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IMAGINING OROMO SELF-KNOWLEDGE FOR NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

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This paper imagines and explains the essence of Oromo self-knowledge in relation to *Oromummaa*—Oromo culture, identity, and human agency at the personal, interpersonal[1] and collective (national)[2] levels. It specifically explains the relationship between Oromo national and sub-identities before and after colonialism, the uneven development of *Oromummaa,* and Oromo organizational problems. This paper also suggests some steps that should be taken by Oromo leaders, nationalists, and activists in order to overcome the problem of uneven development of Oromo nationalism and to build an effective national political leadership, increasing the organizational capacity of Oromo society so it will be able to achieve self-determination and human liberation. Let me start my discussion with the concept of *Oromummaa*—a manifestation of Oromo national culture, identity, and nationalism.

Oromummaa as National Culture, identity, and nationalism

Most Oromos think that they have *Oromummaa* since they were born from Oromo families and speak *Afaan Oromoo*. If this assumption is true, today, since the majority members of the Ethiopian parliament were born to Oromo families and speak *Afaan Oromoo*, the Ethiopian government is under the control of the Oromos. The reality is that the majority of them are agents of Meles Zenawi who are there to satisfy their personal interests at the cost of the Oromo nation by serving as members of a rubber stamp parliament. So the sources of *Oromummaa* are not only having Oromo family trees and speaking the Oromo language. *Oromummaa* is about having pride in and developing Oromo national culture, identity, nationalism, and defending the Oromo national interest by any means necessary.

Oromummaa is a complex and dynamic national and global project. That was why the founding fathers of Oromo nationalism such as Haile Mariam Gamada of the Maaca-Tuulamaa Self-help Association, and Elemo Qilxu and Baaro Tumsa of the Oromo Liberation Front developed sophisticated cultural, political, military, and economic programs for Oromo society. As a national project and the central ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables Oromos to retrieve their cultural memories, assess the consequences of Ethiopian colonialism, give voice to their collective grievances, mobilize diverse cultural resources, interlink Oromo personal, interpersonal and collective (national) relationships, and assists in the development of Oromo-centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action empowering the people for liberation.

As a global project, *Oromummaa* requires that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons operating in a democratic fashion. This global *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social

movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in promotion of a global humanity that is free of all forms oppression and exploitation. In other words, global *Oromummaa* is based on the principles of mutual solidarity, social justice, and popular democracy.

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. To date, the paltry, uneven development of *Oromummaa* is a reflection of the low level of political consciousness and the lack of political cohesiveness in contemporary Oromo society. Against this background, the basis of *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. *Oromummaa* as an egalitarian, democratic vision must create mutual solidarity and cooperation among all people who accept the principles of self-determination and multinational democracy in order to remain congruent with its underlying values.

The main foundations of *Oromummaa* are individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation. These foundations are built on the concept of *saffu* (moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa* principles. Although in recent years many Oromos have become adherents of Christianity and Islam, the concept of *Waqaa* (God) still lies at the heart of Oromo tradition and culture, which shapes the basis of *Oromummaa*. In Oromo tradition, *Waqaa* is the creator of the universe and the source of all life. The universe created by *Waqaa* contains within itself a sense of order and balance that is manifested in human society.

Although *Oromummaa* emerges from Oromo cultural and historical foundations, it goes beyond culture and history in providing a liberative narrative for the future of the Oromo nation as well as the future of other oppressed peoples, particularly those who suffer under the Ethiopian Empire. *Oromummaa* as the national project cannot be built on fragmented identities that were introduced to Oromos by others in order to dominate, control, and exploit them.

Oromo National and Sub-identities before and after Colonialism

Under the *gadaa* republic of historic Oromia, between the sixteenth and the mid-seventieth century, all Oromos lived under one *gadaa* administration. In the *gadaa* republic, the Oromo people were organized around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions on regional and national levels.[3] Between 1522-1618, with their increased population and extended territories, different Oromo groups started to form autonomous *gadaa* governments. While establishing autonomous local governments, the Oromo formed alliances, federations, and confederations to maintain their political and cultural solidarity and to defend their security and interest from their common enemies.[4] What we learn from these historical facts are that our pre-colonial ancestors knew about the importance of democracy in creating unity, national and regional political structures, and military organization and capability in defending the Oromo national interest than most contemporary Oromos.

The *gadaa* system (Oromo democracy) has the principles of checks and balances (such as periodic transfer of power every eight years and division of power among executive, legislative, and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five *gadaa*

grades[5]), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Other principles of the system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies; accountability of leaders; the settlement of disputes through reconciliation; and the respect for basic rights and liberties.

There are five *gadaa* grades, which have different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of the expansion of Oromos and their establishment of different autonomous administrative systems. The rule of law is the key element of the *gadaa* system; those leaders who have violated the law of the land or whose families could not maintain the required standard of the system were recalled before the end of their tenure in the office. *Gadaa* leaders implemented the laws that were made by the representatives of the people. Oromo democracy allowed the Oromo people to make, change or amend laws and rules every eight years. The *gadaa* system accepted Oromo people as the ultimate source of authority and nobody was above the law.

Gadaa officials were elected by established criteria from the *qondala* grade and received rigorous training in *gadaa* philosophy and governance for eight years before they enter into the *luba* grade (administrative grade); the main criteria for election or selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability to govern, etc. *Gadaa* as an integrative social system combined political and civil culture in Oromo society. As a political system, it organized male Oromos according to *hirya* (age-sets) and *luba* (generation-sets) for social, political, and economic purposes. Therefore, it was difficult to draw a clear boundary between civil and political culture during the *gadaa* era.

During this period, Oromo women had the *siqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that "functioned hand in hand with *gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances."[6] If the balance between men and women was broken, a *siqqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society. The *gadaa* and *siqqee*[7] institutions greatly influenced the Oromo value system in pre-colonial (pre 1880s) Oromo society. These two institutions helped maintain *saffu* (Oromo moral codes) in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, and sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.

The development of class within Oromo society in some areas and external factors—such as Turko-Egyptian colonialism in eastern Oromia between 1875 and 1885, European and Ethiopian colonialism, the emergence of an Oromo collaborative class, and the spread of Islam and Christianity—undermined the political, military, and ritual/spiritual roles of the *gadaa*[8] system in some parts of Oromia. Though the institutions were weakened, some elements of Oromo democratic values still exist in areas where the *gadaa* system was suppressed. In its modified form, the system is still practiced among the Boorana, Guji, and Tuulama, helping in maintaining peace, exchanging knowledge of society, and practicing rituals among some moieties and groups.

After Oromos were colonized and until *Oromummaa* developed, the self-identity of individuals as being Oromo primarily remained on the personal and group levels since they were denied opportunities to form national institutions. Oromo identity was targeted

for destruction and the colonial administrative regions that were established to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources were glorified and institutionalized. Consequently, there are Oromos who brag about their colonial identities such as Wallaganess, Haragheneess, Shawaness, Arssi or Baleness, and others. There are Oromos also who consider their clan or religious identities more than their Oromo national identity. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized and not strongly connected to the collective identity of *Oromummaa*. Until those Oromos who see their colonial regional, clan or religious are liberated from such chains by embracing *Oromummaa*, they cannot play their effective roles in the Oromo national struggle. Even if such individuals join the struggle, they easily frustrate and quit the struggle or they can be easily manipulated by the internal and external enemies of the Oromo national struggle and turned against the struggle.

For more than a century, Oromos have been separated from one another and prevented from exchanging goods and information. They have been exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and adopted some of their elements. Consequently, today there are Oromo elites who have internalized these externally imposed regional or religious identities because of their low level of political consciousness or political opportunism or lack of clear understanding of *Oromummaa*. Oromo relational identities include extended families and clan families. Historically and culturally speaking, Oromo clans and clan families never had clear geopolitical boundaries among themselves. Consequently, there are clans in Oromo society that have the same name in southern, central, northern, western and eastern Oromia. For example, there are Jarso, Gida, Karayu, Galan, Nole and Jiru clans all over Oromia. Clan and extended families have been important in Oromo society during the time of hardship for promoting social welfare and psychological comfort.

Oromos should see beyond such fragmented identities and build their national identity as their ancestors to liberate their country that they inherited and defend their national interest to survive as individuals, groups, and a people in the world of cutthroat competition. Our survival as a group and a nation depends on our actions and struggle, and it is not automatically given. We can learn from the history of the world that people who did not develop their cultures and nationalisms could not survive in the racialized the capitalist world system because they did not have their own states that could have provided them security and protected their national interests. The policy of targeting and exterminating indigenous peoples has occurred in different parts of the world, and it has been an integral practice of the racialized capitalist world system since the 16th century. The European colonialists exterminated indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, Asia, and Africa over a period of several centuries in order to transfer their resources to the European colonial settlers and their descendants while claiming to promote Christian civilization, modernity, and commerce. Specifically, the Meles government has a grand plan for the Oromo similar to what King Leopold of Belgium had for the Congo or Andrew Jackson of the United States had for the Cherokees or colonial Germany had for the Herero and Nama peoples in South West Africa (Nambia).[9]

The Ethiopian colonial system and borrowed cultural and religious identities were imposed on Oromos creating regional and religious boundaries. Consequently, there were times when Christian Oromos identified themselves more with Habashas and Muslim Oromos more with Arabs, Adares, and Somalis than they were with other Oromos. Under

these conditions, Oromo personal identities, such as religion replaced Oromoness, central Oromo values, and core Oromo self-schemas. Colonial rulers saw Oromoness as a source of raw material that was ready to be transformed into other identities. In the colonial process, millions of Oromos lost their identities and became attached to other peoples. Consequently, the number of Amharas, Tigres, Adares, Gurages, and Somalis in Oromia has increased at the cost of the Oromo population. The Oromo self was attacked and distorted by Ethiopian colonial institutions.

In pre-colonial Oromo society, clans and clan families were organized under the *gadaa* system to protect the regional and national interests of the Oromo people without betraying any aspect of the Oromo interest. After Oromia was colonized, the national political institution and Oromo peoplehood/nationhood were systematically dismantled, and Oromo sub-identities in clan, regional, religious forms started to have prominence to promote the interest of the Ethiopian colonial state and society at the cost of the Oromo nation. For two important reasons some local and regional Oromo elites started to embrace these Oromo sub-identities by ignoring or by giving lip service to the Oromo national identity. One of the reasons is political and cultural ignorance. The other reason is political opportunism.

Most Oromo elites are ignorant about their national history; they even do not know about the history of their own clans, regions, and culture. Despite the fact that today there are many Oromos who have received formal education, they are lazy to ready and study about their nation. In reality, such individuals cannot be serious nationalists who are ready to do something for their nation. Today some of these individuals both in Oromia and the diaspora are engaged in attacking the Oromo national struggle by clandestinely or openly joining the enemy camp; or they have become a propaganda machine of our enemy knowingly or unknowingly; or they have simply ignored the Oromo national struggle by engaging in their private lives or by engaging in religious radicalism.

When such individuals engage in politics, they focus on clan, regional, and religious politics and relentlessly attack those Oromo nationalists who are sacrificing their lives, energies, knowledge and money for the liberation of their people. All these politically unconscious people or opportunists knowing or unknowing contribute to the destruction of the Oromo nation. Using clan, regional, religious or friendship networks, the sophisticated enemies collect information from such individuals on the Oromo people and their struggle and disseminate their poisonous lies and misinformation among our society to break its spirit so that it accepts defeat and abandon its national struggle. Developing *Oromummaa* and overcoming these obstacles require recognizing Oromo unity and diversity and building Oromo nationalism.

Unity, Diversity, and Nationalism

While recognizing the unity of Oromo peoplehood, one must also realize the existence of diversity in Oromo society. The lack of open dialogue among Oromo nationalists, political leaders, activists, and ordinary citizens on the issue of religious differences and/or problems of colonial regional identities has provided opportunities for profiteers of the continued subjugation of the Oromo people. These profiteers have employed a divide and conquer strategy by exploiting religious and regional differences among the Oromo people. Since Turks, Arabs, Habashas and the Europeans imposed both Islam and

Christianity on Oromos while at the same time suppressing indigenous Oromo religion in order to psychologically control and dominate them, Oromo nationalists must encourage an open dialogue among adherents of indigenous Oromo religion, Islam and Christianity. Through this approach, a common understanding of what it means to be an Oromo and the positive role religion and ethics can play in Oromo society could be reached. *Oromummaa* celebrates the positive elements of all religious beliefs among the Oromo.

Since Oromos are a diverse and heterogeneous people, the exploration of the concept of diversity is an essential element of *Oromummaa*. The concept of diversity applies to Oromo cultural, religious, political, professional, class, and gender divisions. As S.M. Buechler notes, "one critical intervening process which must occur to get from oppression to resistance is the social construction of a collective identity which unites a significant segment of the movement's potential constituency."[10] Collective identities are not automatically given, but they are "essential outcomes of the mobilization process and crucial prerequisite to movement success."[11] Oromo nationalists can only reach a common understanding of Oromoness through open, critical, honest dialogue and debate. Fears, suspicions, misunderstandings and hopes or aspirations of Oromo individuals and groups should be discussed by invoking Oromo cultural memory and democratic principles.

Through such discussions, a single standard that respects the dignity and inalienable human rights of all persons with respect to political, social, and economic interaction should be established for all Oromos. Oromo personal and social identities can be fully released and mobilized for collective actions if Oromos recognize that they can freely start to shape their future aspirations or possibilities without discrimination. This is only possible through developing an Oromo identity on personal and collective levels that is broader and more inclusive than gender, class, clan, family, region, and religion. Basing this understanding on *Oromummaa* eliminates differences that may emerge because of religious plurality. Similarly, because colonial administrative regions were invented by the Ethiopian colonial structure, they do not correspond to Oromo group or regional identities. As a result the political diversity of Oromo society can and should transcend regional identities based on the boundaries of colonial regions.

Political diversity exists in Oromo society to the extent that individuals and national political organizations have serious ideological, political, and strategic differences. And, it is the acceptance of this diversity that provides the basis for the establishment of a truly democratic, egalitarian Oromo society. At present, the various Oromo liberation organizations are not separated by clear ideological, political and strategic differences. The (1) lack of political experience; (2) borrowed cultures, religions, and political practices; (3) the abandonment of the Oromo democratic heritage of consensus building; (4) the low level of *Oromummaa*; (5) the existence of political opportunism; and (6) a lack of open dialogue and conversation have all contributed to political fragmentation in a context that does not value ideological, political and strategic differences, viewing alternative ideas as a threat to unity rather than a resource that reflects strength.

Oromo political problems have emerged primarily from attitudes, behavior and perceptions that have been shaped by a culture that valued domination and exploitation and have seen diversity and equality as threats to the colonial institutions most Oromos passed through. These problems still play a significant role in undermining *Oromummaa*

and the organizational capacity of the Oromo national movement. The behavior and political practices of Oromo elites and leaders of Oromo institutions in the Diaspora, such as churches and mosques, associations, and political and community organizations, demonstrate that the impact of the ideology of domination and control that was imparted by Ethiopian colonial and neo-colonial institutions and organizations is far-reaching. Despite the fact that Oromos are proud of their democratic tradition, their behavior and practices in politics, religion, and community affairs indicate that they have learned more from Habashas and Oromo chiefs than from the *gada* system of democracy.

While the social and cultural construction of the Oromo collective identity is an ongoing process, this process cannot be completed without the recognition that Oromo society is composed of a set of diverse and heterogeneous individuals and groups with a wide variety of cultural and economic experiences. Hence, Oromo nationalists need to recognize and value the diversity and unity of the Oromo people because "people who participate in collective action do so only when such action resonates with both an individual and a collective identity that makes such action meaningful."[12]

In every society, personal and social identities are flexible. Similarly, Oromo self-identity exists at the personal, interpersonal, and collective levels with this confederation of identity being continuously shaped by Oromo historical and cultural memory, current conditions and hopes and aspirations for the future. According to Robert G. Lord and Douglas J. Brown, the self "is believed to be a system or a confederation of self-schemas that are derived from past experience.... In essence, the self is a collection of small, relatively independent processing units that are elicited in different contexts and each of which has specific cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral consequences."[13]

Every Oromo has an internally focused self and an externally focused social self. Lord and Brown define the self as "an overarching knowledge structure that organizes memory and behavior. This structure includes many trait-like schemas that organize social and self-perceptions in specific relations. It also includes script-like structures that help translate contextual cues into self-consistent goals and behaviors."[14] The Oromo social self emerges from the interplay between intimate personal relations and less personal relations. The former comprise the interpersonal or relational identity and the latter are a collective identity. The relational-level identity is based on perceptions or views of others about an individual. Thus, individual Oromos have knowledge of themselves from their personal viewpoints as well as knowledge from the perspective of significant others and larger social groups. The concept of individual self emerges from complex conditions that reflect past and present experiences and future possibilities.

Some Oromos are more familiar with their personal and relational selves than they are with their Oromo collective self, because their level of *Oromummaa* is rudimentary. These Oromo individuals have intimate relations with their family members, friends, and local communities. These interpersonal and close relations foster helping, nurturing, and caring relationships. Without developing these micro-relationships into the macro-relationship of *Oromummaa*, the building of Oromo national organizational capacity is illusive. Organizing Oromos requires learning about the multiplicity and flexibility of Oromo identities and fashioning from them a collective identity that encompasses the vast majority of the Oromo populace. An Oromo political leadership that is willing to develop an understanding of the breadth of the diversity of Oromo society by looking for those personal and relational identities that can be used to

construct an Oromo collective identity and expanding Oromummaa can facilitate this process.

The Oromo National Movement and its Organizational Capacity

Collective grievances, the Oromo language and history, the historical memory of the *gadaa* system and other forms of Oromo culture, and the hope for liberation have helped in maintaining fragmented connections among various Oromo groups. The emergence of Oromo nationalism from underground to the public sphere in the 1990s allowed some Oromos to openly declare their *Oromummaa* without clearly realizing the connection among the personal and interpersonal selves and the Oromo collectivity. This articulation occurred without strong national institutions and organizational capacity that can cultivate and develop *Oromummaa* through transcending the political and religious barriers that undermine the collective identity of the Oromo people.

Oromo nationalists cannot build effective national institutions and organizations without taking Oromo personal, interpersonal and collective-level Oromo selves to a new level. The Oromo collective self develops through relations with one another. Good interpersonal relations and good treatment of one another create a sense of security, confidence, openness, belonging, strong and effective bonds, willingness to admit and deal with mistakes and increase commitment to political objectives and organizations. The individuality of an Oromo can be observed and examined in relation to the concept of self which is linked to psychological processes and outcomes, such as motivation, affection, self-management, information processing, interpersonal relations, commitment, dignity and self-respect, self-preservation and so forth.

The Oromo self-concept as an extensive knowledge structure contains all pieces of information on self that an individual Oromo internalizes in his or her value systems. Every Oromo has a self-schema or a cognitive schema that organizes both perceptional and behavioral information. An individual's self-schema can be easily captured by accessible knowledge that comes to mind quickly to evaluate information on any issue. The Oromo self is the central point at which personality, cognitive schema and social psychology meet. The Oromo self consists both personal or individual and social identities. The former is based on an individual's comparison of oneself to other individuals and reveals one's own uniqueness and the latter are based on self-definition in relation to others or through group membership.

Without recognizing and confronting these issues and problems at all levels, the Oromo movement cannot build its organizational capacity. The social experiment of exploring and understanding the internal selves at individual, relational and collective selves must start with Oromo elites who aspire to organize and lead the Oromo people. Since the ideological and organizational tools that Oromo elites have borrowed from other cultures have reached their maximum limit of capacities and cannot move the Oromo movement forward in the quest for achieving self-determination and human liberation, Oromo nationalists must develop their approaches based on *Oromummaa* and *gada* democratic heritage. Oromo elites have passed through schools that were designed to domesticate or "civilize" them and to mold them into intermediaries between the Oromo people and those who dominated and exploited them. They have been disconnected from their history, culture, language, and worldviews, and have been trained by foreign educational and religious institutions that glorified the culture, history,

language and religion of others. Consequently, most Oromo elites do not adequately understand Oromo history, culture and worldview.

When Oromo nationalists first emerged they rejected the worldviews and institutions of the colonizers turning instead to Marxism-Leninism in their fight against the Ethiopian colonial system. In conjunction with other liberation forces they participated in the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime only to be excluded from participation in the government by the military regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. Under the military strongman Mengistu Hailemariam, the domination and suppression of the Oromos continued. In the end, Marxism-Leninism did not provide a liberative base for the Oromo people.

Although the Oromo movement achieved many important things in the past, the organizational and ideological tools that it has used did not provide an effective basis for organizing the Oromo people and enabling them to defend themselves from their enemies. At present, Oromo human and material resources remain scattered, and are used by their enemies who are committing hidden genocide on them. It is in this context that Oromo leaders turned to Oromo traditions and culture to seek the basis of a discourse that could bring full liberation to the Oromo people.

The main goal of Oromo nationalism is to facilitate the creation of state that will defend the interests of Oromos on individual, group and national levels. Oromos can achieve sovereignty by themselves or with other peoples. Without establishing the Oromo political unity from within, Oromos cannot reestablish their sovereignty from without. When most Oromos internalize *Oromummaa,* they will be able to unite and speak with one voice and take collective action both in Oromia and worldwide. As a result, the global community will be forced to pay attention to their demands for self-determination and democracy. While establishing internal political unity among the Oromo people, it is also necessary to critically address the question of *Oromummaa* in relation to the global context. Global *Oromummaa* is not an exclusivist concept for Oromos only, but is based on the principles of fairness, justice, mutual benefit, and multinational democracy for all people everywhere. According to Edward Said "to testify to a history of oppression is necessary, but it is not sufficient unless history is redirected into an intellectual process and universalized to include all sufferers."[15]

The failure of Oromo nationalists and political leaders to frame issues and formulate policies that promote actions based on *Oromummaa* has given ample opportunity for free-riders, political opportunists, enemy agents, and confused individuals and groups to claim that they are nationalists and leaders who represent their localities, religious groups, or nominal organizations. While using Oromo slogans, such individuals or groups attack and attempt to discredit those individuals and organizations that have accomplished many things for the Oromo cause. Oromo national institutions and organizational capacity will develop when true nationalists, intellectuals and political leaders start to fully embrace *Oromummaa* and work openly and courageously through formulating practical domestic and foreign policies that can be implemented by a broad-based Oromo movement.

Although Oromos can learn a lot from other forms of leadership, without developing the style of leadership that is Oromo-centric, Oromo nationalists will be unable to build enduring national institutions and organizations. The building of the Oromo national organizational capacity is only possible when *Oromummaa* is fully

developed and can be packaged into a generally accepted vision that energizes the entire Oromo nation into well-organized and coordinated collective action at the personal, interpersonal and national levels. The full development of *Oromummaa* facilitates the mobilization of Oromo individuals and diverse groups enabling them to overcome political confusion and take the necessary concrete cultural and political actions essential for liberation from psychological dehumanization and colonial oppression.

Discussion and Conclusion

While Oromo nationalists are fighting against colonial institutions, the restoration and development of the Oromo self through cognitive liberation and Oromo-centric values must be the order of the day. The attack on Oromo selves at personal, interpersonal and collective-levels has undermined the self-confidence of some Oromo individuals by creating an inferiority complex within them. Without the emancipation of Oromo individuals from this inferiority complex and without overcoming the ignorance and the worldviews that their enemies imposed on them, Oromos cannot have the self-confidence necessary to facilitate individual liberation and Oromo emancipation.

The development of the Oromo self and relational self are critical to developing a collective-level Oromo identity. The collective-level Oromo identity involves complex social dynamics that are based on the organizational culture or on collective norms. Because of internal cultural crises and external oppressive institutions, Oromo collective norms or organizational culture is at rudimentary level at this historical moment. Consequently, some comrades in an Oromo organization do not see themselves as members of a team, and they engage in undermining members within their team through gossiping, spreading rumors, or promoting themselves while denigrating their comrades in his or her absence. Such individuals do not have a strong organizational culture or norm. Such individual Oromo activists or leaders could not develop a core of Oromo leadership that is required in building a strong liberation organization.

Without critically and deeply understanding *Oromummaa*, Oromos cannot build strong Oromo social and political institutions and organizations that are needed to take the Oromo nation to a "promised land." It is only if the Oromo people and leaders adequately understand the concept of *Oromummaa* and engage in fully deploying Oromo cultural and political institutions both in the diaspora and at home through a centralized and organized channel, that the Oromo people will be able to challenge Ethiopian colonial institutions in Oromia and gain international recognition and support for the Oromo cause.

The major problem facing Oromo society at this historical juncture is the lack of organizational capacity that has the ability to mobilize all Oromo human and material resources under one national leadership to confront both the internal and external enemies of the Oromo nation. The first step in dealing with this major challenge is to develop and unleash the power of Oromo individuals on both the personal and collective levels by clearly understanding the concepts of *Oromummaa* and diversity. By openly and honestly addressing in the political arena the issues that Oromos discuss in informal settings like the issues of religious plurality and/or regional difference, and nature of Oromia once it achieves national self-determination, Oromos will transform *Oromummaa* from an intellectual concept to a uniting force for liberation and justice. This discussion should be

based on a single standard for all Oromos and all people, and should include the principles of *saffu* (ethical and moral order), human decency, and the rule of law.

If Oromos honestly and courageously recognize their strengths and weaknesses as individuals, groups, organizations, and society and build upon their strengths while reducing or eliminating their weaknesses, they can emerge victorious from the destructive alien cultural, ideological, and political nightmares they have faced in the past. The Oromo leadership needs to recognize the inadequacies of existing organizations, visions, and strategies and need to plan and develop new strategies and approaches that will unleash the potential of an Oromo society based on *Oromummaa*. Oromos cannot liberate themselves without overcoming the organizational deficiencies and leadership problems that emerged prior to and after the colonization of their people. While recognizing the negative legacy of portions of historical Oromo political systems, the Oromo political leadership should practically incorporate the positive aspects of *gada* into their organizational norms and culture.

Oromo organizational culture and norms cannot be changed without transforming Oromo self-concepts at the individual, interpersonal and collective levels. The Oromo political leadership as well as the population as a whole must adopt these changes. Members of the Oromo political leadership need to be effective political leaders who can engage in the processes of cognitive liberation and self-emancipation; they must struggle to develop in themselves and their followers' personal leadership skills, such as self-control, discipline, ability to communicate, and a deep sense of social obligation or commitment. Effective leaders have the capacity to understand that the oppressed are capable of self-change through educational and popular participation in struggle. They believe in a democratic conversation and they recognize that both leaders and followers possess both "leading" and "led" selves.

The combination of the processes of cognitive liberation and self-emancipation along with liberation knowledge or expertise, technological capability or skills, modern organizational rules and codes, and courage and determination are needed to build an effective and strong political leadership. The Oromo leadership cannot find all these qualities from a few individuals. Therefore, the leadership needs to blend the experiences of political leadership and public intellectuals with the knowledge and commitment of the general populace to develop a liberative society based on *Oromummaa* principles. Leadership networks and chains should engage in a conversation with the Oromo people to develop a new organizational culture that facilitates the institutionalization of Oromo democratic experiences in ways that are compatible with contemporary technological and political conditions. Oromo nationalists, public intellectuals, and the Oromo people as a whole must challenge the tendency of exclusivist leadership and political anarchism and fragmentation and reinvent the Oromo national political leadership that is anchored in *Oromummaa* and *gadaa*.

Endnotes

[1]In this paper the interpersonal relationship includes the range of relationships from two persons to close communities and beyond.

[2]In this paper the concept of collective level is used to refer to Oromo consciousness at the national or peoplehood level and closely tied to the concept of *Oromummaa*.

[3]According to Lemmu Baissa (2004: 101), "*Gadaa* government comprised a hierarchy of triple levels of government: the national, the regional and the local. At the pan-Oromo level, the national government was led by an elected *luba* council [*gadaa* class] formed from representatives of the major Oromo moieties, clan

families and clans, under the presidency of the *abba gadaa* and his two deputies, collectively known as the *warana sadden.* The national leadership was responsible for such important matters as legislation and enforcement of general laws, handling issues of war and peace and coordinating the nation's defense, management of intra-Oromo clan conflicts and dealing with non-Oromo people."

[4]The case of the Tuulama Oromo demonstrates that "autonomous local governments were answerable to the overall *gadaa* of the main branch" (Etefa, 2008: 21).

[5]For example, these five grades are called *itimako, daballe, folle, doroma/qondala*, and *luba* in central Oromia.

[6](Kumsa, 1997: 119).

[7]*Siiqqee* was a woman institution, which functioned parallel to the *gadaa* system to protect the rights of Oromo women in pre-colonial Oromia.

[8]Some aspects of *gadaa* still survive in some Oromo regions. In the Boorana Oromo community, for example, the *Gumii Gayyo* (the assembly of multitudes) brings together almost every important leaders, such as living *abba gaddas* (the president of the assembly), the *qaallus* (spiritual leaders), age-set councilors, clan leaders, *gadaa* councilors, and other concerned individuals to make, amend, or change laws and rules every eight years. The 37th *Gumii Gayyo* Assembly of the Boorana was held in the August of 1996 to make, amend, or change the three categories of their laws, known as the cardinal, customary, and supplementary laws (Huqqa, 1998). The *Gumii Gayyo* assembly has a higher degree of ritual and political authority than the *gadaa* class and other assemblies because it "assembles representative of the entire society in conjunction with any individual who has the initiative to the ceremonial grounds," and "what *Gumii* decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly" (Legesse, 1973: 93).

[9]In his book *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa,* Adam Hochschild (1998) vividly explains how King Leopold II of Belgium terrorized the people of Congo by dispossessing their lands and reducing them to semi-slaves in order to force them to collect ivory and harvest wild rubber. While claiming developing the Congo Free States and promoting a humanitarian cause, King Leopold II established policies that resulted in the destruction of more than five million Africans by murder, diseases, and hunger. His Force Publique Officers led by a few Belgians and staffed by the natives committed horrendous crimes against humanity by burning villages, hanging, torturing, raping, flogging, and mutilating in order to terrorize the people and force them to work for the king. This organization is similar to the organization of Meles Zenawi called the OPDO that imposes a reign of terror on the Oromo people. Similarly, in his book, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur,* Ben Kiernan (2007) explains how it took four centuries to decimate the indigenous peoples of the Americas through war, genocide, terrorism, diseases, and removal. He particularly discusses how the president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, destroyed the Cherokee Nation by removing them from their homelands and sending them to reservations. Jackson and his supporters and white settlers created civil war among the leadership of the Cherokee and made them to fight each other. In *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal,* Amy H. Sturgis (2007) explores how the United States practiced racial or ethnic cleansing on the Cherokee nation. When the Cherokee people were removed from Georgia between 1838 and1839, about eight hundred Cherokee perished, and they arrived in Oklahoma without any children and only a few elders. When the Herero and Nama peoples of Nambia resisted Germany colonialism, the German soldiers and settlers developed a plan to carry out a shoot-to-kill policy. They conducted extrajudicial killings, established concentration camps, and employed forced labor and death camps. The German colonial governor expressed the plan of Germany: "15 years from now, there will not be much left of the natives" (quoted in Kiernan, 2007: 381). This plan was implemented between 1904 and 1905 when the majority of Herero and Nama were exterminated. For further discussion, see Edwin Herbert, *Small Wars and Skirmishes 1902—18, (*Nottingham, Great Britain: Foundry Books, 2003).

[10] S. M. Buechler, "Beyond Resource Mobilization? Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory," *The Sociological Quarterly,* 34/2, 1993, pp. 228.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12]*Ibid*, P. 328.

[13] Robert G. Lord and Douglas Brown, *Leadership Processes and Followers Self-Identity,* (Mahwal, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Inc., 2004), p. 8.

[14] *Ibid.* p. 14.

[15] Edward Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," in *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, edited by Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 313.