




September 2012

# Promoting and Developing Oromummaa

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## Recommended Citation

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# Promoting and Developing *Oromummaa*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As any concept, *Oromummaa* has different meanings on conventional, theoretical, and political, and ideological levels. Although the colonizers of the Oromo deny, most Oromos know their linguistic, cultural, historical, political, and behavioral patterns that closely connect together all of their sub-identities to the Oromo nation. There is a clear conventional understanding among all Oromo branches and individuals on these issues. The Oromo national movement has gradually expanded the essence and meaning of *Oromummaa*. The colonization of the Oromo and the disruption of their collective identity and the repression and exploitation of Oromo society have increased the commitment of some Oromo nationalists for the restoration of the Oromo national identity and the achievement of statehood and sovereignty through developing the intellectual, theoretical, and ideological aspects of *Oromummaa*. In other words, some Oromo nationalists and their supporters have started to further develop the concept of *Oromummaa* as a cultural, historical, political, and ideological project for recapturing the best elements of the Oromo tradition, critically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Oromo society, and for formulating a broad-based program of action to mobilize the nation for social emancipation and national liberation.

This paper argues that the critical and thorough comprehension of all aspects of *Oromummaa* is necessary to build a more united Oromo national movement. First, it introduces the conventional meaning of *Oromummaa* through identifying and explaining the major cultural and historical markers that differentiate the Oromo from their neighbors and other ethnonational groups. Second, it examines how Ethiopian settler colonialism has slowed the full development of *Oromummaa* by suppressing the Oromo national identity and culture, by killing real Oromo leaders and by creating subservient or collaborative leadership, and by destroying and outlawing Oromo national institutions and organizations. Third, the piece illustrates how Oromo diversity can be recognized and celebrated within a democratic national unity. Fourth, it explores the concept of national and global *Oromummaa* as history, culture, identity, and nationalism. Fifth, the paper demonstrates how expanded *Oromummaa* can serve as the central and unifying ideology of the Oromo national movement for social emancipation and national liberation.

## The Essence and Meaning of Conventional *Oromummaa*

*Oromummaa* as the total expression of Oromo peoplehood developed from the historical, cultural, religious, and philosophical experiences of Oromo society. As a self and collective schema, *Oromummaa* encapsulates a set of fundamental beliefs, values, moral codes, and guiding principles that make Oromo society different from other societies.<sup>2</sup> *Oromummaa* has been built on personal, interpersonal, and collective connections that the Oromo “have to an historically shaped form of knowledge that emerged out of the Oromo experience of several centuries of life and living (*jiruf jireenya*);” it has been also evolved from the moral codes and guiding principles of Oromo society, and has “served as a mechanism that built Oromo society in the past and left its unique mark upon the people, and their environment.”<sup>3</sup> The Oromo belief systems and cultural principles have been encoded in and expressed by *Afaan Oromoo*; therefore, the Oromo language has been the main carrier of the essence and features of Oromo culture,

tradition, and peoplehood. Since the Ethiopian colonizers had failed to destroy this language and replace it by that of their own, they could not successfully suppress *Oromummaa* that has survived in scattered forms and underground for more than a century.

However, the colonizers have prevented the Oromo from developing independent institutions that would allow them to produce and disseminate their historical and cultural knowledge freely. To objectively and clearly discuss about conventional *Oromummaa*, we need to know the historical, cultural, religious, linguistic, geographical, and civilizational foundations of Oromo society. Currently our knowledge of Oromoness is very limited and fragmented. For generations, the Oromo have mainly transmitted their history through oral discourse. Since the colonization of Oromo society, Oromo scholars and others have been discouraged or prohibited by the Ethiopian colonial state from documenting Oromo oral traditions; therefore, adequate information is lacking on this society. Due to the dominant role of oral history, Oromo historiography requires a thorough and critical study of oral traditions. The Ethiopian colonial state has suppressed the production, reproduction, and dissemination of the intellectual knowledge of the people. To deny the opportunity of self-knowledge to the Oromo people in general, the youth in particular, the Ethiopian colonial institutions and their knowledge for domination have been imposed on Oromo society through colonial education and other institutions, such as the media and religion.

For most Ethiopian and Ethiopianist scholars, Oromo history began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Oromo were actively recapturing their territories and rolling back the Christian and Muslim empires. The Oromo had at that time a form of constitutional government known as *gadaa*. Although we have limited knowledge of Oromo history before this century, it is reasonable to think that this people did not invent their government system just at the moment they were defending their country from the Christian and Muslim empire builders. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo were effectively organized under the *gadaa* institution for both offensive and defensive wars. The *gadaa* government organized and ordered society around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions. We do not clearly know at this time when and how this institution emerged. However, we know that it existed as a full-fledged system at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

During this century, the Oromo started to live under one *gadaa* republic with a strong democratic leadership and a national defense army. Today, almost all Oromos recognize and express proud in the *gadaa* system and its democratic principles. *Gadaa* as the main institutional emblem of the Oromo national character marks Oromo national culture and identity at all levels; Oromo cultural, historical, and behavioral patterns have been marked by the indigenous democracy of the *gada* system. This system has the principles of checks and balances (through periodic succession of every eight years), and 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 principles of the system 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 *miseensas* (parties) in *gaada*; these parties have different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of the population growth and the establishment of different autonomous administrative systems. All *gadaa* officials were elected for eight years by universal adult male suffrage. The system organized male Oromos according to age-sets (*hirya*) based on

chronological age, and according to generation-sets (*luba*) based on genealogical generation, for social and political and economic purposes. These two concepts – *gadaa*-sets and *gadaa*-grades – are important to a clear understanding of *gadaa*. All newly born males enter a *gadaa*-set at birth, which they will belong to along with other boys of the same age, and for the next forty years they will go through five eight-year initiation periods; the *gadaa*-grade is entered on the basis of generation, and boys enter their *luba* forty years after their fathers.

All Oromo branches were organized in age-sets and generational sets to defend their collective interest from external and internal enemies. In Oromo society, knowledge and information have been mainly transmitted from generation to generation through the institutions of family, religion, and *gadaa*. Young Oromos are expected to learn important things that are necessary for social integration and community development. They learn appropriate social behavior by joining age-sets and generation-sets. From their families and communities and experts, they learn stories, folk tales, riddles, and other mental games that help acquiring the knowledge of society. As age-mates, they share many things because of their ages; members of generation-sets also share many duties and roles because of their membership in grades or classes.

The balancing of the domains of women and men was a precondition for keeping peace between the sexes and for promoting *safuu* (moral and ethical order) in society.<sup>47</sup> The value system of Oromo society has been influenced by the *gadaa* and *siiqqee* institutions. In pre-colonial Oromo society, women had the *siiqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system, “functioned hand in hand with *gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances.”<sup>49</sup> These two institutions helped in maintaining *safuu* by enabling Oromo women to have control over their labor and economic resources and private spaces, social status and respect, and sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.<sup>50</sup> If the balance between men and women was broken, a *siiqqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society.

The principles of justice and democracy guided the Oromo worldview and value. Oromo society rejected hierarchies based on race/ethnicity, class, and gender. Therefore, when the Oromo fought wars and defeated their competitors, they integrated them into their society through the processes known as *guudifacha* and *moogafacha*. When other peoples or groups were interested to join Oromo society they were allowed to join the society through these processes. Although this assimilation process was not perfect, it involved both cultural and structural assimilation to allow an open access to economic and political resources without discrimination. Therefore, Oromoness does not necessarily require biological or blood ties, but endorsing social justice, popular democracy, and accepting the rule of law. The Oromo nation used to make *nagaa* (peace) among its various branches and social forces through assertive peacemaking process of the *gadaa* system that renewed *Oromummaa* as a social contract in Oromo society in every generation. *Oromummaa* embraces the Oromo sense of *nagaa* and justice among all Oromos and beyond through “balance of human beings with the environment, balance of men and women, balance of productive forces, balance of power, balance of families, balance within families, etc. At the heart of that notion of balance was the principle or definition of justice. It was encoded in the law, *or seera*.... According to the Oromo, justice prevailed when that balance was reached and maintained by law.”<sup>4</sup>

All Oromo practices and behavior have been regulated by the *gadaa* democracy and principles. Oromo society like any society has been conscious of its cultural identity, its relation to nature, and the existence of a powerful force that regulates the connection between nature and society. The Oromo knowledge of society and the world can be classified into two: a) cultural

and customary knowledge known as *beekumssa aadaa*, and b) knowledge of laws known as *beekumssa seera*. The knowledge of laws is further subdivided into *seera Waaqa* (the laws of God), and *seera nama* (the laws of human beings). The laws of God are immutable, and the laws of human beings can be changed through consensus and democratic means. Oromo customary knowledge is a public and common knowledge that guides and regulates the activities of members of society; some elements of this customary knowledge can develop into rules or laws depending on the interest of society.

Every person is expected to learn and recognize *seera Waaqa* and *seera aadaa*; however, should someone does not know the laws of society or the laws of God, there are Oromo experts who can be referred to. These experts study and know the organizing principles of the Oromo worldview that reflect Oromo cultural memory and identity both temporally and religiously. Another important aspect Oromo culture and history has been *Afaan Oromoo*. Although the Ethiopian colonial system has tried its best to destroy all aspects of Oromo culture and history, including the Oromo language, it did not have the capacity to totally impose on Oromo society its culture and language. The Amhara-Tigrayan colonizers have killed assertive independent Oromo leaders and destroyed or suppressed Oromo important institutions, such as *gadaa*, in the attempt to uproot *Oromummaa* and replace it with Ethiopianism. However, Oromo rural families, particularly Oromo women, protected *Afaan Oromoo* because they had little access to the institutions of the colonizers.

Without having a national institution that can protect it, *Afaan Oromoo* has remained the blood and sinew of the Oromo identity, culture, and history. Today, the survival of this language has enabled all Oromo branches that have been disconnected by colonial regions and borrowed religions to be reconnected and revive their national institutions and *Oromummaa*. The Oromo language as the gold mine of Oromo history and culture has remained the main pillar and marker of *Oromummaa*. The Oromo national struggle led by the Oromo Liberation Front has enabled the Oromo to write and read in *qubee* since 1991 although the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government has dwarfed its development and the Amhara elites have opposed this alphabet wishing to continue the imposition of their colonial language, Amharic. Generally speaking, Oromo institutions, such as *gadaa*, *siqqee*, and *waaqeffannaa* had imprinted indelible and enduring marks on Oromo personality, peoplehood, and conventional *Oromummaa*. How did Ethiopian colonialism suppress *Oromummaa*? Why do the Amhara and Tigrayan elites hate *Oromummaa* while promoting Ethiopianism?

### **Colonialism and the Suppression of *Oromummaa***

Colonialism attacks the individual psyche and biography, as well as the collective history, of a given people. These damaging processes occur through various forms of violence, including colonial terrorism. “*Violence is any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group.* From this perspective, violence inhibits human growth, negates inherent potential, limits productive living, and causes death” [Emphasis given in original].<sup>5</sup> Colonialism can be maintained by committing genocide or ethnocide and/or by organized cultural destruction and the assimilation of a sector of the colonized population. The Ethiopian colonialists have expropriated Oromo economic resources and destroyed Oromo institutions and cultural experts and leaders; they have also denied the Oromo opportunities for developing the Oromo system of knowledge by preventing the transmission of Oromo cultural experiences from generation to generation. All these have been intended to uproot *Oromummaa* in order to produce individuals and groups who lack self-respect and are submissive and ready to serve the colonialists.

Under these conditions, the Oromo basic needs and self-actualizing powers have not been fulfilled. In other words, the Oromo biological and social needs have been frustrated. “If failure to satisfy biological needs leads to disease and physical death,” Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan notes, “then denial of human contact, communication, and affirmation . . . leads to a social and psychological ‘starvation’ or ‘death’ no less devastating than, and conditioning, physical death.”<sup>6</sup> The Ethiopian colonialists have caused the physical death of millions, and further attempted to introduce social and cultural death to the Oromo people. Both the Amhara and Tigrayan elites have attempted to destroy or control the Oromo selfhood in order to deny the Oromo both individual and national self-determination. Furthermore, the Ethiopian colonial state has destroyed Oromo leaders who have fought against Abyssinian/Ethiopian colonialism, and has co-opted those leaders that collaborated with the system as intermediaries.<sup>7</sup> Euro-American guns, cannons, technology, and administrative skills have been utilized in colonizing Oromia and maintaining the Ethiopian colonial system by massacring, repressing, and by reorganizing Oromo society in order to control and exploit. Since the colonization of the Oromo people, one of the goals of the Ethiopian state has been the destruction and underdevelopment of the Oromo elites and their leadership; the Amhara-Tigray state has used both violent and institutional mechanisms to ensure that the Oromo people remain leaderless.

Furthermore, to ensure its colonial domination, the Ethiopian state has destroyed or suppressed Oromo institutions while glorifying, establishing, and expanding the Amhara-Tigrayan government and Orthodox Christianity.<sup>8</sup> According to Bonnie K. Holcomb, “The essence of colonization was the replacement of the values of *Oromummaa* as the overarching integrating mechanism of the Oromo superstructure and replacing it with the ideology and the resulting institutions of Greater Ethiopia.”<sup>9</sup> The Ethiopian state has also sought to suppress Oromo history, culture, and language while promoting that of the Abyssinians. The main reasons for suppressing or destroying major Oromo institutions was to prevent the transmission of the Oromo belief system and cultural norms from generation to generation and to stop “each new generation engaging creatively with the circumstances in which they found themselves to find expression for the core values in the way they organized themselves.”<sup>10</sup> In consequence of these efforts, the Ethiopian state has fractured Oromo culture and identity. It targeted *Oromummaa* for destruction and established its colonial administrative regions to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources. As a result, Oromo relational identities were localized and were not strongly connected to the collective identity of national *Oromummaa*.

Consequently, the Oromo have been separated from one another and prevented from exchanging goods and information on national level for more than a century, and their identities have been localized into clan families and colonial regions. They have been exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and have adopted some elements of these cultures and religions because of the inferiority complex that Ethiopian colonialism introduced to them. Until Oromo nationalism emerged *Oromummaa* primarily remained on personal and interpersonal levels since the Oromo were denied the opportunities to form national institutions. The Ethiopian colonialists have also expropriated Oromo economic resources and destroyed Oromo institutions and cultural experts and leaders. Oppressors don’t just want to control the oppressed; they want also to control their minds, thus ensuring the effectiveness of domination and exploitation. Na’im Akbar succinctly explains how the mental control of the oppressed causes personal and collective damages: “The slavery that captures the mind and imprisons the motivation, perception, aspiration and identity in a web of anti-self-images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction, is [crueler] than shackles on the wrists and ankles. The slavery that feeds on the mind, invading the soul of man [and woman], destroying

his [and her] loyalties to himself [and herself] and establishing allegiance to forces which destroys him [and her], is an even worse form of capture.”<sup>11</sup>

The mental enslavement of most Oromo elites is the major reason why the Oromo, who comprise the majority of the Ethiopian population, are brutalized, murdered and terrorized by the minority Tigrayan elites today. Without the emancipation of Oromo individuals and groups from the inferiority complex and without overcoming the ignorance and the worldviews that the enemies of the Oromo have imposed on them, the Oromo cannot have the self-confidence necessary to facilitate individual liberation and Oromo emancipation. Some Oromo elites have become raw materials for the successive Ethiopian regimes and have implemented their terrorist and genocidal policies. These internal agents of the Ethiopian government have also participated in robbing Oromo economic resources. As Frantz Fanon notes, “The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination . . . he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.”<sup>12</sup> The Oromo national struggle has to solve the internal problem of Oromo society before it can fully confront and defeat its joined external enemies. Ethiopian history demonstrates that most Oromo collaborative individuals and groups have been king makers and have protected the Ethiopian Empire without seeking authority for themselves and their people.

These collaborators have acted more Ethiopian than their colonial masters. “The oppressed learn to wear many masks for different occasions;” Frantz Fanon notes, “they develop skills to detect the moods and wishes of those in authority, learn to present acceptable public behaviors while repressing many incongruent private feelings.”<sup>13</sup> The Oromo collaborative elites have been politically ignorant and harbor an inferiority complex that has been imposed on them by the colonial institutions. According to Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, “Prolonged oppression reduces the oppressed into mere individuals without a community or a history, fostering a tendency to privatize a shared victimization.”<sup>14</sup> Since they have been cut from their individual biographies and the collective Oromo history, members of the Oromo collaborative class have only known what the Amhara or Tigrayan elites have taught them and, as a result, they have constantly worn “Ethiopian masks” that have damaged their psyches. The colonizers have never been content with occupying the land of indigenous peoples and expropriating their labor; they have also declared war on the psyches of the oppressed.<sup>15</sup>

By introducing an inferiority complex, the Amhara-Tigray state has attacked the Oromo culture and worldview in order to alter the perspective of the colonized Oromo from independence to dependence; consequently, every colonized Oromo subject who has not yet liberated his/her mind wears an Ethiopian mask by associating his/herself with the Ethiopian culture and identity. As Fanon asserts, “All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language . . . The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of [the colonizers], the more he [and she] will have” imitated his/her masters.<sup>16</sup> As the European colonialists did, the Amhara-Tigrayan colonizers have manufactured the Oromo collaborative elites to use them in their colonial projects. According to Bulhan, “in prolonged oppression, the oppressed group willy-nilly internalizes the oppressor without. They adopt his guidelines and prohibitions, they assimilate his image and his social behavior, and they become agents of their own oppression. The oppressor without becomes . . . an oppressor within . . . They become *auto-oppressor* as they engage in self-destructive behavior injurious to themselves, their loved ones, and their neighbors.”<sup>17</sup>

What Fanon says about other colonial intermediary elites applies to the Oromo elites: “The European elite undertook to manufacture native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture;

they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth.”<sup>18</sup> Since most Oromo elites who have passed through Ethiopian colonial institutions have not yet achieved psychological liberation, they consciously or unconsciously prefer to work for their colonial masters rather than working as a team on the Oromo liberation project. What Walter Rodney says about the consequences of the colonial educational system in Africa also applies to the situation of Oromo intermediaries: “The colonial school system educated far too many fools and clowns, fascinated by the ideas and way of life of the European capitalist class.” “Some reached a point of total estrangement from African conditions and the African way of life . . . ‘Colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and filled him with abnormal complexes.’”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, some Oromo intermediaries who have passed through the Ethiopian colonial education system have been de-Oromized and Ethiopianized, and have opposed the Oromo struggle for national liberation.

Colonial education mainly creates submissive leaders that facilitate underdevelopment through subordination and exploitation.<sup>20</sup> Considering the similar condition of the African Americans in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Carter G. Woodson characterized the educated Black as “a hopeless liability of the race,” and schools for Blacks were “places where they must be convinced of their inferiority.”<sup>21</sup> He demonstrated how White oppressors controlled the minds of Blacks through education in the United States: “When you control a man’s [and a woman’s thinking] you do not have to worry about his [and her] actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He [or she] will find his [or her] ‘proper place’ and will stay in it.”<sup>22</sup> The behaviors and actions of most educated Oromo intermediaries parallel what Woodson says about the educated African Americans before they intensified their national struggle. There have been also biologically and culturally assimilated former Oromo elements that liked to disassociate themselves from anything related to the Oromo. These assimilated former Oromos, like their Habasha masters, have been the defenders of the Habasha culture, religion, and the Amharic language and the haters of the Oromo history, culture, institutions, and *Afaan Oromoo*. Explaining similar circumstances, Fanon notes, “The individual who *climbs up* into white, civilized society tends to reject his black, uncivilized family at the level of the imagination.”<sup>23</sup>

The slave psychology of such assimilated elements has caused them also to prefer the leadership of the Amhara or Tigrayan oppressor. Through his seven years of experimentation and observation in Martinique, Frantz Fanon concluded that the dominated “black man’s behavior is similar to an obsession neurosis . . . There is an attempt by the colored man to escape his individuality, to reduce his being in the world to nothing . . . The [psychologically affected] black man goes from humiliating insecurity to self-accusation and even despair.”<sup>24</sup> These conditions also apply to all colonized, repressed, and exploited peoples. Therefore, some Oromos also have faced similar problems. Furthermore, the attack on Oromo families and national structures introduced psychological disorientations to Oromo individuals and incapacitated their collective personality. The family – as a basic institution of any society – provides guidance in values, norms and worldviews, and acts as the educating and training ground for entry into that society. Since Oromo families have lived for more than a century under colonial occupation and since Oromo national institutions were destroyed or disfigured by the Ethiopian colonial institutions, the Oromo people have lacked educational, cultural, and ideological resources to guide their children toward building national institutions and organizational capacity. Oromo individuals and who have been brought under such conditions have faced social, cultural, and psychological crises and become conflict-ridden.

Due to these complex problems, the low level of political consciousness, and an imposed inferiority complex, those Oromos who claim that they are nationalists sometimes confuse their sub-identities with the Oromo national identity or with Ethiopian identity. According to Fanon,



“The neurotic structure of an individual is precisely the elaboration, the formation, and the birth of conflicting knots in the ego, stemming on the one hand from the environment and on the other from the entirely personal way this individual reacts to these influences.”<sup>25</sup> The Ethiopian colonial system was imposed on the Oromo creating regional and religious boundaries among them. Under these conditions, personal identities (e.g. religious affiliation) replaced Oromoness – with its unique values and self-schemas – and Ethiopianism replaced *Oromummaa*. Colonial rulers saw Oromoness as a source of raw material that was ready to be transformed into other identities. Since most Oromos have been psychologically damaged, they have run away from the Oromo national identity. Through political, educational, and religious institutions and the media the Ethiopian colonial elites and their successive governments have continuously created and perpetuated negative stereotypes and racist values regarding the Oromo people<sup>26</sup> and have even led most Oromos to think negatively about themselves.

That is why some Oromo parents have rejected Oromo names and given Amhara or Arab names to their children in order to assimilate them to the cultures they considered superior. Some Oromos have also developed self-hatred and self-contempt and worn the masks of other peoples. Ethiopian colonialism and racism have made some Oromo elites hate their culture and language and avoid self-discovery. The process of de-Oromization has created alienation among some Oromos and imbued them with distorted perceptions of their own people. Everything Amhara-Tigray has been praised and everything Oromo has been rejected and denigrated in some Oromo circles; the colonialists have depicted the Oromo as barbaric, ignorant, evil, pagan, backward, and superstitious. In order to avoid these perceived characteristics, some Oromo elites who passed through the Ethiopian colonial education system were Amharized. The colonization of the Oromo mind has indoctrinated the Oromo elites in order to isolate them from their families and communities and distort their identities by disconnecting them from their heritage, culture, and history.<sup>27</sup>

In order to achieve psychological liberation via the development of political consciousness and national *Oromummaa* it is essential to understand the process of oppression by learning about the bankruptcy of assimilated Oromo elites and the crises in both individual Oromo biographies and collective Oromo history. As Bulhan asserts, “The experience of victimization in oppression produces, on the one hand, tendencies toward rebellion and a search for autonomy and, on the other, tendencies toward compliance and accommodation. Often, the two tendencies coexist among the oppressed, although a predominant orientation can be identified for any person or generation at a given time.”<sup>28</sup> The oppressed are chained physically, socially, culturally, politically, and psychologically; hence, it is difficult for them to learn about these problems and search for ways to overcome them. The conscious element of the oppressed “opts for an introspective approach and emphasizes the need to come to terms with one’s self—a self historically tormented by a formidable and oppressive social structure.”<sup>29</sup> As the current national crisis unfolds, Oromo nationalists in general and leaders in particular should start to critically self-evaluate in order to identify the impacts of oppressive and destructive values and behaviors on them and the Oromo political performance. Psychological liberation from ideological confusion and oppression requires fighting against the external oppressor and the internalized oppressive values.

Most oppressed individuals understand what the oppressor does to them from outside, but it is difficult for them to comprehend how the worldviews of the oppressor are imposed on them and control them from within. Bulhan explains that “institutionalization of oppression in daily living . . . entails an internalization of the oppressor’s values, norms, and prohibitions. Internalized oppression is most resistant to change, since this would require a battle on two fronts: the oppressor without and the oppressor within.”<sup>30</sup> The Ethiopian colonial system has

denied education to almost all the Oromo in order to keep them ignorant and submissive. Even those few who have received colonial education have not been provided with critical education and knowledge for liberation. As Woodson says, colonial education is “a perfect device for control from without.”<sup>31</sup> So it has been difficult and challenging for most Oromo elites to engage in a two-front struggle—liberating themselves from the values and worldviews of the Ethiopians and their colonial institutions and structures. Because of the lack of political consciousness, the oppressed individuals and groups learn the behavior of the oppressor, engage in conflict, and abuse one another. Attaining a critical political consciousness enables the oppressed individuals and groups to regain their identity, reclaim their history and culture, and regain self-respect while fighting against the oppressor externally.

Those people who are disconnected from their social and cultural bonds are disorganized, disoriented, and alienated and lack critical understanding of individual biographies and collective history; hence, they cannot effectively organize and fight against the values and institutions of their oppressors. “The colonized had been reduced to individuals without an anchor in history, alienated from themselves and others. So long as this alienation prevailed, the colonizer *without* could not be challenged. His abuses, humiliations, and suffocating repression permeated everyday living, further undermining the colonized [person’s] self-respect and collective bonds.”<sup>32</sup> When some elements of the colonized people develop political consciousness, organize, and engage in the struggle for freedom, and social justice they turn their internalized anger, hostility, and violence that destroyed relationships among them against the colonizers. The nascent Oromo nationalists faced monumental political problems from the decadent Ethiopian political system. In addition to brutal violence and repression, the oppressor uses various methods of social control. “The oppressed is made a prisoner within a narrow circle of tamed ideas, a wrecked ecology, and a social network strewn with prohibitions. His family and community life is infiltrated in order to limit his capacity for bonding and trust. His past is obliterated and his history falsified to render him without an origin or a future. A system of reward and punishment based on loyalty to the oppressor is instituted to foster competition and conflict among the oppressed.”<sup>33</sup>

The colonialists and their collaborators have committed various crimes against the Oromo culture, history, language and psychology. The founding fathers and mothers of Oromo nationalism understood these complex problems and tried to solve them through developing social, economic, cultural, and political projects. Those people whose culture has been attacked and disfigured by colonialism are underdeveloped; their basic needs are not satisfactorily met and self-actualizing powers are stagnated; “For to acquire culture presupposes not only a remarkable power of learning and teaching, but also an enduring capacity for interdependence and inter-subjectivity. Not only the development of our higher power of cognition and affect, but also the development of our basic senses rest on the fact that we are social beings.”<sup>34</sup> From all angles, the Habasha have tried their best to prevent the Oromo from having clarity and integrity of the Oromo self; they have prevented the Oromo from establishing cultural and historical immortality through the reproduction and recreation of their history, culture and worldview, and from achieving maximum self-determination. “The pursuit of self-clarity is . . . intimately bound with the clarity developed first about one’s body, the body’s boundary and attributes, and later one’s larger world. This pursuit of clarity has survival, developmental, and organizing value. It entails both a differentiation from as well as integration with others and with one’s past. Without some clarity of the self, however tentative and tenuous, there can be no meaningful relating with others, no expression of inherent human potentials, no gratification of essential needs.”<sup>35</sup>

The founding fathers and mothers of Oromo nationalism purposely engaged in political praxis to save the Oromo from psychological, social, cultural, and physical death. Without a

measure of self-determination, a person cannot fully satisfy his/her biological and social needs, self-actualize, and engage in praxis as an active agent to transform society and oneself. “*Self-determination* refers to the process and capacity to choose among alternatives, to determine one’s behavior, and to affect one’s destiny. As such, self-determination assumes a consciousness of human possibilities, an awareness of necessary constraints, and a willed, self-motivated engagement with one’s world.”<sup>36</sup> The Oromo nation cannot achieve self-determination without developing all aspects of *Oromummaa*. The Ethiopian colonialists have assumed almost complete control over the Oromo in an attempt to deny them the right of self-determination, both individually and collectively. Unfortunately, the oppression is not limited to national borders. Ethiopian colonialists have psychological impacts on some Oromos in the Diaspora, and have infiltrated the Oromo Diaspora communities and their organizations in order to dismantle them. Oromo individuals and groups who do not clearly comprehend the essence of *Oromummaa* and self-determination and who do not struggle for them are doomed to both psychological and cultural death. “History and social conditions presents alternatives but also constraints. We can choose to act or not act. But even when we lack alternatives in the world as we find it, we do possess the capacity to interpret and reinterpret, to adopt one attitude and not another. Without the right of self-determination, we are reduced to rigid and automatic behaviors, to a life and destiny shorn of human will and freedom.”<sup>37</sup>

At this historical moment, most of the Oromo in the Diaspora are passive, and they do not struggle effectively for their individual and national self-determination. This has left their communities vulnerable to infiltration by Oromo collaborators, who then attempt to turn Oromos against one another. The founding fathers and mothers of Oromo nationalism as a social group reclaimed their individual authentic biographies and Oromo collective history and defined the Oromo national problem, and sought the political solution of national self-determination. Without psychological liberation, organization, *Oromummaa* consciousness, and collective action, the Oromo people cannot fulfill the objectives of the Oromo national movement. “A psychology of liberation would give primacy to the empowerment of the oppressed through organized and socialized activity with the aim of restoring individual biographies and a collective history derailed, stunted, and/or made appendage to those of others. Life indeed takes on morbid qualities and sanity becomes tenuous so long as one’s space, time, energy, mobility, and identity are usurped by dint of violence.”<sup>38</sup> The Oromo elites and leaders must realize that the Oromo cannot achieve their liberation objectives without understanding and overcoming the internalized values that they have learned from the oppressors and the inferiority complex that they are suffering from: “To transform a situation of oppression requires at once a relentless confrontation of oppressors *without*, who are often impervious to appeals, to reasons or compassion, and an equally determined confrontation of the oppressor *within*, whose violence can unleash a vicious cycle of auto-destruction to the self as well as to the group.”<sup>39</sup>

The Oromo national movement is still suffering from the oppressor within and the lack of effective leadership and organization. Since the Oromo masses are not organized and educated in the politics and psychology of liberation, they have been passive participants in the Oromo national movement. They have been waiting to receive their liberation as a gift from Oromo political organizations. This is a serious mistake. Oromo liberation can only be achieved by the active participation of the majority of the Oromo people. As Gilly Adolfo states, “Liberation does not come as a gift from anybody; it is seized by the masses with their own hands. And by seizing it they themselves are transformed; confidence in their own strength soars, and they turn their energy and their experience to the tasks of building, governing, and deciding their own lives for themselves.”<sup>40</sup> Developing national *Oromummaa* among the Oromo elites and masses is required to increase Oromo self-discovery and self-acceptance through liberation education.

Without overcoming the political ignorance and the inferiority complex among all sectors of the Oromo people, the Oromo national movement continues to face multi-faceted problems. The Oromo can challenge and overcome multiple levels of domination and dehumanization through multiple approaches and actions. As Patricia Hill Collins puts, “People experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context . . . and the systematic level of social institutions.”<sup>41</sup>

*Oromummaa* consciousness as ideology empowers the Oromo to intensify their struggle on these three levels. Developing individual political consciousness through liberation knowledge generates social change. This is essential to the creation of a sphere of freedom by increasing the power of self-definition for the liberation of the mind. Without the liberated and free mind, we cannot resist oppression on multiple levels. The dominant groups are against mental liberation, and they use institutions such as schools, churches or mosques, the media, and other formal organizations to inculcate their oppressive worldviews in the minds of the dominated. According to Collins, “Domination operates by seducing, pressuring, or forcing . . . members of subordinated groups to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group’s specialized thought. As a result . . . ‘the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situation which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.’ Or . . . ‘revolutionary begins with the self, in the self.’”<sup>42</sup> Every Oromo must be educated to acquire liberation knowledge to fight for his/her individual freedom and empowerment.

Without the liberation and empowerment of the individual, we cannot overcome the docility and passivity of our people and empower them to revolt and liberate themselves. “Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization . . . individuals in subordinate groups become empowered when we understand and use those dimensions of our individual, group, and disciplinary ways of knowing that foster our humanity as fully human subjects.”<sup>43</sup> Oromo individuals and groups need to engage in the process of national discovery and liberation while recognizing their diversity and unity. National *Oromummaa* as a political project recognizes Oromo diversity within a democratic national unity. For instance, today the Oromo have religious plurality that they need to adapt to national *Oromummaa*. All Oromo religious institutions, including the church and mosque, can reflect Oromo-centered culture and values and other democratic traditions and freely participate in spiritual and cultural development of Oromo society. All Oromo-centered institutions and organizations must protect Oromo women and children and encourage them to freely develop their talent through education and work.

### **Diversity, Unity, and National *Oromummaa***

Since the Oromo 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, professional, religious, class, and gender divisions. National *Oromummaa* facilitates the social construction of an Oromo national collective identity, which unites a significant segment of the Oromo for national struggle. Collective identities are not automatically given, but they are outcomes of the active mobilization process. Oromo nationalists can only reach at a common understanding of national *Oromummaa* and diversity through open, critical, honest dialogue and debate. 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 the Oromo. Oromo personal and social identities can be fully released and mobilized for collective actions if all Oromo recognize that they can freely start to shape their future aspirations or possibilities without discrimination. This is only possible through

developing an Oromo collective identity on personal and collective levels that is broader and more inclusive than gender, class, clan, family, region, professional, and religion. Basing this understanding on national *Oromummaa* eliminates differences that may emerge because of religious plurality or regional differences.

Despite the fact that the Oromo 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 *gadaa* 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 individuals and groups participate in collective action when such action is connected to the Oromo collective identity that makes such action meaningful. In every society, personal and social identities are flexible. Similarly, Oromo self-identity exists at the personal, interpersonal, and collective levels, and this confederation of identity is continuously shaped by Oromo historical and cultural memories, current conditions, and hopes and aspirations for the future.

Every Oromo has an internally focused psychological self and an externally focused social self. The Oromo social self emerges from the interplay between intimate personal relations and less personal relations. The former relations 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 the 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 national *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 national *Oromummaa*, the building of Oromo national organizational capacity is illusive.

Organizing the Oromo requires learning about the multiplicity and flexibility of Oromo identities and fashioning from them a collective national identity that encompasses the vast majority of the Oromo populace. This process can be facilitated by an Oromo civic and 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 the Oromo collective identity based on expanded *Oromummaa*. The politics of Oromo liberation constructs “a new Oromo family” in which all subgroups come together to regain their human dignity by overthrowing Ethiopian colonialism and by building a just and democratic society. In these processes national *Oromummaa* reflects the common denominator of Oromoness. *Oromummaa* as a project and a national ideology has yet to challenge the conditions that promote the politics of conventional wisdom because of the low level of cognitive liberation, the low level of global awareness, and the low level of political experience and organizational shortcomings.

### **Low Level of Cognitive Liberation**

At the individual level, cognitive liberation means having critical knowledge that allows one to confront a complex problem and solve it. It means also developing a high level of political and

cultural understanding and consciousness. On the political level, a critical understanding of the past and current problems and formulating a dynamic policy to address and solve them indicate cognitive liberation. Politicians and organizations with a high level of cognitive liberation push their national interest as first priority, and solve their residual differences through open dialogue based on the principles of a common denominator. Our people have lived under Ethiopian political slavery for more than a century. As a result, many are chained under ignorance and poverty. Most Oromos are a rural and scattered people without modern communication networks and information.

For most of them, understanding of the world is limited. Under these circumstances, most Oromos are fatalistic and think that external forces will solve their problems. What about formally educated Oromos? The legacy of Ethiopian political slavery has psychologically disabled educated Oromos; it has dwarfed their potentials and undermined their creativity. Some of them want to be free from Ethiopian colonialism, but as a practical matter they act like Ethiopians in their daily lives. Some educated Oromos are more Ethiopian than the Ethiopians themselves. What about the Oromo nationalist intellectuals? Although they began to defend the interest of the Oromo people, their cognitive liberation has not reached the level that they can build the Oromo organizational capacity. We cannot transform our cognitive liberation without increasing our knowledge of the globalized world order and its politics.

### **Low Level of Global Awareness**

As a consequence of the lack of critical understanding of the racialized nature of the global world order, most educated Oromos try to refashion the world after their disoriented perceptions rather than trying to understand how it works. The racialized capitalist world system is brutal to the people who do not have power and state to protect them. The modern world is heaven for those who have power and wealth. It is hell for most people, like the Oromo, who lack power, state, and wealth. Most Oromos naively think that this world cares, and somebody in it is going to help solve their political problems. They fail to understand that they only get support from others if they first help themselves and convince others that they can benefit by helping them. The Oromo can only achieve their liberation when they realize their human potentials. To do this, they must know their potentials as a nation, and refashion their understanding of the ways of the fast changing global system. The Oromo only achieve their freedom if they work for it.

Otherwise, the Oromo remain a powerless and victimized people without voice in the world. They need to learn about the world around them, and how other oppressed people have taken matters into their own hands by aggressively organizing and defending their collective interests. The Oromo will build their power, if they believe in themselves and take individual and organizational action to liberate their Oromia. If they continue to see themselves as powerless victims who fight one another while expecting some leaders or some organizations to liberate them, they remain hopeless victims. The Oromo need to understand the realities of the fast changing world order by overcoming their illusions and ignorance. Without cognitive liberation and critically and thoroughly comprehending the world around them, the Oromo cannot fully develop their political consciousness to overcome their organizational shortcomings.

### **Low Level of Political Experience and Organizational Deficits**

Because the Oromo people have lived under Ethiopian political slavery, they lack experience in building and running a strong political machine. The Oromo elites refuse to recognize their lack of experience. They tend to hide their ignorance through impression management, and pretend that they know every thing. A person who claims he or she knows everything is fool. Nobody is born with knowledge, and nobody knows everything. They fear to take action in order to avoid

making mistakes so that they can be considered perfect human beings. These elites also believe that their leaders and organizations know everything for them, and they have only to do what they are told to do. This tendency has created a wrong impression among the Oromo leadership. As a result, Oromo political leaders and organizations require absolute loyalty without listening to the voice of their followers. Such approaches stifle creativity.

Most of the Oromo elites believe in wait and see approaches. Without fulfilling their obligations, they expect miracles. If things go wrong, they are quick to blame those who have tried to do something. They need to stop transferring responsibility to others by blaming certain leaders and organizations. The Oromo need to give up their helpless sense of fatalism. The Oromo must establish a single standard by which they measure themselves both individually and organizationally before they blame others. When they do little or nothing they lack the moral standing to blame others. There is no external power or unknown perfect set of leaders who will lead them to the promised land of liberated Oromia. Those revolutionary Oromos who have high level of commitment have their own set of problems. They are not ready to share with the people their hardships, grieves, and their shortcomings. What they want from their supporters and sympathizer are blind loyalty and material assistance, not ideas and knowledge. They always want to tell them stories but they are not ready to listen to their supporters and followers. Because the supporters and sympathizers are not ready to accept a higher level of commitment, they are satisfied with this relationship.

The Oromo must recognize that ideas and knowledge can emerge from ordinary people. The capacity of revolutionary leaders is measured by their ability to listen to their followers and sympathizers and by their willingness to mobilize and coordinate the best ideas and knowledge directed toward taking action. Because the best ideas, knowledge, and other resources are not mobilized and coordinated by the political leaders and activists, the Oromo political and social organizations are unable to bring about a paradigm shift in the Oromo national movement. The Oromo movement needs to create a platform using an alternative knowledge of liberation and mobilization. We know that there are no ready-made answers for Oromo problems, and millions of Oromos need to work together to find solutions based on the principle of a common denominator. This is the only way to solve the organizational shortcoming at all levels; this cannot be achieved without embracing the ideology of national *Oromummaa*.

### ***Oromummaa* as Identity, History, Culture, and Nationalist Ideology**

Overcoming several obstacles, the founding fathers and mothers of the two pioneering Oromo national organizations, the Maccaa-Tuulaama Self-Help Association in the 1960s and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the 1970s, started to restore and revitalize national *Oromummaa*. These organizations established a roadmap for the burgeoning Oromo national movement. Unfortunately, the national movement has since been confronted externally by the forces of Ethiopian colonialism – with assistance from their global supporters – and internally by an Oromo collaborative class that serves the interests of the enemy of the Oromo people. Some Oromo elites have become raw materials for the Ethiopian regime and have implemented its terrorist and genocidal policies. Despite these external and internal challenges, in 1991, by contributing to the demise of the Ethiopian military government and by joining the transition government of the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government, the OLF had partially transformed conventional *Oromummaa* into national *Oromummaa*. Within a year, the attack on independent Oromo political organizations, particularly, the OLF, and institutions was intensified by the new *nafxayans* (new colonizers) before the Oromo national movement managed to achieve maturity. Consequently, the consolidation of the Oromo national leadership and the maturation of national *Oromummaa* have been incomplete.

As such, the movement's ability to defend itself from internal and external enemies has been significantly compromised. These challenges confronted the Oromo national struggle before the Oromo leadership could develop the ideological coherence and organizational capacity to catapult the Oromo national movement to an advanced stage. Recognizing the significance of national *Oromummaa*, the Tigrayan elites have been determined to halt its progress by killing or imprisoning Oromo revolutionary leaders. Although national *Oromummaa* embraces Oromoness, all Oromos did not develop this central ideology because of the several reasons explained below. Only those Oromos who have developed political consciousness and believe and participate in the Oromo national movement have the ideology of national *Oromummaa*. There are Oromos who speak *Afaan Oromoo* by being born to Oromo families and by being related to Oromo clans and express certain aspects of Oromo culture, but do not care about the Oromo national movement. Therefore, national *Oromummaa* goes beyond Oromoness. The concept of national *Oromummaa* emerged in the Oromo national movement with the deepening of Oromo nationalism and with further studying and understanding of the essence of Oromo history, culture, traditions, and identity.

Realizing that the concept of Oromo nationalism could not adequately capture the whole projects of the Oromo national movement, namely the reconstruction and development of Oromo history, culture, identity, and vision, some nationalist Oromo and Oromia scholars have begun to use and develop the concept of *Oromummaa* both theoretically and practically for empowering the Oromo nation to achieve individual and collective human liberation. *Oromummaa* as an aspect of Oromo history, culture, identity, nationalism, and vision builds on the best elements of the Oromo tradition, and particularly endorses an indigenous Oromo democracy. *Oromummaa* as an intellectual and ideological vision rejects the position of Ethiopianists, collaborationists, modernists, and mainstream Marxists and 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 and by promoting the struggle for national self-determination, statehood, sovereignty, and multinational democracy. Hence, *Oromummaa* is a complex and dynamic national and global project and opposes the ideologies of racism, classism, and sexism from without and from within.

As a national project and the central ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo nation to formulate its Oromo centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action empowering the people for liberation. As Bonnie K. Holcomb states, "The social and political process of prioritizing and articulating which ideas from among the set values embodies in *Oromummaa* will be made into a formula for action in the twenty-first century is the process of transforming *Oromummaa* into a guiding ideology. Such a process would go a long way toward solving the organizational problems that arise when ideology is not yet clearly formulated."<sup>44</sup> As a global project, it requires that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons and groups, 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 the promotion of a global humanity that is free from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

The foundation of *Oromummaa* is built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo history, tradition, and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. The main principles of *Oromummaa* are individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation that are built on the concept of *safuu* (moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa* principles. Although some Oromos have become adherents of Christianity and Islam, the concept of *Waqaa* (God) lies at the heart of



Oromo history, tradition, and culture. 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 are to manifest in human society. Although national and global *Oromummaa* emerges from Oromo historical, cultural and historical foundations, it goes beyond culture and history in providing an emancipatory 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* challenges the idea of glorifying monarchies or *mootis* (chiefs) or warlords that collaborated with European slavers and colonizers and destroyed Africa by participating in the slave trade and the project of colonization. It also rejects the notion of forming and maintaining an exclusive racist or ethnocentric state and promotes a multinational democratic state.

Those Oromo and African scholars who degrade African democratic traditions just as their Euro-American counterparts devalue the Oromo democratic system and consider indigenous Africans such as the Oromo primitive and “stateless.” But learning about Oromo society, with its complex democratic laws, elaborate legislative tradition, and well-developed methods of dispute settlement can present a new perspective for Oromo and African politics. As a national project and the central ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo to retrieve their historical and 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. As an ideology of human liberation, *Oromummaa* includes the vision of a democratic state and the principles of multinational democracy in order to be emancipatory, revolutionary, democratic, and inclusive.

Furthermore, *Oromummaa* as an element of history, culture, nationalism, and vision has the power to serve as a manifestation of the collective identity of the Oromo national movement. It is a revolutionary and emancipatory ideology. To be born from Oromo parents and to belong to an Oromo community cannot necessarily empower an Oromo individual to develop national and global *Oromummaa*. Such *Oromummaa* is acquired through learning about the Oromo culture and history and defending the Oromo national interest. 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. The further development of national and global *Oromummaa* is essential in unifying and consolidating the Oromo national movement.

### ***Oromummaa* as the Central and Unifying Ideology of the Oromo National Movement**

The building of an effective national organizational capacity is only possible when national and global *Oromummaa* can be packaged into national symbols, norms, values and policies that can be used to mobilize the Oromo nation as a whole so that it can engage in well-organized and coordinated collective actions at both the personal and interpersonal levels. In addition to a clear understanding of *Oromummaa*, practicing it as values, norms, and policies facilitates the mobilization of Oromo individuals and groups to overcome their political confusion and take concrete cultural and political actions in the quest to liberate the Oromo nation from Ethiopian settler colonialism and its global and regional supporters. *Oromummaa* as the central and unifying ideology mobilizes the best elements of Oromo political and cultural experiences for building national institutions and organizations with the capacity to liberate and develop Oromo society. “The ideology is the specific chosen beliefs that guide the behavior of its adherents and in so doing,” Bonnie K. Holcomb notes, “determine the construction of an organization, a set of institutions, and ultimately, even economic system.”<sup>45</sup>

Among other things, the lack of political experience, borrowed cultures and political practices, the abandonment of our democratic heritage of consensus building, and the lack of open dialogue and conversation have contributed to the Oromo political fragmentation. We know the result of this political fragmentation and the Oromo cannot afford to continue on this path. As the behavior and political practices of Oromo elites and leaders of independent Oromo institutions in the Diaspora—churches, mosques, associations, and political organizations—demonstrate, the legacy of Oromo war chiefs and the impacts of Ethiopian institutions are far-reaching. Leaders and followers spend most of their times producing gossips, rumors, conflicts and unproductive arguments and stories. They have little interest or time in learning about management, administration, and conflict resolution from their host cultures. The low level and uneven development of *Oromummaa* and the lack of open dialogue among Oromo nationalists, political leaders, and activists on the problems of regional and religious diversity have provided opportunities for the internal and external enemies of the Oromo people—political opportunists, free-riders, and regionalists of various forms—to fabricate and disseminate misinformation among the less informed Oromos in order to turn them against one another.

Individuals and groups that attempt to turn the Oromo against one another rather than uniting them to fight against Ethiopian colonialism are not the forces of political diversity. Using regional or religious categories consciously or unconsciously as political bases is tantamount to supporting the continued destruction of Oromo society. As the decentralization of the *gadaa* system during the 17th and 18th centuries without an overarching national political structure contributed to the defeat of the Oromo in the late nineteenth century, using localized or religious categories in the Oromo national movement will promote the perpetual subordination of the Oromo to Habashas. The educated Oromo elites have passed through colonial schools that were designated to domesticate or “civilize” them by molding them into intermediaries between the Oromo people and those who dominated and exploited them. They were disconnected from their history, culture, language, and worldview and trained by foreign educational and religious institutions to glorify the culture, history, language, and religions of others.

Consequently, most of them do not adequately understand Oromo history, culture and worldview. When Oromo nationalists emerged to liberate their people by rejecting the worldviews and institutions of the colonizers, they turned to Marxism-Leninism to fight against the Ethiopian colonial system. Although the Oromo movement has achieved many important things, the organizational and ideological tools that the movement have been using did not help in organizing the people effectively. The Oromo human and material resources are still scattered and used by the enemies who are committing hidden genocide on our people. The failure of Oromo nationalists and political leaders to frame Oromo-centric issues and to formulate policies and directives that promote pragmatic actions has given a great opportunity for those who functionally stand in the way of the liberation of Oromia. The Oromo national organizational capacity will develop when true nationalists and political leaders start to work openly and courageously by formulating practical domestic and foreign policies that can be implemented by a broad-based Oromo movement.

Although the Oromo can learn a lot from other forms of leadership, without developing the style of leadership that is Oromo-centric, the Oromo movement cannot build enduring national institutions and organizations. The broadening and deepening of *Oromummaa* require the cognitive liberation of Oromo leaders and followers. Leaders with cognitive and/or behavioral deficiencies will be unable to facilitate the broadening and deepening of Oromo nationalism and the development of Oromo personal, social, and collective identities. Because leadership as an activity involves intellectual guidance, directive and organizational capacity, Oromo leaders need to actively work to achieve full cognitive liberation. Leaders with full cognitive liberation can be

effective leaders by balancing their “leading” and “led” selves and by interacting and conversing with their followers. This requires critically and thoroughly understanding and practicing expanded *Oromummaa*. Through intense conversation between and among effective leaders and followers, strategic innovations and new solutions for existing problems can be formulated out of diverse perspectives and experiences. Democratic conversations allow Oromo civic and political leaders to be teachers and effective communicators, and also to be effective listeners and students.

Such leadership develops skills that empower all members of Oromo society to broaden national and global *Oromummaa* at the personal, interpersonal and collective levels. An Oromo individual cannot start an open and honest dialogue with other Oromo individuals without understanding expanded *Oromummaa* and engaging in dialogue with oneself. The Oromo individual should critically evaluate oneself and look at her/his own attitudes, perceptions, behavior, and knowledge with a single standard that she/he uses to evaluate others in relation to the Oromo national struggle. When an individual Oromo treats his/her Oromo sisters and brothers as he or she treats herself/ himself, the sense of justice, equality, and fairness starts. The sense of justice, fairness, *nagaa* (peace), accountability, and democracy are the principles of the Oromo tradition. Without understanding these basic principles, to make the claim that “I struggle for the liberation of the Oromo people” is problematic. Change must start with Oromo individuals. These individuals are both leaders and followers.

The Oromo political leadership must be guided by Oromo-centric cardinal values and principles that reflect honesty, fairness, and the use of a single standard, equality, and democracy. The emergence of Oromo nationalism from underground to public discourse in the 1990s allowed some Oromos to openly declare their *Oromummaa* without clearly realizing the connection between the personal and interpersonal selves and the Oromo collectivity. This articulation occurred without strong national institutional and organizational capacity that can cultivate, develop and sustain the ideology of expanded *Oromummaa*. The restoration of expanded *Oromummaa* requires good interpersonal relations and the proper treatment of one another to create sense of security, confidence, sense of belonging, strong and effective bonds, willingness to admit and deal with mistakes and increase commitment to our 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 of the pieces of information on self that an individual 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. The lack of a deep and critical understanding of Oromo culture, behavior, perceptions, actions, the criminality of the Ethiopian state, the brutality of the capitalist world system, and the inability to play by the rules of the system have created conditions conducive to engaging in the politics of self-destruction.

The politics of self-destruction that was started by Oromo war chiefs has been continued by some Oromo elites who are engaged in promoting themselves at the cost of the Oromo nation.

Those Oromos who engage in such politics lack the ideology of expanded *Oromummaa*. *Oromummaa* is about Oromo national politics and about rebuilding state power through organizing and enabling the Oromo people to solve their political, social, economic, and cultural problems as a nation. Without critically and deeply understanding *Oromummaa*, the Oromo will be unable to build the strong Oromo social and political institutions and organizations that will take the Oromo nation to social emancipation and national liberation. Therefore, accepting and practicing expanded *Oromummaa* are the only ways of unifying and consolidating the Oromo national movement.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Oromo nationalists must recognize, promote, and develop all aspects of *Oromummaa* as the central and main ideology and intellectual force of Oromo society by restoring and improving the democratic principles to remove and prevent any domination from without and within. The unifying ideology of *Oromummaa* must challenge the ideas of Ethiopianism and the collaborative class and other reactionary forces and cultural imperialism that have been targeting the Oromo culture and tradition for destruction. All Oromos who believe in social emancipation and national liberation and the restoration of an Oromia state and sovereignty in a multinational context are the owners of the national and global projects of *Oromummaa*. What are the immediate tasks of Oromo nationalists? They must teach their people and children the correct information about their conditions. Although the Oromo people have a lot of problems at this historical time, they have a lot of things that they must be proud of and celebrate them. The ancestors of the Oromo established a beautiful country and a democratic tradition.

The Oromo culture, history, language, worldview, and tradition are as valuable as that of other peoples. Explaining about the conditions of African Americans, Na'im Akbar notes, "It is through self-celebration that we heal our damaged self-esteem. Yes, feeling good about oneself is a legitimate activity of cultures. In fact, any culture, which does not make its adherents feel good about them, is a failure as a culture. It is through the energy of self-worth that humans are motivated to improve and perpetuate themselves."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the Oromo must be proud of the Oromo democratic tradition and their principles of justice, and *nagaa* (peace). While recognizing and celebrating their historical achievements, the Oromo must recognize their weaknesses and work hard to overcome them. The process of mental liberation requires courage, hard work, discipline, and commitment; it involves individual, family and community. National *Oromummaa* can be restored and developed by the active participation of Oromo individuals, families and communities. "Since the new consciousness can take a lifetime to begin to show tangible results," Akbar writes, "it takes a great deal of courage to persist in breaking the chains of the old consciousness and developing a new consciousness."<sup>47</sup>

Those of us who are a part of the Diaspora beyond Ethiopian political slavery must not waste our time and energy on trivial and unproductive issues; we must build our brains and communities to overcome the lonely and ill-equipped road to freedom. We do not need to wait for activists or politicians to engage us in mental liberation and community building since they are not better than us. Every Oromo nationalist has a moral and national obligation to promote and engage in consciousness-building projects and developing national and global *Oromummaa*. Colonialists use community divisions to keep mental shackles on their subjects, even in the Diaspora. They use divide-and-conquer strategies, replete with tricks and deceit, in order to destroy Oromo community life. This is one of the reasons why many Oromo communities in the Diaspora face substantial problems and are overwhelmed by perpetual conflicts.

Most Oromos – despite the fact that they brag about it – forget their *gadaa* tradition, which was based on accountability, democracy, solidarity, and collectivity. We must realize that there

is strength in accountability, democracy, solidarity, and unity, and there is weakness in loneliness and fragmentation. “As we gain greater knowledge and information, many of those divisions will disappear because they cannot stand under the light of Truth and correct information.”<sup>48</sup> In the capitalist world system, the less informed are the less organized. The less organized are the ones who are physically and mentally controlled by those who are organized. In forming solidarity and building our communities, we do not need to agree on everything; yet our unity must be built on our common denominator. As Akbar states, “In the process of liberation, it is important to recognize that *unity does not require uniformity*. We can stand together and preserve our separate qualities which serve to enhance further the objectives of freeing ourselves and all of our people.”<sup>49</sup> We need to have faith in ourselves both individually and collectively.

We have many talented individuals in many areas that can play central roles in the process of mental liberation and consciousness- and community building on the principles of expanding *Oromummaa*. “We must work to re-educate ourselves and our young people by seeking and studying new *information*. We must find every opportunity to celebrate ourselves and we must challenge the fear that causes us to hesitate in taking the chains out of our minds. We must work together and we must have faith that our struggle will be successful, regardless of the opposition.”<sup>50</sup> We must also stand with and celebrate our heroes and heroines who have broken the Ethiopian prison house by shedding their blood and sacrificing their precious lives to send us around the world as Oromo diplomats to contribute toward the liberation of the politically enslaved, psychologically chained, and economically impoverished Oromos. At this historical moment, we the Oromo in the Diaspora should overcome our passivity, political ignorance, individualism, naiveté, anarchism, fatalism, perceived inferiority, and community divisions by actively engaging in our psychological and mental liberation and by building our expanded *Oromummaa*.

How can we accomplish all these urgent tasks? We must attack the internalization of oppression and victimization by rejecting the worldviews of our oppressors through un-brainwashing our entire people. This can be made possible by promoting quality informal and formal education through establishing study groups, cultural centers, and related institutions for engaging in workshops, discussion groups, seminars, lectures, etc. These kinds of engagements help us in overcoming our weaknesses and in fighting the basis of our powerlessness through participating in political actions that can be demonstrated every day. This array of activities can facilitate the further mobilization of our material, cultural, and intellectual resources to further develop Oromo communities and national and global *Oromummaa*.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at a seminar of “Revival of *Oromummaa*,” Organized by the Oromo Community Organization, Washington, DC, September 1, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie K. Holcomb, “*Oromummaa* as a Construct or Peace Through Balance: *Oromummaa* in the Twenty-First Century,” Presentation prepared for the Oromo Studies Association Conference Roundtable,” Washington, DC, July 27-28, 2002, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> Bonnie K. Holcomb, “*Oromummaa* as a Construct,” p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *ibid*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion, see Asafa Jalata, *Contending Nationalisms of Oromia and Ethiopia*; and Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia*.

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<sup>8</sup> Ethiopian settler colonialism established five institutional arrangements in Oromia in order to tightly control Oromo society and intensify its exploitation: (1) garrison cities and towns, (2) slavery, (3) the colonial landholding system, (4) the *nafxanya-gabbar* system (semi-slavery), and (5) the Oromo collaborative class.<sup>8</sup> The colonialists were concentrated in garrison cities and towns and formulated political, economic, and ideological programs that they used to oppress their colonial subjects.<sup>8</sup> The settlers expropriated almost all Oromo lands, and forced most Oromos to work on these lands without payment. The Oromo intermediaries were used in subordinating the Oromo people to the colonial society. Many people were enslaved and forced to provide free labor to the colonial ruling class, and others were reduced to the status of semi-slaves to provide agricultural and commercial products and free labor for their colonizers.

<sup>9</sup> Bonnie K Holcomb, "Oromummaa as a Construct," p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Bonnie K. Holcomb, "Oromummaa as a Construct," p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Na'im Akbar, *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*, (Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates, 1996), pp. v-iv.

<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963[1961]), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *ibid*, p. 123.

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

<sup>15</sup> Fanon, Frantz, *A Dying Colonialism*, translated by Haakon Chevalier, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967[1965]), p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 2008[1952]), pp. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *ibid*. pp. 125-126.

<sup>18</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press,) pp. 248-249.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Rodney, *ibid*. p. 241.

<sup>21</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990 [1933]), pp. xiii, and 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Ibid*. p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed discussion, see Asafa Jalata, *Fighting against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012[2001]).

<sup>27</sup> Begna F. Dugassa, "Colonialism of Mind: Deterrent of Social Transformation," *Sociology Mind*, 1(2): 55-64.

<sup>28</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*. p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*. p. 123.

<sup>31</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *ibid*., p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *ibid*, p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*. p. 123.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*. p. 263.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*. p. 264.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 265.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 265-266.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 277.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 277-278.

<sup>40</sup> Gilly Adolfo. [1965] 1967. "Introduction," *A Dying Colonialism*, *ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 227.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>44</sup> Bonnie K. Holcomb, "Oromummaa as a Construct," p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Na'im Akbar, *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.