

Haile Fida Kuma: the Father of Qubee Afan Oromo (OroMedia)

([OroMedia.Net](#)) – Dr. Haile Fida Kuma had made an outstanding contribution to the development of the Oromo national orthography. He was one of the pioneers who attempted to shed light on the history of the Oromo; and the right of the Oromo people to speak, read and write in Afan Oromo. He initiated Oromo studies in Europe and had made a major contribution both to our knowledge of Afan Oromo grammar and to the discussion on how the language should be written (from 1968 to 1974). His first research paper, entitled ‘Languages in Ethiopia: Latin or Geez for Writing Afan Oromo,’ was published in 1972 on *Tatek*, a theoretical Journal of Ethiopian Studies in Europe. He further published in 1973 an Oromo Grammar book entitled ‘*Hirmaata Dubbi Afaan Oromoo*’ (Paris, Haile Fida, et al., 1973). *Hirmaata Dubbi Afaan Oromoo* and a literature book: ‘*Barra Birraan Barihe*’ (Paris), using his adopted 35-letter Latin *Qubee* alphabet. The books were results of his long-time study of the Oromo language and problems of Oromo orthography.

In this groundbreaking Afan Oromo grammar book, he adopted the Latin alphabet to the phonology of the Oromo language by modifying some of the shapes of the letters and adding subscript diacritics. He made distinctions between short and long vowels letters by using single vowels letters (i, e, a, o and u) for the former, and double (ii, aa, oo, uu) ones for the latter. He presented the finding of his research to the conference of the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe in 1972 and this brought a debate on language issues within the Ethiopian and Oromo students movement abroad (see, Dr. Fayisa Demie, “Historical Challenges in the Development of the Oromo Language and Some Agenda for Future Research,” *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 & 2, pp. 18-27, 1996; and Dr. Fayisa Demie, “The Father of *Qubee* Afan Oromo: A Tribute in Honour of Haile Fida’s Contributions to the Development of Oromo Orthography,” *Oromia Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 3. pp. 1-5, 1999.)

His knowledge on Oromo language was so encyclopedic, and his contribution to the Oromo studies in Europe was so well known at the time, and his contribution was greatly acknowledged by the Oromians who knew him very closely. Oromo national organisations have used *Qubee* Afan Oromo since the 1970’s. The Oromo National Convention in 1991 also endorsed the use of *Qubee* all over Oromia.

Dr. Haile was assassinated by the *Dergue* Ethiopian regime before seeing this remarkable achievement in the use of *Qubee* in Oromia – which has been the greatest milestone in the history of the Oromo people. Dr. Haile Fida completed his initial primary education at Arjo Primary School, and his Junior (Grades 7-8) at the then Haile Selassie I Secondary school in Naqamtee followed with secondary education at the General Wingate School in Finfinne, and undergraduate at Finfinne University (Science Faculty, Geology Department). Haile was an outstanding student while he was at the General Wingate Secondary School and the university. He completed his secondary education with 10A’s and 2B’s, and his undergraduate university

studies with great distinction with a GPA of 4.0. After graduating from the Department of Geology, he was employed as a Graduate Assistant and became a Lecturer in the same department. He then left to France to pursue postgraduate studies.

Haile studied M.A. in Sociology and Social Anthropology, and PhD in Philosophy at the Le Palais De L'Académie Paris. While he was in Europe, he was an active member of the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe and an Honorary Secretary of the French Socialist Party. Dr. Haile was married to Mme. Marie and survived with two children. Haile belonged to a group of generation of Oromo nationalists who embarked on an arduous struggle to liberate the Oromo nation from the Ethiopian oppression using two different strategies.

The first Oromo group is convinced that the Oromo question is a *colonial question*, and argued the solution to the Oromo question is the liberation of Oromia from the Ethiopian colonialism. Indeed, to show the Oromo identity as a colonial people deprived of their right to govern themselves democratically and oppressed by Amhara/Tigrari colonial settlers, they have put forward historical evidences which support the Oromo case.

The second group, in which Haile belonged, argues the Oromo question is *national oppression*, and this group is convinced that it is possible to solve the problem through the democratization of the Ethiopian state. As part of their struggle against the national oppression, this group of Oromos have attempted to take forward the national question high on the agenda of the Ethiopian Students Movement and other Ethiopian organisations that have mushroomed since the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974. The first members of this generation were born in the early 1940's, and the youngest in the early and mid 1950's. It is a generation of Oromo activists who have come together to struggle against the national oppression.

Most of them had been killed while struggling for the Oromo cause or while attempting to change Ethiopia. Indeed, Haile was one of the victims who died while attempting to change the environment of the national oppression in Ethiopia. He was killed by Ethiopians while struggling against the national oppression, and for the right of the Oromo people to speak and write in their language. His death at a younger age robs Oromia of an enthusiastic, hardworking and committed Oromo professional. The inspiration he provided throughout his life continues to influence Oromo scholars and new generations in the field of Oromo studies.

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