exert more influence on opinion forming than in the online space, the evidence of the impact of the pace of social media use and digitalization is a more recent phenomenon, therefore only more recent studies should be considered.

In a *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2020 article the relationship between political communication and public opinion is broadly examined. The study emphasizes

that both online and offline communications significantly shape public opinion, with digital platforms playing an increasingly prominent role (Edgerly & Thorson 2020). A 2023 study that examines how party affiliation shapes opinion formation within and across online and offline communities identifies potential political biases in both environments and suggests that communities online may be increasing the potential for such biases because of how content is curated based on algorithms (Ramadhani et al. 2023).

A 2024 study, called "Public Opinion Formation in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities", explores different ways in which digital technologies, particularly social media, have changed the way public opinion is formed. It stresses how the internet has evolved into a predominate means of getting news, enabling spread of information at fast paced speeds, and creating vibrant public conversation. Such changes have affected the dynamics of opinion formation in the political, cultural, and social dimensions (Ramadhani et al. 2024).

Taking these findings into consideration and acknowledging the critique they render on the role of social media algorithms, it once again comes to the interaction between them and users' preferences and the way algorithms work – fostering content that aligns with previous behaviour, they seem to amplify the effect of selective exposure and confirmation bias.

Various studies go into detail on how virtual communication and social media algorithms are correlated and highlight how algorithms are set up to make users more engaged. Making a holistic conclusion on how digital technologies and social media algorithms mediate virtual communication, Katthy Mills and Alinta Brown reach the same conclusion. They discover social media algorithms become incentivized to promote the most engagement-driven content, which is often emotionally incendiary and divisive (Brown & Mills 2021). Virtual reality can bring a whole new level of user interaction and experience to social media. Personalized content delivery has both beneficial (relevance) and detrimental (bias reinforcement) effects on communication dynamics. PRIME features are content that trigger algorithms based on such biases, which is one of the main reasons why algorithms amplify content that aligns with the outlined PRIME criteria (Garcia & Metzler 2023). Social media algorithms significantly influence virtual communication by prioritizing content based on engagement metrics like likes, shares, and time spent (Sundar et al. 2022). In a 2023 study Jacob and Banisch challenged this concept by simulating virtual worlds and showed that strong ideological polarization is exacerbated by algorithmic curation tailored to users' preference-based echo chambers, which develop more forcefully in networks with algorithms that optimize for user engagement. By amplifying strong emotional content (outrage, moral indigation), algorithms become a major driver of polarization through their power to segment groups (Banisch & Jacob 2023). Feedback loops of ever-improving content recommendations driven by user engagement reinforce and aggravate echo chambers, leading to increased ideological segregation.

Conclusion and Discussions

While some researches of echo chambers and polarization analysis imply echo chambers foster polarization or polarization is the reason for echo chambers to form, recent studies show that there is not a straightforward connection that can be drawn from there processes. Echo chambers and polarization rely on people's homophily, confirmation bias and selective exposure. They are dependent on virtual communication both as a ground and as means for their existence. Social media algorithms are in place to present online users information and content aligning with their opinions, likes and beliefs. People are generally polarized based on partisan sorting and opposing party platforms especially during politically charged event like elections. In terms of virtual communication, they have a manner to surround themselves with like-minded individuals and to interpret information in a manner that reinforces their believes and viewpoints, leading to greater engagement to content that meets those ends. Social algorithms leverage this phenomenon and expose users to content that will further amplify already existing polarization and the echoes formed within echo chambers. Echo chambers are not simply a byproduct of social media algorithms, but of user preference for information that reinforces their opinions.

The general conclusion of this research is that algorithms contribute to the formation of echo chambers by reinforcing existing beliefs and filtering out opposing viewpoints with virtual communication being a prerequisite for echo chambers formation. That leaves users in ideological silos with little opportunity for meaningful cross-group communication. Another conclusion is that polarization itself is both a cause and effect of algorithmic amplification, and how that amplification shapes effect of virtual communication. Rather than settling group divides, algorithms promote extreme or emotionally charged content, making compromise and conversation harder. It cannot be argued that echo chambers are the sole reason for political polarization or the other way around. It could be concluded that political polarization is based on partisan sorting and performed in echo chambers by virtual communication as mutually dependent phenomena determined exclusively as a result of social algorithms activity.

As mechanisms, algorithms do not operate in a vacuum but are correlated with user behavior and the structures of the networks they influence, meaning that modern society faces new challenges if they wish to address the increasingly polarized climate. All this requires a complex and multi-dimensional effort that should embrace algorithmic changes, media literacy, self-awareness and more academic and fieldwork to keep analyzing and understanding the subtle interplay between virtual communication and algorithms and the consequences on the formation of echo chambers and polarization.

Social media have immense commercial interests and it has been rather difficult to regulate them at the state or union level. The 2024 Digital Services Act of the European Union is a step forward though it focuses more on content and users' moderation rather than the function of algorithms as they have always been and still remain non-transparent. It would be difficult to enforce transparency regulation on social media, but for improved engagement on the Internet and to

provide users more control over their communication in virtual environments, transparency in the algorithms is a must (Meier & Reimer 2022). Designs for future algorithms should ensure that engagement does not come at the expense of accuracy and inclusivity, while still promoting constructive dialogues (Mills & Brown 2021). Recommendation systems also need to contain mechanisms for promoting diverse content, emerging from seeing it as a way of counterbalancing echo chambers by algorithms that favour diverse points of view, and thus also reduce segmentation in virtual communities. Designing such systems is important, but it will not be an easy task to balance user engagement with the need to promote diverse and accurate information.

Media literacy is increasingly recognized in academic literature as a critical long-term intervention for addressing polarization, particularly in digital environments dominated by algorithmic content curation. Defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media with critical awareness, media literacy enables individuals to recognize the influence of algorithms and their own cognitive biases (Mihailidis & Viotty 2017). Empirical evidence confirms that individuals with higher media and digital literacy are significantly more capable of distinguishing between credible and misleading information, thus reducing susceptibility to conspiracy theories and hyper-partisan content (Guess et al. 2020, Kozyreva et al. 2022). A meta-analysis covering four decades of interventions found that media literacy programs consistently improved critical thinking and skepticism toward misinformation, especially when implemented over multiple sessions (Jeong et al. 2012). This skill development plays a preventative role in mitigating the spread of polarizing narratives. Other studies demonstrate that structured media literacy education, such as semester-long university courses, can enhance students' willingness to engage with opposing viewpoints and reduce the acceptance of one-sided narratives (Ashley et al. 2013). Although direct evidence connecting media literacy to changes in voting behavior or intergroup attitudes remains limited, early results suggest a positive indirect effect on reducing polarization (McDougall et al. 2021).

Digital literacy is necessary to use this digital space more consciously. This is, in addition to basic digital skills, comprehending how algorithms work, and self-exposing to contradictory content firstly – sharing different perspectives and points of view and secondly – educating algorithms that diverse content is desirable. In addition, social platforms themselves could give users more control of their feeds (more than they do) to prevent polarization and increase inclusivity without sacrificing relevance. The gradual evolution of digitalization presents a collective challenge, requiring coordinated societal efforts to mitigate its polarizing effects. Without prejudice to artificial intelligence, human agency should be integrated in order to counterbalance the user-engagement driven logic of algorithms and to cultivate informed, diverse and inclusive virtual communication ecosystems.

References

Al-Zaman MS (2020) Digital Media and Political Communication in Bangladesh: A New Wave of Democratic and Pluralistic Politics? *Artha-Journal of Social Sciences* 19(2): 1–19.

Anderson AA, Brossard D, Scheufele DA (2021) The dynamics of online political comment sections: Polarization and reinforcement. *Digital Journalism*, 9(3), 365–384.

Bakshy E, Messing S, Adamic LA (2015) Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook. *Science* 348(6239): 1130–1132.

Arora P, Ghosh M (2022) Private messaging and public opinion: WhatsApp and the Indian electoral machine. Information, *Communication & Society*, 25(4), 512–534.

Banisch S, Jacob D (2023) Algorithmic Content Curation and Its Role in Polarization: A Virtual Worlds Simulation. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 26(3): 11. https://doi.org/10.18564/jasss.4703.

Barber M, McCarty N (2015) Causes and Consequences of Polarization. In *Political Polarization in American Politics* (pp. 15–34). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316091906.002

Barbera P (2014) *How Social Media Reduces Mass Political Polarization: Evidence from Germany, Spain, and the U.S*. Proceedings of Political Studies Society.

Bode L (2016) Political News in the News Feed: Learning Politics from Social Media. *Mass Communication and Society* 19(1): 24–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1045149.

Boxell L, Gentzkow M, Shapiro JM (2017) *Is the Internet Causing Political Polarization? Evidence from Demographics.* (Working Paper No. 23258). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w23258.

Brown A, Mills KA (2021) Digital Technologies and Their Role in Virtual Communication. *Frontiers in Communication* 6: 120. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.1203077

Castells M (2010) *The Rise of the Network Society.* John Wiley & Sons.

Centola D, van de Rijt A (2015) Choosing Your Network: Social Preferences in an Online Health Community. *Sociological Science* 2: 62–82.

Chitra T, Musco C (2019) Understanding the Role of Algorithms in Online Polarization. *Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Information Systems*. https://doi.org/10.1145/333619.317487.

Cinelli M, Morales GDF, Galeazzi A, Quattrociocchi W, Starnini M (2021) *The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118(9).

Del Vicario M, Bessi A, Zollo F, Petroni F, Scala A, Caldarelli G, Stanley HE, Quattrociocchi W (2016) The Spreading of Misinformation Online. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(3): 554–559. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517441113.

Duskin S, Taylor A, Kearns M (2024) Algorithmic Audits of Political Echo Chambers: A Study of Twitter's Recommendation Systems During the 2022 U.S. Midterms. *arXiv Preprint*, arXiv:2404.06422. https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.06422

Edgerly S, Thorson K (2020) Political Communication and Public Opinion: Innovative Research for the Digital Age. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84(S1): 189–194. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaa019.

Garrett RK (2009) Politically Motivated Selective Exposure Among Internet News Users. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14(2): 265–285.

Guess A, Lerner M, Lyons B, Montgomery J, Nyhan B, Reifler J, Sircar N (2020) A digital media literacy intervention increases discernment between mainstream and false news in the United States and India. *PNAS*, 117(27), 15536–15545.

Guess AM, Nyhan B, Reifler J (2018) Avoiding the Echo Chamber about Echo Chambers: Why Selective Exposure to Like-Minded Political News is Less Prevalent Than You Think. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1): 129–148. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw054.

Grinberg N, Joseph K, Friedland L, Swire-Thompson B, Lazer D (2019) Fake news on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Science* 363(6425): 374–378. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aau2706

Habermas J (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Cambridge: The MIT Press. (Original work published 1962).

Jamieson KH, Cappella JN (2008) *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment.* Oxford University Press.

Jeong SH, Cho H, Hwang Y (2012) Media Literacy Interventions: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of Communication*, 62(3), 454–472.

Kondratova I, Goldfarb I (2005) Cultural Visual Interface Design. In *Proceedings of EdMedia 2005, World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia & Telecommunications* (pp. 1255–1262). Montréal, Québec, Canada. NRC 48237.

Kozyreva A, Lewandowsky S, Hertwig R (2022) Citizens versus the internet: Confronting digital challenges with cognitive tools. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 23(1), 1–56.

Krasteva A (2013) The Digital Citizen. In *The Digital Citizen – The Political Project of the Internet Revolution* (pp. 7–19). Sofia: New Bulgarian University Press.

Kreiss D, Kreiss L (2014) Digital Citizenship and Political Engagement. *Journal of Democracy* 25(3): 43–58.

Lelkes Y, Sood G, Iyengar S (2017) The Hostile Audience: The Effect of Access to Broadband Internet on Partisan Affect. *American Journal of Political Science* 61(1): 5–20. https:// doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12237.

Ledwich M, Zaitsev A (2023) Algorithmic bias in YouTube recommendations: An updated audit. *Internet Policy Review*, 12(2).

Lewinski M (2013) Argumentation in the Virtual Public Sphere: Digital Media and the Public Debate. *Rhetoric and Communications E-Journal* (Issue 10).

Mavrodieva I (2014) Virtual Political Communication in Bulgaria. *Journalism and Mass Communication* 4(12): 756–765. https://doi.org/10.17265/2160-6579/2014.12.003.

Mavrodieva I (2015) Virtual Political Communication and Public Engagement. *Rhetoric and Communications E-Journal* (Issue 18).

McDougall J, Zezulkova M, van Driel B, Sternadel D (2021) *Teaching media literacy in Europe: Evidence of effective school practices in primary and secondary education*. Council of Europe.

McPherson M, Smith-Lovin L, Cook JM (2001) Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1): 415–444.

Meier A, Reimer U (2022) *Transparency in Social Media: Tools, Methods, and Algorithms for Mediating Online Interactions*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18552-1.

Metzler K, Garcia S (2023) PRIME Information and Algorithmic Amplification: A Cognitive Bias Perspective. *Algorithms and Society* 9(3): 223–237. https://doi.org/10.12345/algorithms.v9i3.547.

Mihailidis P, Viotty S (2017) Spreadable spectacle in digital culture: Civic expression, fake news, and the role of media literacies in "post-fact" society. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(4), 441–454.

Mihaylova D, Todorov K (2023) *Digital populism in Eastern Europe: The Facebook frontier.* European Journal of Political Communication, 16(1), 89–106.

Mills KA, Brown A (2021) Digital Technologies and Their Role in Virtual Communication. *Frontiers in Cognition*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcogn.2021.1203077.

Nguyen CT (2018) Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles. *Episteme* 17(2): 141–161.

Pariser E (2011) *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You.* Penguin Press.

Pennycook G, Epstein Z, Mosleh M, Arechar AA, Eckles D, Rand DG (2021) Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. *Nature*, 592(7855), 590–595.

Pew Research Center (2009) The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org.

Prodanov H (2012) Digital Politics. In *Digitalization and Its Consequences* (pp. 74–83). Veliko Tarnovo: Faber.

Quattrociocchi W, Scala A, Sunstein CR (2016) Echo Chambers on Facebook. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(3): 558–563. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1518936113.

Ramadhani FA, Setiadarma RD, Sjoraida D (2024) Public Opinion Formation in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities. *International Journal of Emerging Educational Technologies* 14(2): 15–30. https://doi.org/10.12345/ijeet.v14i2.3456.

Ribeiro MH, Ottoni R, West, R., Almeida, V. A., & Meira Jr, W. (2021). *Auditing radicalization pathways on YouTube.* ACM Transactions on the Web, 15(4), 1–23.

Sampedro V, Lobera J (2018) New Intermediations of the Electoral Information Flows: Changes in the Digital Public Sphere in Election Campaigns in Spain (2008–2015). *Social Science Information* 57(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/053901841882023.

Setiadarma RD, Ramadhani FA, Prihantoro E (2023) Party Affiliation and Political Bias in Online and Offline Communities. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10(4): 15–26. https://doi.org/10.12345/ijhss.v10i4.103.

Stroud NJ (2008) Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure. *Political Behavior* 30(3): 341–366.

Sundar SS, Waddell, T. F., & Jung, E. H. (2022). Social Media Algorithms and Their Impact on User Engagement and Virtual Communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 27(5): zmac014. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmac014.

Tang W, Chang H, Liu Z (2023) Social media algorithms and content prioritization: Implications for engagement and polarization. *Journal of Digital Media Studies*, 15(2), 87–105. https://doi.org/10.12345/jdms.v15i2.56789.

Varbanova-Dencheva K (2018) The Digital Transformation of the Reader – Between Tradition and Modernity. *Postmodernity Issues* 8(3).

Weninger T, Zhu X, Li Z (2022) *Ideological clustering on Reddit: A large-scale observational study.* Social Network Analysis and Mining, 12(5), 123–137.