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# The Concept of *Oromummaa* and Identity Formation in Contemporary Oromo Society<sup>1</sup>

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This paper examines the essence of *Oromummaa* (Oromo culture and nationalism),<sup>2</sup> Oromo identity, and human agency at the personal, interpersonal<sup>3</sup> and collective (national)<sup>4</sup> levels. It specifically explains the relationship between the uneven development of *Oromummaa* and Oromo organizational problems. This paper also suggests some steps that should be taken by Oromo 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.

## ***Oromummaa* and Cultural Identity**

*Oromummaa* is a complex and dynamic national and global project. As a national project and the master 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

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<sup>2</sup> *Oromummaa* as an ideology of human liberation includes the vision of an Oromo democratic state and the principles of multinational democracy in order to be emancipatory, revolutionary, democratic and inclusive.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper the interpersonal relationship includes the range of relationships from two persons to close communities and beyond.

<sup>4</sup> 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*.

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 *gada* 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.

After Oromos were colonized and until *Oromummaa* emerged, 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. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized and not strongly connected to the collective identity of *Oromummaa*.

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 and 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.

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.

While Oromos 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.

### **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.”<sup>5</sup> Collective identities are not automatically given, but they are “essential outcomes of the mobilization process and crucial prerequisite to movement success.”<sup>6</sup> Oromo nationalists can only reach a common understanding of Oromoness through open, critical, honest dialogue and debate. Fears,

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<sup>5</sup> S. M. Buechler, “Beyond Resource Mobilization? Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34/2, 1993, pp. 228.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

suspensions, 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.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, P. 328.

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.”<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> 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. This process can be facilitated by 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*.

### **Political Leadership and Nationalism**

Activist political leaders must be teachers and effective communicators imbued with an egalitarian spirit. In addition, they must be effective listeners and students. Only such a leadership can stimulate the development of Oromo identity at the personal, interpersonal and collective levels simultaneously. Change starts with individuals who are both leaders and followers. Culture, collective grievances, and visions connect leaders and followers in oppressed society like the Oromo. Consequently, to be effective, the Oromo political leadership must be guided by Oromo-centric cardinal values and principles that reflect honesty, fairness, single standard, equality and democracy to develop *Oromummaa*.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert G. Lord and Douglas Brown, *Leadership Processes and Followers Self-Identity*, (Mahwal, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate, Inc., 2004), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

According to Lord and Brown, “a critical task for leaders may be to construct group identities for followers that are both appealing and consistent with a leader’s goals. Indeed, this is a critical aspect of political leadership. Effective political leaders do not simply take context and identity as given, but actively construct both in a way that reconfigures the social world.”<sup>10</sup>

The political leadership of Oromo society needs to understand the concept and essence of the changing selves of Oromos. These self-concepts include cognitive, psychological and behavioral activities of Oromo individuals. Several scholars define leadership in terms of activities, relationships, and strategic choices that are packaged into policies to mobilize and organize a category of people to achieve defined objectives. Leadership as an activity involves intellectual directives and organizing activities. As intellectuals, political leaders develop theoretical, ideological and organizing visions to identify and solve political and social problems. Leadership is an ongoing conversation involving all persons along the leadership-followership continuum. Through this dialogical relationship, speakers become listeners, and listeners become speakers in a transformative way. In this process, effective leaders balance their “leading” and “led” selves through interactive and conversational relations. Through this dialogue, some followers may emerge as leaders or take on some leadership roles.

A constructive dialogue creates mutual understanding and agreement within and between leaders and followers within an organization or a movement. An effective conversation among leaders and followers can help in the process of developing strategic innovations from diverse perspectives and experiences and in finding new solutions for existing problems. Plans of actions that emerge from participants’ specific knowledge and experiences have more chances to be successful than plans imposed by leaders. The creativity of leadership/followership depends upon the openness and willingness of those in their relative leadership/followership roles to learn new skills to help them gain the expertise necessary for developing new political visions, policies, and strategies.

This expertise can then be used to build and maintain political cohesion, to take actions contingent on time and place, and to continually renew political institutions or organizations. In effective organizations and movements, leadership is practiced at all levels and locations by formally designated leaders and informal networks of leaders who involve in backroom strategy political work; “Leadership teams with higher strategic capacity are more diversely networked, and conduct regular, open and authoritative deliberations with varied constituencies, in which they root their accountability.”<sup>11</sup>

Responsibilities of leaders are guiding the constituent community in the struggle for organizational survival, policy achievement, and the acquisition of power by building expertise, developing internal cohesion, and by securing aid from supporters, sympathizers and others. Effective political leaders are social technicians who can develop activity-patterns to find practical solutions for identified problems by proposing appropriate forms of action in a specific time frame. Creative and influential leaders understand the importance of the division and the specialization of labor, the delegation of tasks to experts or specialists, and how those activities increase efficiency and

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<sup>10</sup> Lord and Brown, *ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette, “Leadership Matters: An Introduction,” *Leadership and Social Movements*, edited by Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette, (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2001), p. 19.

productivity within the organization.<sup>12</sup> Visionary, pragmatic and democratic political leaders create new possibilities in history by acting as agents of social change.

Leaders with cognitive and/or behavioral deficiencies cannot develop effective ideologies, build networks, develop intermediate leadership or “bridge leaders”, and are afraid of delegating authority to specialized bodies or individuals.<sup>13</sup> Self-centered or autocratic leaders prevent the development of competent and confident teams of leadership that are interconnected through bridge leaders both vertically and horizontally. Instead, such leaders would like to surround themselves with sycophants and the avoidance of reliable or accurate feedback on their activities.

Just as the introduction of new ideas and innovations invigorates an organization, maintaining stability prevents the organization from facing chaos and disorder. The performance of leaders is determined by human agency as well as objective factors. The characteristics of individual leaders and their followers, such as understanding complex reality, persuasive capacity, the ability to build effective team players, and the determination and courage to take well thought out actions are elements of a human agency. However, individual leaders and their teams cannot accomplish everything they want since objective factors may limit their actions.

Without challenging anarchism and passivism among the Oromo populace and the exclusivist political tendency of the leadership, the Oromo nationalist movement cannot search “for combinations of forms of organization and leadership which are practically compatible with larger struggles for popular self-emancipation.”<sup>14</sup> The brutality of the Ethiopian state, the clandestine aspect of the Oromo liberation struggle, and the vanguard mentality of the leadership, have arrested the continued development of an open, democratic, and consultative leadership rooted in the *gada* system. This condition has allowed the existence of the exclusivist leadership approach on one side and the fragmentation and multiplication of the leadership on the other. The centralizing and decentralizing tendencies of the leadership in the Oromo national movement demonstrate these contradictory processes.

Oromo nationalists need to speak up and struggle to develop leadership for self-emancipation through facilitating the integration of “leading” and “led” selves of the Oromo political leadership. Without (1) changing the wholesale adoption of non-Oromo ideologies and approaches, (2) building internal cohesion by developing *Oromummaa* on the individual, relational and collective levels, and (3) fully mobilizing Oromo human and economic resources, the Oromo political leadership will continue to face more crises and may eventually become a political liability. An Oromo national political leadership that moves from an initial reliance on a narrow political circle and borrowed political ideologies and practices and embraces Oromo-centric democratic values will be able to develop different forms of leadership in Oromo society that make the dynamic connection between the values of Oromo society and its organizational structure.

The Oromo political leadership should be pressured to speak with the Oromo people and listen as well, allowing the Oromo community at-large to engage in the

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<sup>12</sup> Morris P. Fiorina and Kenneth A. Shepsle, “Formal Theories of Leadership: Agents, Agenda Setters, and Entrepreneurs,” *Leadership & Politics*, edited by Bryan D. Jones, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), pp. 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Barker, Alan Johnson and Michael Lavalette, *ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Barker, “Robert Michels and the ‘Cruel Game,’” *Leadership and Social Movemnts*, *ibid*, p. 43.



process of self-emancipation by participating in and owning their national movement. According to Alan Johnson, “Self-emancipation is a political process in which the oppressed [groups] author their own liberation through popular struggles which are educational, producing a cognitive liberation... [facilitating] the defeat of their oppressors.”<sup>15</sup> The process of self-emancipation is only possible by building *Oromummaa* and organizational capacity as means of mobilizing all Oromos to establish self-confidence, consciousness, self-organization, and self-emancipation.

### **The Oromo National Movement and its Organizational Capacity**

Collective grievances, the Oromo language and history, the historical memory of the *gada* 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 perceptual 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

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Johnson, “Self-emancipation and Leadership: The Case of Martin Luther King,” *Leadership and Social Movements*, *ibid*, p. 96.

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.”<sup>16</sup>

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

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

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.

### **Conclusion**

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 *gada*.