Gadaa (Oromo Democracy): An Example of Classical African Civilization

by

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Abstract

The paper briefly introduces and explains the essence of indigenous Oromo democracy and its main characteristics that are relevant for the current condition of Africa in general and Oromo society in particular. It also illustrates how Oromo democracy had functioned as a socio-political institution by preventing oppression and exploitation and by promoting relative peace, security, sustainable development, and political sovereignty, and how the *gadaa* system organized Oromo society around economic, cultural and religious institutions. Finally, the paper explores how the Oromo movement for national self-determination and multinational democracy struggles to revive and revitalize the Oromo democratic tradition.

Introduction

Prior to their colonization during the European Scramble for Africa by the alliance of European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 2005), the Oromo people were independent and organized both culturally and politically using the *gadaa* system (Oromo democracy) to promote their wellbeing and to maintain their security and sovereignty. But, today, the Oromo do not have any autonomous or democratic political representation; they have been ruled by the successive regimes of the Amhara-Tigray ethno-national groups that have been supported by global powers (Jalata, 2005; Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990). The Ethiopian colonial terrorism and genocide that started during the last decades of the 19th century still continue in the 21st century. Ethiopia, former Abyssinia, has terrorized and committed genocide on the Oromo people during the Scramble for Africa with the help of European imperial powers such as England, France, and Italy.

Without the expertise and the modern weapons they received from these European powers, the Amhara-Tigray warlords could not colonize Oromia (the Oromo country). The Oromo and Abyssinian peoples fought each other over territories, religions, and power between the 16th and mid-19th centuries without defeating and colonizing each other. This balance of power was changed by the intervention of the European colonial powers on the side of the Amhara-Tigray warlords in the second half of the 19th century.

During Ethiopian colonial expansion, Oromia, "the charming Oromo land, [would] be ploughed by the iron and the fire; flooded with blood and the orgy of pillage" (de Salviac, 2005 [1901]: 349). Calling this event as "the theatre of a great massacre," Martial De Salviac (2005 [1901]: 349) states, "The conduct of Abyssinian armies invading a land is simply barbaric. They contrive a sudden irruption, more often at night. At daybreak, the fire begins; surprised men in the huts or in the fields are three quarter massacred and horribly mutilated; the women and the children and many men are reduced to captivity; the soldiers lead the frightened herds toward the camp, take away the grain and the flour which they load on the shoulders of their prisoners spurred on by blows of the whip, destroy the harvest, then, glutted with booty and intoxicated with blood, go to walk a bit further from the devastation. That is what they call 'civilizing a land.'" The Oromo oral history also testifies that Ethiopians/Abyssinians destroyed and looted the resources of Oromia, and committed genocide on the Oromo people through massacre, slavery, depopulation, cutting hands, famine, and diseases during and after the colonization of Oromia.

According to Martial de Salviac (2005 [1901]: 350), "With equal arms, the Abyssinia [would] never [conquer] an inch of land. With the power of firearms imported from Europe, Menelik [Abyssinian warlord] began a murderous revenge." The colonization of Oromia involved human tragedy and destruction: "The Abyssinian, in bloody raids, operated by surprise, mowed down without pity, in the country of the Oromo population, a mournful harvest of slaves for which the Muslims were thirsty and whom they bought at very high price. An Oromo child [boy] would cost up to 800 francs in Cairo; an Oromo girl would well be worth two thousand francs in Constantinople" (de Salviac, 2005 [1901]: 28). The Ethiopian/Abyssinian government massacred half of the Oromo population (five million out of ten million) and their leadership during its colonial expansion (de Salviac, 2005 [1901]: 608, 278; Bulatovich, 2000: 66-68). According to Alexander Bulatovich (2000: 68-69), "The dreadful annihilation of more than half of the population during the conquest took away from the [Oromo] all possibilities of thinking about any sort of uprising . . . Without a doubt, the [Oromo], with their least five million population, occupying the best land, all speaking one language, could represent a tremendous force if united." The destruction of Oromo lives and institutions were aspects of Ethiopian colonial terrorism.

The surviving Oromo who used to enjoy an egalitarian democracy known as the *gadaa* system were forced to face state terrorism, political repression, and an impoverished life. Bulatovich (2000: 68) explains about the *gadaa* and notes, "the peaceful free way of life, which could have become the ideal for philosophers and writers of the eighteenth century, if they had known it, was completely changed. Their peaceful way of life is broken; freedom is lost; and the independent, freedom loving [Oromos] find themselves under the severe authority of the Abyssinian conquerors." Ethiopian colonialists also destroyed Oromo natural resources and the beauty of Oromia (the Oromo country): Oromia was "an oasis luxuriant with large trees" and known for its "opulent and dark greenery used to shoot up from the soil" (de Salviac, 2005 [1901]: 21-22).

As de Salviac (2005 [1901]: 21) also notes, "the greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape a richness and a variety which make it like *a garden without boundary*. Healthful climate, uniform and temperate, fertility of the soil, beauty of the inhabitants, the security in which their houses seem to be situated, makes one dream of remaining in such a beautiful country." As the Oromo people were killed, terrorized, and repressed, the Oromo natural resources were depleted and their environment and natural beauty were destroyed.

Human beings have basic attributes that Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan (1985: 262) characterizes as "essential human *needs* and essential human *powers*" in order to survive and develop fully. The people who were colonized and dominated cannot adequately satisfy their basic needs and self-actualizing powers: "(a) biological needs, (b) sociability and rootedness, (c) clarity and integrity of self, (d) longevity and symbolic immortality, (e) self-reproduction in praxis, and (f) maximum self-determination." Human beings must satisfy their basic biological needs such as food, sex, clothing, and shelter to survive; these biological needs can only be satisfied in a culture that provides sociability and rootedness. Those people whose culture has been attacked and disfigured by colonialism are underdeveloped; their basic needs and self-actualizing powers are stagnated. According to Bulhan (185: 263), "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."

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. Ethiopian colonialists expropriated Oromo economic resources, such as land, 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 were intended to uproot the Oromo cultural identity and to produce individuals who lack self-respect and become 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," Bulhan (1985: 263) 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."

Furthermore, the Ethiopian colonialists have attempted to introduce social and cultural deaths to the Oromo people in addition to millions of physical deaths for more than a century. That is why the Amharas and Tigrayans are mad at the current revival of Oromo culture, history, and the Oromo language, and the latter presently use the state machinery to control these developments in order to promote their political agendas at the cost of the Oromo. Both the Amhara and Tigrayan elites have also attempted to destroy Oromo selfhood in order to deny the Oromo both individual and national self-determination. From all angels, they have tried their best to prevent the Oromo from having clarity and integrity of Oromo self; they have prevented the Oromo from establishing their cultural and historical immortality through reproducing and recreating 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" (Bulhan, 1985: 264)

The founding fathers and mothers of Oromo nationalism purposely engaged in political praxis to save the Oromo individual and collective selves from psychological, social, and physical deaths. 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" (Bulhan, 1985: 265). The revival of *gadaa* empowers the Oromo to achieve their personal and national self-determination. The Oromo have internal power to make their choices from the best possible alternatives and to have control on what they do despite the fact that the Ethiopian colonialists have imposed on them nearly total control to deny them the right of self-determination both individually and collectively.

Currently, the Oromo are an impoverished and powerless political minority because they have been the colonial subjects of Ethiopia/Abyssinia since the last decades of the nineteenth century. However, numerically speaking, today the Oromo are estimated at 40 million of the 80 million people in the Ethiopian Empire alone, and they are larger than combined numbers of Tigrayans and Amharas. Some branches of the Oromo also live in Kenya and Somalia.

To change their deplorable status, presently the Oromo national movement is engaged in struggle to restore Oromo democracy and to liberate the Oromo people from all forms of oppression and exploitation (Jalata, 2010; 2012). A few elements of the Oromo educated class clearly understood the impact of Ethiopian colonialism on Oromo society by familiarizing themselves with Oromo history, culture, values, and various forms of the Oromo resistance to Ethiopian colonialism (Jalata, 1998).

These elements facilitated the emergence of the Oromo national movement in the 1960s and 1970s by initiating the development *Oromummaa* (Oromo culture, identity, and nationalism). Specifically, the emergence of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in the early 1960s and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in the early 1970s marked the development of *Oromummaa* and its national organizational structures. Since the 1980s, by replacing the OLF's Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, *gadaa* has reemerged as the central political ideology of the Oromo national movement (Jalata, 2005). As we shall see below, the revival of *gadaa* as the Oromo democratic tradition is the central aspect of *Oromummaa* or Oromo nationalism.

Gadaa as the Totality of the Oromo Civilization

The critical and comprehensive understanding of the classical Oromo civilization requires studying the historical, cultural, political, philosophical, religious, linguistic, and geographical foundations of Oromo society. This is a monumental task that cannot be adequately achieved at this historical moment. Currently our knowledge of the social and cultural history of Oromia (the Oromo nation) is very limited and fragmented. For generations, the Oromo have mainly transmitted their history and culture through oral discourse. Since Oromo scholars and others have been discouraged or prohibited by the Ethiopian colonial state from documenting Oromo oral traditions, adequate information is lacking. Due to the dominant role of oral history, Oromo historiography requires a thorough and critical study of oral traditions. For the Oromo, as for many African societies, the observation applies that "each time an old man [or a woman] dies a library is lost." The Ethiopian colonial state has suppressed the production, reproduction, and dissemination of the intellectual knowledge of the people by destroying and/or suppressing Oromo institutions, culture, and history.

For most Ethiopian and Ethiopianist scholars, Oromo history began in the 16th century when the Oromo were actively recapturing their territories and rolling back the Christian and Muslim empires (Jalata, 2005). The Oromo had at that time a form of constitutional government known as *gadaa* (Luling, 1965; Baissa, 2004: 101). Although we have limited knowledge of Oromo history before the 16th century, it is reasonable to think that this people did not invent the *gadaa* system just at the moment they were consolidating themselves through defensive and offensive wars and thereby entering "recorded history." Between the 16th and 19th, 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.

As Virginia Luling (1965: 191) mentions, "from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century the [Oromo] were dominant on their own territories; no people of other cultures were in a position to exercise compulsion over them." There are adequate evidences that indicate the Oromo people dominated the areas from Abyssinia, the Amhara-Tigray homeland, to Mombasa and from Somalia to the Sudan (albeit there were no well demarcated boundaries) before they were partitioned and colonized during the Scramble for Africa (Hambly, 1930: 176). To increase our understanding of the classical Oromo civilization, it is necessary to demonstrate the connections among Oromo peoplehood, culture, worldview, philosophy, religion, and politics. Let us start our analysis of the Oromo classical civilization with indigenous Oromo democracy as the central foundation of social and political institutions.

Oromo Democracy and its Major Principles

The indigenous *gadaa* system organized and ordered society around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions (Baissa, 1971, 1993; Legesse, 1973). We do not know when and how this system emerged. However, we know that it existed as a full-fledged system at the beginning of the sixteenth century. During this century, the Oromo were under one *gadaa* administration (Baissa, 1993). According to Lemmu Baissa (2004: 101),

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

Gadaa has three interrelated meanings: it is the grade during which a class of people assumes politico-ritual leadership, a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones, and the institution of Oromo society (Legesse, 1973; 2006). Discussing the philosophy of Oromo democracy, Asmarom Legesse (1973: 2) notes, "What is astonishing about this cultural tradition is how far Oromo have gone to ensure that power does not fall in the hand of war chiefs and despots. They achieve this goal by creating a system of checks and balances that is at least as complex as the systems we find in Western democracies."

Bonnie Holcomb (1991: 4) asserts that the *gadaa* system "organized the Oromo people in an all-encompassing democratic republic even before the few European pilgrims arrived from England on the shores of North America and only later built a democracy."

The *gadaa* 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 have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and the respect for basic rights and liberties (Baissa, 1971, 1993). There have been five *miseensas* (parties) in *gadaa*; these parties have different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of Oromo expansion and the establishment of different autonomous administrative systems (Lepisa, 1975; Ibssa 1992).

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, political and economic purposes. These two concepts – *gadaa*-sets (age-sets) and *gadaa*-grades (generation-sets) – are important to a clear understanding of *gadaa*. All newly born males would enter a *gadaa*-set at birth, which they would belong to along with other boys of the same age, and for the next forty years they would go through five eight-year initiation periods; the *gadaa*-grade would be entered on the basis of generation, and boys would enter their *luba* forty years after their fathers (Legesse, 1973: 81). In incorporating the age-classification system, *gadaa* is similar to age-sets practiced by the Masai, Kikuyu and the Nuer. However, its use of genealogical generations as its organizing elements makes it different and unique.

In 1522, the Oromo had already begun to participate in the extensive and intensive struggle in the Horn of Africa. This was before the Muslims seriously confronted Christian Abyssinia in 1527. In the first half of the 16th century, after two centuries of domination, the Muslims destroyed Christian rule and established their own under the leadership of one Ahmed Gragn for more than a decade.

The Oromo were caught in the wars of the Christian and Muslim empire-builders, and according to Darrel Bates (1979: 7), "The [Oromo] . . . of the southern and western highlands had suffered in their time from both parties, and were waiting in the wings for opportunities . . . to recover lands which had been taken from them." Internally, an increase in both population and cattle had exhausted the scarce resources; externally, the wars with both the Christians and the Muslims endangered the Oromo's survival as people.

Butta wars occurred every eight years by the Oromo, when power transferred from one *gadaa* grade to the next, and were organized for revenge, or for defensive and offensive purposes. In the beginning of the 16th century, when they began to intensify their territorial recovery and expansion through the *butta* wars, all Oromo were under one *gadaa* government.

This factor, according to Asmarom Legesse (1973: 8, 10, 74), and the ability of the *gadaa* system to consolidate the people both militarily and organizationally enabled them to expand or recover their territories and accommodate their increased population and stock. Their recovery and expansion signaled their survivability (Ta'a, 1986: 17). The Oromo fought twelve *butta* wars between 1522 and 1618, recovering, expanding, and establishing Oromia (the Oromo country) to its present boundaries (Ta'a, 1986: 21-28). In the course of their continued expansion into various regions, different groups established autonomous *gadaa* governments. Various Oromo groups kept their relations through the office of *Abbaa Muuda* (the father of anointment) (Ta'a, 1986: 10) and formed alliances or confederations during times of difficulty. The *gadaa* system has a very logical structure, but because of the interlinking of the two concepts of belonging and responsibility that are at its core, it is not easily accessible at first glance. Several descriptions are offered here. John Hinnant (1978: 213-214) says:

> [*Gadaa*] divides the stages of life, from childhood to old age, into a series of formal steps, each marked by a transition ceremony defined in terms of both what is permitted and what is forbidden. The aspect of *gadaa,* which throws the concept of age grading into confusion is that of recruitment. A strict age-grade system assumes that an individual's social passage through life is in tune with his biological development. An individual enters the system at a specific age and passes through transition rites at intervals appropriate to the passage from childhood through full adulthood to senility. However, recruitment into the *gadaa* system is not based upon biological age, but upon the recruitment that an individual remain exactly five stages below his father's level. Recruitment is thus based on the maintenance of one socially defined generation between father and son.

Describing how *gadaa* currently works in the Borana region of Oromia, Asmarom Legesse (1973: 8) asserts that "[*Gadaa*] is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsibilities. Each *gadaa* class remains in power during a specific term (*gadaa),* which begins and ends with a formal transfer ceremony." And "[society is organized] *into two distinct but cross-cutting systems of peer group structures. One is a system in which the members of each class are recruited strictly on the basis of chronological age. The other is a system in which the members are recruited equally strictly on the basis genealogical generations. The first has nothing to do with genealogical ties. The second has little to do.* Both types of social groups are formed every eight years. Both sets of groups pass from one stage of development to the next every eight years" (Legesse, 1973: 50-51).

Despite the emergence of various autonomous *gadaa* administration*s* after the mid-17th century, the central principles of the system remained intact. While establishing these autonomous local governments, the Oromo formed alliances, federations, and confederations to maintain their cultural and political solidarity and defend their security and interest from their common enemies (Bulcha, 1996: 50; Etefa, 2008). The possession of institution of *qaallu* (the spiritual leader) and the common *gadaa* government seems to have been what Mohamed Hassen (1990: 9) terms "'the special mark' of the Oromo nation." We have seen that Oromo males are involuntarily recruited to both age-sets and generation-sets. Male children join age-sets as newly born infants. Males born in the same eight-year period belong to an age-set. But they enter into the system of *gadaa* grades forty years after their fathers, and since one grade is eight years, fathers and sons are five grades apart. Male children can join advanced grades at birth, and may join men or old men who are considered to be members of their genealogical generations. Older men mentor young males in teaching rules and rituals, but the former treat the later as equals since there is no status difference between the two groups in a *gadaa* class. Members of a *gadaa* class share the same status and roles and perform their rights of passage from one grade to another collectively.

Although some Oromo accepted Islam by force or as resistance to Ethiopian colonial domination, and others were forced to accept Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity or willingly accepted other forms of Christianity, their worldviews "are still hidden under the surface" (Lambert, 1990: 42). Oromo prayers, blessings, and greetings manifest the Oromo worldview. "The words of prayers, blessings and greetings continuously create and recreate connections between the organizational and the cosmological structures," P. T. W. Baxter (1990: 247) writes, "such as the moieties and *gaada.*" Discussing the original system of Oromo thought and worldview, Lambert Bartels asserts (1990: 15) that "whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo's traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued almost unaffected, in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed have been very diminished or apparently submerged in new ritual cloaks."

In Oromo society, knowledge and information have been mainly transmitted from generation to generation through the institutions of family, religion, and *gadaa*. Young Oromo 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, 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.

At the stage of grade four "the *gadaa* classes and the age set come into being as a formal corporate group: Leaders are elected for both groups. The name of the most senior man in each group becomes the name of the group as a whole. *The two groups then become cross-linked, cross-cutting, structural units that operate as complementary institutions so long as they are both represented by living members* " (Legessee, 1973: 58) [author's emphasis]. Between the third and fourth *gadaa* grades, boys become adolescent and initiated into taking serious social responsibilities. The ruling group has responsibility to assign senior leaders and experts to instruct and council these young men in the importance of leadership, organization, and warfare. They also learn songs, parables, proverbs, cultural and historical maps, and other social skills that they can use in public speech to praise the living and dead heroes or to criticize and ridicule cowardice and traitors. Oratory, the art of public speaking, is highly valued in Oromo society; "the forms of delivery, the wit of the speaker, his tone of voice, his posture, eye contact and ability to command the attention of the audience" are skills to be honed and admired (Megersa, 1993: 36).

Young men are also trained to become junior warriors by taking part in war campaigns and hunting large animals; they learn the practical skills of warfare, military organization, and fighting so that they can engage in battle to defend their country and economic resources (Baxter, 1979: 69-95). P. T. W. Baxter (1979: 177) argues that the Oromo have used age-sets because generation-sets "cannot be an efficient means to mobilise troops, and a quite distinct organisation based on closeness of age . . . exists for that purpose." In the Borana community, where many elements of the *gadaa* system still exist, the assembly known as *Gumi Gayyo* (the assembly of multitudes) brings together every type of important living leaders, such as living– *Abba Gaddas*, the *qaallus*, age-set councilors, clan leaders and *gadaa* councilors, and other concerned individuals – to make or amend or change laws and rules every eight years (Huqqaa, 1998). The *Gumi Gayyo* assembly has the highest degree of authority than the *gadaa* and other assemblies, and other assemblies cannot reverse its decisions (Legessee, 1973: 93).

The *Abbaa Boku* (the father of scepter) was a 'chairman' who presided over the assembly. According to G. W. B. Huntingford (1955: 54): "The *Abbaa Boku* and his two colleagues are chosen from the oldest or most distinguished families, which are known as `families of Hayu.' The principal function of the *Abbaa Boku* is to preside over the parliament . . . to proclaim the laws, and to act when necessary as ritual expert in the *gadaa*-ceremonies." *Abbaa Gadaa* is another name for *Abbaa Boku.*

The *Abbaa Duula* (the defense minister) was also one of the leading figures in the *gadaa* government. He was the leader of *qondala* (army) and was elected by the people. His main responsibility included assisting the *Abbaa Boku*, especially during the time of war. The *Abbaa Boku* was also supported by a council, known as *shanee* or *salgee*, and retired *gadaa* officials. *Gadaa* laws were passed by the *caafee* (assembly) and implemented by officials. There was no taxation under this system except that *gadaa* leaders and their families were provided with necessary materials, such as food.

Despite kinship relationships are being such an important factors in Oromo society, those who are elected to office are expected to serve without regard to kinship ties. Nobody is above the rule of law in Oromo democracy. Lemmu Baissa (1993: 11) expresses the view that the *gadaa* system "as a whole "provided . . . the machinery for democratic rule and enjoyment of maximum liberty for the people." Despite the *gadaa* system being an egalitarian social system, women were excluded from passing through age-sets and generation-sets. *Gadaa* effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromo society, although it allowed two equally important separate and interdependent economic domains.

Explaining how the *gadaa* system brought these two domains together by establishing mechanisms of balancing, regulating, and safeguarding these domains, Qabbannee Waqayyo (1991: 8) argues that "men have controlled the mobile resources -- those that required going out from the homestead – herding, defense of livestock and land, tilling new fields, plowing, etc. Women have controlled the stationary resources – the house, the grain and other products of the fields once they are brought into *gotara* for storage, etc. Even the cattle around the house are under their control; women milk them, decide how much milk goes to the calves, how much to the people in the household for drinking, how much for butter or cheese to eat or sell, how much to guests who bring valuable information, become friends in time of need."

The balancing of the domains of women and men and maintaining their interdependence have been preconditions for keeping peace between the sexes and for promoting *safu* (moral and ethical order) in society (Kelly, 1992). "By exercising a real day-to-day control over the disposition of the resources at every point of the decision-making process in ways that are protected by the value system of society," Waqayyo (1991: 9) writes, "the woman wields determinative influence in the society as a whole." The *gadaa* system and the *siiqqee* institution had influenced the value system of Oromo society. In pre-colonial Oromo society, women had the *siiqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that "functioned hand in hand with *Gadaa* [sic] system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances" (Kumsa, 1997: 119). These two institutions helped maintain *safu* in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, and sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights (Kumsa, 1997: 115-145). If the balance between men and women was broken, a *siqqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society.

When there were violations of their rights, women left their homes, children, and resources and traveled to a place where there was a big tree called *qilxxu* and assembled there until the problems were solved through negotiation by elders of men and women (Kumsa, 1997: 129-130). According to Kuwee Kumsa (1997: 126), "Married women have the right to organize and form the *siiqqee* sisterhood and solidarity. Because women as a group are considered *halaga* [non-relative] and excluded from the *Gadaa* grades, they stick together and count on one another through *siiqqee* which they all have in common . . . in the strange *gosa* [lineage] where women live as strangers, *siiqqee* represents the mother and they even address each other as `daughters of a mother.'

They get together regularly for prayers as well as for other important individual and community matters. If men try to stop women from attending these *walargee* (meetings), it is considered against *safu.*"

Oromo women used different *siiqqee* mechanisms to maintain their rights; such mechanisms included the law of *muuka laaftu* (soften wood), the *abarsa* (curse), *iyya siiqqee* (scream), and *godaana siiqqee* (trek). As Kumsa comments, "because of their liminality, women wield a special religious power where they draw an enormous moral and ritual authority. Men, therefore, try to avoid their curse and seek their blessings . . . `Women in general are symbolically and politically liminal and correspondingly enjoy special sacred power as a class.' . . . people respect and revere a woman because *Waaq* made her to be respected and revered . . . . Interference with a woman's sacred authority is regarded as violating *seera Waaq* and *safu"* (Kumsa, 1997: 127).

A man who violated women's individual and collective rights could be corrected through reconciliation and pledging not to repeat the mistakes or through women's reprisal ritual: A group of women "ambush the offender in the bush or on the road, bind him, insult him verbally using obscene language that they would not normally utter in the direct presence of an adult male . . . pinch him, and whip him with leafy branches or knotted strips of cloth. In extreme cases, they may force him to crawl over thorny or rocky ground while they whip him . . . They demand livestock sacrifice as the price to cease their attack. If he refuses, they may tie him to a tree in the bush and seize one of his animals themselves. Other men rarely intervene " (Kelly, 1992: 187). With the colonization of the Oromo people and the destruction of *gadaa* and *siiqqee* institutions Oromo women have been subjected to three levels of oppression: racial/ethno-national, class, and gender oppression. How did the social structures of the Oromo society work before colonization?

The Origin and Branches of the Oromo

Between the 12th and 13th centuries, the Oromo were already organized into two confederations or moieties known as Barentu and Borana (Hassen, 1990: 4-6). All Oromo subgroups can and do trace their genealogies to these confederations. Practically, however, it is not possible "to trace in detail the manner in which further division and the formation of" these moieties, sub-moieties, clans, and lineages did occur (Haberland, 1963: 775). According to the Oromo oral tradition, these Borana and Barentu moieties descended from the same family stock called Oromo (Baxter 1983: 129-149).

Despite the fact that the Oromo claim that they descended from the same family stock, Oromo, they do not limit their kinships to biological ancestry. The Oromo kinship system has been based on a biological and social descent. The Oromo recognize social ancestry and avoid the distinction between the biological and social descent since they know that the formation of Oromo peoplehood was based on the biological and social kinship.

The Oromo have had a long history of cultural contacts with non-Oromo through war, marriage, economic relationship, and group adoption (Baxter, 1994: 174; Braukamper, 1989: 428). However, when there were wars and conflicts between the Oromo and their neighbors on economic and cultural resources, such as land, water, territory, trade route, and religious and political issues, the former imposed specific cultural policies to structurally and culturally change the conquered people in order to Oromoize them and consolidate Oromo society. Oromo laws strictly forbade the distinction between the social and biological descents (Megerssa, 1993: 27). P. T. W. Baxter (1994: 174) explains that "the adoption of adults, and often all their dependents used to be a common practice, which thereby incorporated them and their descendants into the family, and hence into the lineage, clan . . . These practices, though almost certainly widespread and frequent, took place despite the firm ideological contention that descent and inheritance were both rigidly patrilineal. Oromo social theory, like most others, was often very flexible in practice."

Through the process of group or individual adoption known as *moggaasa* or *guudifacha*, non-Oromo were adopted to Oromo *gossa* (confederation of clans), and were structurally and culturally Oromoized; these assimilated Oromo trace their descent to Oromo moieties and to the original Oromo (Braukamper, 1980: 25). Non-Oromo neighbors who were defeated in war or who wanted to share resources with Oromo groups would be adopted to the Oromo *gossa*: "The adopted groups now become collectively the `sons' of *gossa* . . . this arrangement was inspired by political, military and economic considerations, though clearly it is couched in the symbolism of kinship and affiliation" (Blackhurst, 1978: 243). The original two moieties, Borana and Barentu, had one overarching political structure called the *gadaa* system that helped fashion Oromo relations within themselves and with outsiders, but evolved the mechanisms for incorporating new members. According to Hector Blackhurst (1978: 243-244), "Oromo political structure as it existed before [the sixteenth century] expansion began was flexibly centralized, in that major office holders were located at fixed points but power was sufficiently diffused throughout the system to enable local-level decision making to continue without constant reference back to the center. However, the whole system was renewed spiritually and structurally by the meetings at the *caafee* where legal matters were discussed and the law laid down or reiterated."

Although the Oromo had a biologically- and socially-constructed complex kinship system, as we will see below, the formation and expression of Oromo peoplehood are mainly culturally shaped (Baxter 1994: 248). A better understanding of Oromo peoplehood and cultural identity requires the identification and exploration of the main characteristics and essence of Oromo social organizations and politico-religious institutions. Let us have some understanding of the Oromo kinship system on macro and micro-levels since it has been the basic social structure for defining common interests in resource management and utilization and in the process of establishing political and religious leadership and in forming leagues or confederations among Oromo society.

These leagues or confederations were based on a complex kinship system. The Oromo call the largest kinship system *gossa,* which is subdivided into moiety, sub-moiety and *qomo* (clan). These subdivisions have lower-order branches of kinship known as *mana* (lineage), *balbala* (minor lineages), and *warra* (minimal lineage or extended family) (Legesse, 1973: 37-42; Knutsson, 1967; Kelly, 1992: 40-63).

Wherever the Oromo were divided into sub-moieties and clans, there is "clear distinction between clans and lineages. The clan (*qomo)* is first of all a social group, consisting of several descent groups who need not all be Oromo. The heart of every clan is compounded of a cluster of lineages tracing their descent to the ancestor who gave his name to the clan" (Bartels, 1990: 205). There were five sets of sub-moieties that extended from the Borana and Barentu moieties: the Sabbo and the Gona, the Macha and Tulama, and the Raya and Assabo, the Siko and the Mando, and the Itu and Humbana (Megerssa, 1993: 24-37). The first three sets belong to Borana, and the second two sets are branches of Barentu. The descendants of these moieties occupy specific areas in Oromia today: The Raya and Assabo branches occupy northern Oromia (i.e., include some part of Tigray, the whole of Wallo and some part of northern Shawa). The regions of Macha and Tulama include most of the present regions of Shawa, Wallaga, Ilubabor, and the Gibe region. The branches of Sabbo and Gona occupy some part of the present Sidamo, part of Gammu-Gofa, and Borana, Gabra, and Guji lands, and some part of Kenya. The descendants of Siko and Mando occupy the Arssi and Bale lands, and some part of the Rift Valley. Finally, the branches of Itu and Humbana live in most of Haraghe and some part of Wallo in the north. Nevertheless, there have not been demarcated boundaries among these parts of Oromia.

Whenever members of these moieties are asked to identify their descents, they always provide the name of their moieties, rather than their lineages. The complexity of the Oromo kinship system is demonstrated by the existence of similarly named putative descent groups on the macro and micro kinship levels across the whole spectrum of Oromo society (Baxter, 1994: 177). Because of these complexities and the paucity of data, it is impossible at this time to fully reconstruct the Oromo kinship system. Linguistic, anthropological and historical data have linked the Oromo to the so-called eastern Cushitic-speaking peoples who have been in the Horn of Africa as far as their history is known (Lewis, 1966). These so-called eastern Cushitic speakers were historically, geographically, culturally and linguistically connected peoples. The Oromo have lived for their known history in the Horn of Africa as these related peoples (Greenfield and Hassen, 1980: 3).

Before the Arab elements immigrated to the Horn of Africa and mixed with some indigenous African peoples and developed into the Abyssinians or Habashas, the Horn of Africa was the home of the so-called Cushitic and other peoples. The Cushitic-speaking peoples settled on the central "Abyssinia/Ethiopian" Plateau, and were differentiated into subgroups. The Oromo were one of these groups that moved southward (Melbaa 1980: 5; Ehret, 1976). The Oromo have complex worldview, philosophy, and religion, as we shall see below.

Oromo Worldview, Philosophy, and Religion

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 b*eekumsa aadaa*, and b) knowledge of laws known as *beekumsa 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 thorough 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 (Megerssa, 1993: 20-23).

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 (Megerssa, 1993: 20-23). Oromo institutions can be better understood by studying the Oromo concept of social development (*finna).* As in any society, social changes occur in Oromo society by combining the cumulative historical experiences with the contemporary condition. Hence *finna* "represents the legacy of the past which each generation inherits from its forefathers [and foremothers] and which it transforms; it is the fertile patrimony held in trust by the present generation which it will enrich and bequeath to future generations . . . [it describes] a developing of the inner potential of society based on the cultural roots it has already laid down" (Kassam, 2007).

The Oromo concept of social development is constructed in seven interconnected phases: *Gudina, gabbina, ballina, badhaadha, hoormata, dagaaga*, and *dagaa-hoora*. When *gudina* indicates an improvement in cultural life due to the introduction of new experiences to Oromo society, *gabbina* involves the process of integrating cumulative cultural experiences with contemporary social conditions through broadening and deepening the system of knowledge and worldview. According to Aneesa Kassam (2007) "This can only be achieved through the full knowledge, consent and active participation of all members of the community. This implies the existence of a political organization, the forum for debate and the democratic means of reaching a consensus on all decisions affecting the common good. This should be obtained without force or coercion, without excluding the interests of any group, within the Oromo society and outside it, in the broader context of the national or international arena. To this end, the Oromo evolved a political process of power sharing reputed for its highly egalitarian nature: *Gadaa."*

Without *gadaa* or Oromo democracy there cannot be *finna* (development), peace, social justice, *kao (*freedom, peace, prosperity, success, and happiness), and *safu*. *Gabbina* emerges through democracy, peace, cooperation and consensus of all members of Oromo society of different levels to improve economic, cultural, and political conditions. Next to *gabbina*, there is a *ballina* phase. *Ballina* involves the expansion of enriched cultural and political experiences from Oromo society to another society through reciprocity of cultural borrowing and resources sharing and interdependence, based on the principles of democracy. This is the phase that focuses on foreign relations. It allows Oromo society to involve in cultural exchange and cooperation with neighboring peoples. The cumulative experiences of *gudina, gabbina,* and *ballina* lead to the phase of *badhaadha* (richness). Theoretically *badhaadha* is a phase at which the Oromo and their neighbors who accept their philosophy of social development obtain peace, prosperity, and wholeness since there are no incidences of conflict, poverty, disease, and natural calamities.

The *badhaadha* phase of development can only be achieved when there is peace between *Waaqa* (God), *uuma* (nature)*, and society. According to Baxter (1990: 238), human beings "must keep right with each other in order to keep right with God, and they must keep right with God to keep right with each other. Good social relationships and proper ritual relationships are reflexes of each other. Violence between men is both a cause and effect of God's displeasure." The development of this stage facilitates the emergence of the *hoormaata* phase. During this phase, animals and people reproduce and multiply because of availability of abundant resources and peace. Following this phase there is a development phase known as *dagaaga*; this is the stage at which development cycles are assessed and integrated to maintain even and sustainable development. At the final stage of development called *daga-hoora*, Oromo society expands its cumulative cultural experiences of development to neighboring peoples through different mechanisms depending on a given condition. Sometimes, at this stage the Oromo had conflict with their neighbors because of the competition over resources, such as land and water.

Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, when European imperialist intervention changed the balance of power in favor of the Abyssinians, the Oromo easily defeated their competitors due to their *gadaa* organizational capacity and military capability. The Oromo religion called *Waaqeefana*, worldview, philosophy, and politics have been interconnected and influenced one another. Oromo religious and philosophical worldview considers the organization of spiritual, physical and human worlds as interconnected phenomena, and *Waaqa*, the creator, regulates their existence and functions in balanced ways. Explaining how Oromos believe that *Waaqa* directs the world from above and controls everything from within, Kassam (2007) expounds that the "image of creation has important consequences for the Oromo vision of the universe as a whole. It has influenced among other aspects of its traditional culture, its political and economic thought, and determined its traditional system of government and modes of production."

The Oromo use three concepts to explain the organization and interconnection of human, spiritual and physical worlds. These three concepts are *ayaana* (spirit), *uuma* (nature), and *safu* (moral and ethical order). The Oromo believe that through *ayaana, Waaqa* (God) creates and regulates human and physical worlds in balanced ways. This *ayaana* also maintains the connection between the creator and the created. Oromo society has organizing principles for its known and unknown universe like any society; and *ayaana* is a major organizing principle of Oromo cosmology through which the concepts of time and creation are ordered (Kassam, 2007).

Ayaana as a system of classification and an organizing principle of Oromo cosmology establishes the connection between *Waaqa* (the Creator/God) and the created (nature and society) by differentiating and at the same time uniting the created things and the Creator (Kassam, 2007). The Oromo believe that *Waaqa,* the Supreme Being, created *ayaana* and uses it to organize scattered things into order. As Gemetchu Megerssa (1993: 95) explains, "*ayaana* is the mechanism by which the creator propels itself into becoming its own opposite, and dwells in that which it creates. This is then transposed to explain the basic principles that embed themselves in the diverse Oromo institutions, since there is no distinction between the laws of thought, the laws of nature, history and society." The concept *uuma* includes everything created by *Waaqa* including *ayaana. Safu* is an ethical and moral "code that Oromos use to differentiate bad from good and wrong from right . . . [*S]afu* `constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one on the right path; it shows the way in which life can be best lived'" (Megerssa, 1993: 255).

The Oromo claim that the understanding of laws of *Waaqa,* nature, and society both morally and ethically and living accordingly is necessary. They believe in God's law and the law of society that they establish through the *gadaa* system of democracy to maintain *nagaa* (peace) and *safu* among *Waaqa*, society, and nature to achieve their full human destiny known as *kao* or *kayyo* (Hinnant, 1978: 210). Respect for the laws of *Waaqa* and *gadaa* have been essential to maintain *nagaa Oromo* (Oromo peace) and *safu* (moral balance) in society (Hinnant, 1978: 207-243: Knutsson, 1967; de Loo, 1991).

Most Oromos believe that they had full *kao* before their colonization since they had freedom to develop their independent political, economic, cultural and religious institutions. Original Oromo religious leaders, *qaallus,* have had a moral authority and social obligation to oppose tyrants and support popular Oromo democracy and *gadaa* leaders, and to encourage harmonious and democratic relations based on the principles of *safu, kao, Waaqa,* and *uuma.* The *qaallu* "is thought to possess sacred characteristics that enable him to act as intermediary between the people and . . . [God]," and "he had no administrative power, but could bless or withhold blessings from *gadaa* leadership, and had an extraordinary power to curse anyone who threatened the wellbeing of the entire community by deviating from . . . [God's] order" (Kelly, 1992: 166).

The *qaallu* institution has been committed to social justice, the laws of God, and the rule of law, and fair deliberation; the *qaallu* "residence was considered politically neutral ground, suitable for debating controversial issues and for adjudicating highly charged disputes, although he himself might not take a prominent role in proceedings" (Kelly, 1992: 166). The *qaallu* institution has played an important role in protecting original Oromo culture, religion, worldview, and identity. When those Oromos who were influenced by this institution kept their Oromo names, most Oromos who were converted to Islam or Christianity willingly or by force abandoned their Oromo names and adopted Muslim or Christian names depending on their borrowed religion. The *qaallu* can be credited with having played an indirect role in the preservation of the Oromo identity and the Oromo political system. The criteria to be a *qallu* included seniority in lineages, respectability in the community, expertise in ritual practices, moral qualification, respect for cultural taboos, sound social status, and other leadership qualities (Knutsson, 1967: 66-67). The leader of all *qallus* was known as *Abbaa Muuda* (father of the anointment) who was considered to be the prophet and spiritual leader of Oromo society. Oromo pilgrims traveled to the residence of *Abbaa Muuda* to receive his blessing and anointment to be ritual experts in their respective regions (Knutsson, 1967: 148).

Abbaa Muuda served as the spiritual center and symbol of Oromo unity and assisted all Oromo branches to keep in touch with one another for several centuries; "as the Jews believe in Moses and the Muslims in Muhammad, the Oromo believe in their *Abbaa Muuda [sic]"* (Hassen, 1991: 79). *Abbaa Muuda* like other *qaallu* leaders encouraged harmonious and democratic relations in Oromo society. According to the *qaallu* mythology, *Abbaa Muuda,* the original Oromo religious leader was descended from heaven (Knutsson, 1967; Gololcha, 1988). Oromo representatives traveled to the highlands of the mid-south Oromia to honor *Abbaa Muuda* and to receive his blessing and anointment that qualified them as pilgrims known as *jilas* to be ritual experts in their respective areas (Knutsson, 1967: 148). When Oromo representatives went to him from far and near places to receive his blessings, *Abbaa Muuda* commanded them "not to cut their hair and to be righteous, not to recognize any leader who tries to get absolute power, and not to fight among themselves" (knutsson, 1967: 148).

In its modified form, the *qaallu* institution exists in some parts of Oromia, such as in the Guji and Borana areas; it still protects an Oromo way of life, such as dispensing of local justice based on Oromo customs and providing solutions to problems created by a changing social condition (Knutsson, 1967: 133-135). The *qallus* of Guji and Borana are ritual leaders, advisors, and ritual experts in the *gadaa* system. The *qallus* "possess the exclusive prerogative of legitimizing the different *gadaa* officials, when a new *gadaa* group is initiated into the politically active class" (Knutsson, 1967: 142). The Oromo still practice some elements of Oromo democratic values in the areas where the *gadaa* system was suppressed a century ago. The *gadaa* system is still practiced in the Borana and Guji regions under the control of the Ethiopian colonial system in its modified form; it helps maintain peace, exchange knowledge and practice rituals among some clans and regional groups (de Loo, 1991: 25).

The current *gadaa* of Borana and Guji cannot fully reflect its original political culture under Ethiopian colonialism. Theoretically, most Oromos including those intermediaries who are collaborating with the enemies of the Oromo recognize the importance of *gadaa,* and some Oromo nationalists struggle to restore genuine Oromo democracy.

Efforts for Reviving and Revitalizing *Oromo Democracy*

Some core Oromo nationalist scholars advocate that without refining and restoring elements of the original Oromo political culture of *gadaa*, the Oromo society cannot fully develop *Oromummaa,* which is absolutely necessary to achieve national self-determination, statehood, and democratic governance. Recognizing that Oromo identity and peoplehood are an expression of Oromo culture, some Oromo nationalist scholars have started to study the cultural foundations of Oromo society to understand the whole essence of this society. Such scholars believe that studying, understanding, and restoring the original Oromo political institutions by refining and adapting them to contemporary conditions are practical steps towards unifying and consolidating the Oromo national movement.

Some Oromo nationalists have already started to develop *Oromummaa* ideals based on original Oromo cultural foundations. The Oromo national struggle has initiated the Oromo cultural movement based on the following Oromo concepts: *Oromummaa*, *gootummaa* (bravery and patriotism), *walabummaa* (sovereignty), *bilisummaa* (liberation), *gadaa* (popular Oromo democracy), *nagaa* (peace), and kao or *kayyo* (prosperity and peace) (Jalata, 2007). Furthermore, core Oromo nationalist leaders assert today that all concerned Oromos should participate in revitalizing the Oromo national movement by applying some elements of *gadaa,* aiming at establishing a future Oromia state, sharing sovereignty with others, implementing internal peace within the Oromo society, and promoting peace with Oromia's neighbors. They also note that the Oromo national struggle has now reached at a level where it requires mass mobilization and participation in order to succeed. In this mobilization, they recommend the movement to use the ideology and principles of *gadaa* democracy enshrined in *Oromummaa* to mobilize the entire nation spiritually, financially, militarily, and organizationally to take coordinated political and military actions.

Gadaa, as an emblem of an Oromo cultural totality with its democratic traditions, has also become an ideological expression of the Oromo national movement. Holcomb (1993: 4) notes, "*Gadaa* represented an ideological basis for the expression of Oromo nationalism. This expression empowered the Oromo to resist oppression, become self-conscious as a nation in the twentieth century in the face of intense subjugation . . . *Gadaa* represents a repository, a storehouse of concepts, values, beliefs and practices that are accessible to all Oromo. The challenge the Oromo face now is the serious of fashioning elements of the heritage into an ideology, which empowers the nation to achieve the self-determination that the people aspire to."

Also, a few Oromo scholars suggest that Oromo political organizations need to use the Oromo political wisdoms and experiences in order to reach the national organizational capacity and to throw off the chains of Ethiopian colonialism. They also recommend that after bringing together *gadaa* experts and Oromo intellectuals who are familiar with the Oromo democratic traditions, the Oromo national movement should start to formulate procedures, strategies, and tactics for building a national assembly with supreme authority called *Gumii* Oromia. At this national *Gumii*, they suggest representatives of all Oromo sectors, all serious and independent Oromo liberation fronts and organizations should carry out their national obligations. This national *Gumii* must be modeled after the *Gumii Gayyo*:

In Oromo democratic traditions, the highest authority does not reside in the great lawmakers who are celebrated by the people, nor the rulers who are elected to govern for eight years, nor hereditary rights, nor the age-sets and age-regiments who furnish the military force, nor the *abbaa duula* who lead their people in battle. It resides, instead, in the open national assembly, at which all *gadaa* councils and assemblies . . . active and retired are represented, and *warra Qaallu*, the electors, participate as observers. The meetings that take place every eight years review the conduct of the ruling *gadaa* council, punish any violators of law, and remove any or all of them from office, should that become necessary. In such sessions, a retired *abbaa gadaa* presides. The primary purpose of the meetings of the national assembly, however, it to re-examine the laws of the land, to reiterate them in public, to make new laws if necessary, and to settle disputes that were not resolved by lower levels in their judicial organization (Legesse 2006, 211).

The *Gumii Gayyo* is an expression of the exemplar model of the unwritten Oromo constitution. Reframing and transforming the unwritten Oromo constitution into a new written national constitution based on Oromo democratic principles require absolute commitment from Oromo nationalists and their organizations. As Asmarom Legesse (2006: 255) puts, "Oromo democracy is not perfect: if it were, it would not be democratic. Like all democratic institutions, it is the product of changing human thought that must always be re-examined in relation to changing historic circumstances." The underlying assumption is that by establishing the National Assembly of *Gumii* Oromia, Oromo nationalists and organizations of the Oromo national movement aim to frame a written Oromo constitution by adapting older Oromo political traditions to new circumstances while also learning from other democratic practices. Those who promote the idea of building *Gumii* Oromia recommend that the Oromo national movement needs to address three major issues. The first issue is to further develop *Oromummaa* to its fullest capacity by overcoming its unevenness and deficiencies. This will strengthen the Oromo national organizational capacity.

Between the times when the Oromo were colonized and until Oromo nationalism emerged, Oromoness primarily existed on personal and the interpersonal levels since the Oromo were denied opportunities to form national institutions. Expressed Oromoness was targeted for destruction; colonial administrative regions established to suppress the Oromo people and exploit their resources. As a result, Oromo relational identities have been localized and not strongly connected to a collective Oromo national identity. The Oromo were forcibly separated from one another and prevented from exchanging goods and information with one another for more than a century. They were exposed to different cultures (i.e., languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and borrowed an array of them. Consequently, today there are Oromos who have internalized these externally imposed regional or religious identities because of their low level of political consciousness or because of their political opportunism. The Oromo people who did not develop national political consciousness still confuse clan, regional or religious politics with Oromo national politics.

Overcoming these political weaknesses by building Oromo national organizational capacity is only possible when *Oromummaa* as a national vision is accepted, energizes and unites the entire Oromo nation. As an element of culture, nationalism, and vision, national *Oromummaa* has the power to serve as a manifestation of the collective identity of the Oromo national movement. The basis of national *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. The main foundations of national *Oromummaa* are rooted in the rights of individual and collective freedom, justice, popular democracy, and human liberation, which are built on the concept of *safu* (Oromo moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in *gadaa* principles. As the ideology of the Oromo national movement, national *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo to retrieve their cultural memories, assess the consequences of Ethiopian colonialism, and give voice to their collective grievances. National *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 community that will be free from all forms of oppression and exploitation. Therefore, *Oromummaa* is seen as a complex and dynamic national and global project.

As a national project and the central ideology of the Oromo national movement, *Oromummaa* enables the Oromo to 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 regional and global humanity that will be 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.

The foundation of *Oromummaa* must be built on overarching principles that are embedded within the Oromo democratic tradition and culture and, at the same time, have universal relevance for all oppressed peoples. Although, in recent years, many Oromos have become adherents of Christianity and Islam, the concept of *Waaqa* (God) lies at the heart of Oromo traditions and culture. In Oromo traditions, *Waaqa* is the creator of the universe and the source of all life. The universe created by *Waaaq* contains within itself a sense of order and balance that is to be made manifest 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. Those Oromos who endorse and glorify Ethiopianism and clan/regional politics are undermining *Oromummaa* in order to enjoy power and material benefits at the cost of the Oromo nation and other peoples.

Without recognizing the centrality of *Oromummaa* for the national struggle, the Oromo cannot develop a victorious consciousness that equips them with the knowledge of liberation. *Oromummaa* as an intellectual and ideological vision places the Oromo man and woman at the center of analysis and at the same time goes beyond Oromo society and aspires to develop global *Oromummaa*. *Oromummaa* challenges the idea of glorifying African monarchies, chiefs, or warlords that have collaborated with European slavers, colonizers and neo-colonialists and destroyed Africa by participating in the slave trade and the projects of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and global imperialism.

Those Africanist 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." Challenging the view of Euro-American racist and "modernist" scholars, Asmarom Legesse (2000: 30) asserts that "since monarchy was in decline in most Europe, and the transition to democracy became the epitome of Europe's highest political aspirations, admitting that some varieties of democracy were firmly planted in Africa in the 16th century when in fact they were not fully established in Britain, the United States and France until the 17th or 18th century would have made the ideological premise of the 'civilizing mission' somewhat implausible. The idea . . . that African democracies may have some constitutional features, which are more advanced than their European counterpart was and still is considered quite heretical."

Although the priority of the Oromo national movement is to liberate Oromia and its people, the movement has moral and political obligations to promote social justice and democracy for other peoples who have suffered under the successive authoritarian-terrorist governments of the Ethiopian Empire.

Therefore, the Oromo movement needs to build a political alliance with national groups that endorse the principles of national self- determination and multinational democracy. A democratic Oromia should play a central role in a federated multinational democratic state because of its democratic tradition, the size of its population, geopolitics, and abundant economic resources. The Oromo national movement should demonstrate to Oromo society and their neighbors that the Oromo nation is serious about statehood, shared sovereignty, and egalitarian multinational democracy.

Oromummaa, as oppressed nationalism and a critical aspect of Afrocentric worldview, builds on the best elements of Oromo culture and traditions and endorses an indigenous Oromo democracy. As an aspect of Afrocentric worldview (Asante, 1990) that sees an African culture as the center of African life and the African Diaspora, *Oromummaa* bases its vision on Oromo popular democracy. The aspiration to restore this form of popular democracy is similar to the idea of developing Afrocentric awareness in the African and African diaspora communities. According to Molefi Kete Asante (1988: 49), a critical Afrocentric awareness develops "when the person becomes totally changed to a conscious level of involvement in the struggle for his or her own mind liberation. Only when this happens can we say that the person is aware of the collective consciousness will. An imperative of will, powerful, incessant, alive, and vital, moves to eradicate every trace of powerlessness."

Those who endorse and glorify Ethiopianism are undermining this Afrocentric awareness in order to enjoy power and material benefits at the cost of various African population groups. Hence progressive *Habashas,* ordinary Amharas and Tigrayans, other Africans, and the African Diaspora must recognize the negative consequences of Ethiopianism and support the struggle for self-determination, multinational democracy, and development in Oromia, Ethiopia, and beyond. Without recognizing the centrality of Africa for humanity in general and the significance of indigenous African cultures in particular, we cannot develop "a victorious consciousness" (Asante, 1988) that equips us with the knowledge of liberation. This knowledge of liberation must be a critical Afrocentric one that "places the African person at the center of analysis" by making "the African person subject, and not object, of study" (Asante, 1990). Similarly, *Oromummaa* 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 promoting the struggle for self-determination and multinational democracy.

Recognizing the existence of various forms of indigenous African democracy before Africa was partitioned and colonized and challenging Euro-American-centric scholarship and Ethiopian studies that rationalize and justify racial/ethno-national inequality can help in developing a human-centric and original scholarship. Learning about Oromo society—with its complex democratic laws, an elaborate legislative tradition, and well-developed methods of dispute settlement—and the Oromo national struggle can present a new perspective for Africana studies and politics.

Africans and the African Diaspora and other oppressed peoples can ally with one another on global level by exchanging political and cultural experiences and re-creating the ideology of pan-Africanism from "below" and by building global mutual solidarity based on the principles of popular democracy and egalitarian world order. As globalization and transnational capitalism intensify its barbarism and terrorism through looting and destroying indigenous population groups, such as the Oromo, and others, the choice of establishing regional and global mutual solidarity of the oppressed and exploited human groups on the principles of popular democracy and egalitarian world order will become absolutely necessary. The Oromo classical civilization can immensely contribute to such alternative liberation projects.

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