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Summer August, 2014

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/asafa_jalata/84/

Gadaa/Siqqee as the Fountain of Oromummaa and the Theoretical Base of Oromo Liberation¹

Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer

Every society has its unique central organizing and ruling ideology² and theoretical models in a given historical epoch that it uses as its lenses to look at and interpret the world and to survive freely and advance its civilization or ways of life without disruption from within and without. Ideology plays many roles in a society, and its essential function is to define and promote the political, material, and cultural interests of a group, a nation, a social class, a state, or other entities; it also "offers an explanation and an evaluation of political, economic, and social condition, provides its holders a compass that helps orient them and develop a sense of identity, and tenders a prescription for political, economic, or social action."³ Before the Oromo were colonized, they, too, had their central organizing and ruling ideology and theoretical models that were embedded in the *gadaa/siqqee*⁴ civilization that organized and guided them as a society socially, culturally, religiously, politically, militarily, and economically. I advance the idea that without retrieving and developing the best elements of their heritage, the Oromo cannot fully develop *Oromummaa* (national culture, identity, and ideology) as their organizing central ideology and their theoretical model of liberation in order to empower themselves as a nation in the twenty first century. While developing their ideology and theoretical model,

Oromo nationalists need to recognize and overcome the devastating ideologies, behaviors, and theoretical models of their oppressors that have confused and disempowered their nation.

Oromo nationalists who are proud of the Oromo democratic tradition of the *gadaa/siqqee* and their egalitarian principles need to critically and adequately study and ideologically and theoretically incorporate the best elements of this tradition to their nationalist narratives and practices. Most Oromo intellectuals have uncritically adapted the knowledge, theories, and ideologies that they have learned from colonial education; mainstream theories such as modernization and oppositional theories such as Marxism that these intellectuals know and use do not neatly fit to the Oromo condition. I argue that the major reason why the Oromo national movement faces a crisis due to the lack of a coherent ideology and organization emerges from the contradictions between the ideologies and theories that the movement has uncritically borrowed and the *gadaa/siqqee* ideology and theory that the Oromo masses manifest in their daily lives. Without developing an *Oromummaa* ideology and *gadaa/siqqee* theoretical models that will appeal to the ordinary Oromo, it is very difficult to raise their political consciousness, organize them, and build a formidable institutional and organizational capacity that can challenge the Ethiopian colonial state that is supported by global imperialism and the imperial interstate system.

Our foremothers and fathers who resisted foreign domination and exploitation and who preserved the reservoir of Oromo cultural and historical knowledge translated their experiences into collective action by building a national movement that started to manifest itself in the Bale armed struggle, the birth and growth of the Maccaa-Tuulama Self-Help Association, the cultural and artistic renaissance of the Affran Qallo Oromo, and the galvanization of these cumulative experiences into the birth and survival of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Prominent Oromo nationalist leaders such as Haile Mariam Gamada, Alemu Qixeesa, Mamo Mazamir, Elemu Qilxu, Baro Tumsa, and others played key roles in building institutions and organizations and the Oromo national movement by writing Oromo history with their suffering and blood. Tens of thousands of Oromo heroines and heroes have followed these giants have built the Oromo national movement by sacrificing their precious lives for the liberation of the Oromo. The current generations of Oromo nationalists are still dying in the forests of

Oromia and cities while others are suffering in prisons and concentration camps for defending the national rights of their people. Imaging the liberation of the Oromo nation and fearing its potential, the Ethiopian colonial state and the new and old colonial settlers are attacking Oromo nationalists in order to destroy Oromo nationalism and maintain their terrorist and colonial practices in Oromia.

The Oromo national movement is engaged in a politics of liberation that is rooted in Oromo values, beliefs, ideas or ideologies, and culture that reflect the Oromo national identity and political interests. All these cultural and ideological aspects are encapsulated and manifested in *Oromummaa*. *Oromummaa*, as the Oromo national ideology, defines and promotes the Oromo political, material and cultural interests in order to develop an Oromo political community and transform it into a state through destroying all powers and ideologies, mainly Ethiopianism,⁵ that have kept the Oromo society subject to colonialism and political slavery. According to Antonio Gramsci, political domination is practiced through ideological hegemony.⁶ Ethiopianism, as an ideological concept, has been imposed on the Oromo via physical coercion including terrorism and mental genocide. All forms of domination, including colonial domination, cannot be practiced without imposing "a structure of meaning that [reflects] its leading beliefs, values, and ideas;"⁷ the process through which the dominated internalizes the ideology, worldview, culture, and mentality of the rulers as natural order is called ideological hegemony by Gramsci. The triple ideological problems of the Oromo national movement are Ethiopianism and the failed ideologies and theories of the East and the West in the Horn of Africa that have victimized the Oromo people.

The Inadequacy of Borrowed Ideologies and Theories

The Oromo national struggle is taking place at a time when the modern world system is at a crossroads—a time when the modernization perspective of the West and the so-called socialist/communist model of the East have drastically failed in the peripheral part of the world such as Oromia, Ethiopia, and the Horn of Africa. On one hand, the modernization theory that has claimed that all societies would gradually develop by becoming "modern"

under the leadership of powerful capitalist countries⁸ has proved to be false and a self-serving ideology of Western countries and their client states in the Rest of the world. On the other hand, the socialist perspective, which has asserted that since the capitalist world system has been reactionary and exploitative and it should be overthrown by revolutionary means under the leadership of the working class dictatorship, has become a version of the modernization model and ended up in failure in the periphery.⁹

As the policies of the West, particularly those of the US, have promoted colonialism, neocolonialism and dictatorship and have contributed to underdevelopment and gross human rights violations, so, too, have the policies of the former Soviet Union and China have contributed to the same problems in the Ethiopian Empire.¹⁰ For the Oromo, both the capitalist and the socialist ideological and theoretical models have contributed to their colonization, terrorization, and impoverishment. Western countries, particularly England, France, Italy, and later the United States, and the so-called socialist countries, mainly the former Soviet Union and China, have supported the successive colonial governments of Ethiopia and have contributed immensely to the dehumanization and the suffering of the Oromo and other colonized and oppressed peoples. So the question is: what has happened to the West's proclaimed liberal democracy and the protection of human rights and the East's socialist rhetoric that have claimed to eliminate injustices and exploitation under the dictatorship of the working class?

The Oromo case demonstrates that the idea that the West would advance capitalist development, liberal democracy, and human freedoms and rights in the Rest of the world is intended to hide the crimes committed against humanity in different corners of the world by states and transnational corporations. In the capitalist civilization, dominant ethno-nations, classes, corporations, institutions, and powerful individuals who have controlled state power for the last five hundred years have created and maintained two sides of the same world: One of version this world is "heavenly" or paradise, and the other one is "hellish" or torturous. The process by which the capitalist world system has created and maintained the wealthier and healthier societies—metaphorically called heavenly—has also produced the impoverished and suffering societies both in the West and the Rest through various forms of violence and continued

subjugation. The conditions of indigenous Americans, Australians, Oromos, Palestinians, and others demonstrate this reality.¹¹

Out of a world population of over 7 billion, more than "three billion people live on less than two dollars a day... Eight hundred and forty million people in the world don't have enough to eat. Ten million children die every year from easily preventable diseases. AIDS is killing three million people a year and is still spreading. One billion people in the world lack access to clean water; two billion lack access to sanitation. One billion adults are illiterate. About a quarter of the children in the poor countries do not finish primary school."¹² Most of these impoverished and suffering peoples are the descendants of colonial subjects. Those rich and powerful classes and well-to-do ethno-nations ignore the devastating consequences of absolute poverty and the associated violence on the indigenous and stateless people in the world. The Oromo, as one of the colonized and stateless peoples, are one of the most impoverished, uneducated, and suffering colonial subjects.¹³ They are also denied basic political, social, and civil rights that are essential to expand their human capabilities, freedom, and democracy that assist them to define their social and economic needs. Without having political freedom and democracy people cannot actively increase their agency, human creativity, and potential to collectively solve their problems by overcoming their ignorance, fatalism, and powerlessness, and by critically understanding the roles of social and political systems.¹⁴

In the capitalist world system, the processes of societal destruction and construction have occurred and have been maintained through various forms of violence.¹⁵ The processes of colonial state formation and the destruction of indigenous peoples have occurred simultaneously.¹⁶ Despite the fact that those who have created and maintained this kind of unjust world have claimed to promote justice, democracy, security, fairness, the rule of law, equality, fraternity, and human rights, the processes that we have mentioned above have continued. Religious ideologies such as Christianity and Islam and the political ideologies of democracy and socialism have not overcome human greed and ethno-national/racial, class and gender hierarchies with their accompanying oppression, established and maintained through various forms of violence, including terrorism and genocide. In fact, these ideologies are repeatedly used to hide terrorism, genocide, and the gross violation of human rights. Most people, including the Oromo, still cling to

these failed ideologies and theories because "every individual is ... in a two-fold sense predetermined by the fact of growing up in a society: on the one hand he [or she] finds a ready-made situation and on the other he [or she] in that situation performed patterns of thought and of conduct."¹⁷ By using the ideologies and theories of the oppressors, however, human groups cannot bring about the fundamental social transformation needed to change their deplorable conditions.

What is disappointing about humanity is that at the so-called revolutionaries and progressives who have engaged in promoting the ideology of revolution as an emancipatory project changed their minds after they captured state power in the former Soviet Union, China, and other the so-called socialist countries and began developing state capitalism to accumulate more capital/wealth at any cost. These countries implemented their ideological and economic policies through all forms of violence including terror, torture, and genocide, just as imperialist countries have done. Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer note that "political terror is one of the essential instrumentalities at the service of" the so-called socialist system, and the system has "a monopoly of ideology and organization by the ruling elite, as well as its control of all relevant assets—organized force, economy, communications, arts, and science."¹⁸ As in the system of the West, the so-called socialist system has combined dictatorship, all forms of violence and repression, and gross human rights violations¹⁹ and has drastically failed to implement what it promised. As powerful capitalist countries and their collaborators have practically opposed liberal democracy in poor countries, the so-called socialist countries have worked against democracy, equality, and social justice as well.

Without an egalitarian democracy and the popular participation of ordinary people, a movement cannot build a better society. Knowingly or unknowingly, most Oromo nationalists are influenced by either the failed ideologies of liberal democracy or the aborted ideology of socialism. Above all, the Oromo national movement is active during a period of time in which the capitalist world system is facing deep crises partially because of its ideological and cultural conflicts, when the models or perspectives of capitalism and socialism have failed in the peripheral part of the world, when religious fundamentalism in the form of Christianity or Islam is flourishing, and when the future of this world system is not clear. All

these factors raise fundamental ideological and theoretical challenges to the Oromo national struggle. As Karl Mannheim asserts, "Crises are not overcome by a few hasty and nervous attempts at suppressing the newly arising and troublesome problems, nor by flight into the security of a dead past. The way out is to be found only through the gradual extension and deepening of a newly won insights and through careful advances in the direction of control."²⁰

The engineers of the capitalist world system have used modernization theory, Christian absolutism, and the claim of Euro-American racial and/or cultural superiority to explain and justify the capitalist civilization that they have constructed and maintained via the destruction of world indigenous peoples.²¹ The liberation and development of indigenous peoples like the Oromo is impossible under these conditions because "development requires the removal of major sources of un-freedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance of or over activity of repressive states. Despite unprecedented increases in overall opulence, the contemporary world denies elementary freedom to vast numbers—perhaps even the majority—of people."²² The Oromo who enjoyed an egalitarian democracy, although not perfect, prior to their colonization have been denied all forms of freedom by successive Ethiopian colonial governments and their global supporters. Unfortunately, the harsh socio-economic and political conditions make the Oromo the target of Christian and Islamic fundamentalists. Consequently, there are Oromos who are abandoning their culture and nationalism to imitate Franji (Western) or Arab fundamentalists by claiming religious commitment and focusing on the life-after-death. Explaining the significance of religious fundamentalism in the context of the failure of the modernist projects of capitalism and socialism, Tariq Ali notes, "By the end of the twentieth century with the defeat of secular, modernist and socialist impulses on a global scale, a wave of religious fundamentalism swept the world."²³

Above all, the modern capitalist system is changing very fast and drastically; existing national and international institutions, such as states, international organizations, and transnational corporations are incapable of adequately dealing with the emerging cultural, political, ecological, economic and technological challenges. Those who reap immense benefits from the current system are trying to maintain

status quo by the use of violence. Those who want reform or change are engaged in various forms of resistance. The resistance includes social movements that deal with issues of ethno-national/racial problems as well as environmental and human rights issues. At the same time, religious fundamentalists try to pull back the wheel of history to return societies to what they call "golden eras." However, since most people know what these fundamentalists are capable of doing, some fanatics and true believers buy into their narratives. "Antiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories are likely to degenerate into ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than to reveal it,"²⁴ writes Karl Mannheim.

The rapid changes that are currently taking place include developments in communications and information technologies that collapse space and time, changes in military technology and the nature of warfare, changes in political and economic structures, the processes of environmental degradation and the possible depletion of natural resources, unbalanced imperial interstate relations and the declining of the legitimacy of national and supranational governance, the emergence of national and global social movements as anti-systemic social forces, and the failure or inadequacy of some peripheral states because of the lack of domestic legitimacy and external intervention.²⁵ Similarly, the Oromo national movement is simultaneously confronted with the combination of global, ideological, and religious crises. Consequently, Oromo political and intellectual leaders and organizations lack an ideological roadmap and a coherent theoretical model. The repeated attempts of Oromo nationalists and leaders to uncritically borrow certain ideologies and theoretical models from the West and other societies without knowing their own social and cultural history, worldview, philosophy, and political thought have created a very dangerous situation for the survival and liberation of the Oromo nation in the twenty first century.

Practicing Gadaa/Siqqee and Developing Oromummaa and the Theory of Liberation

Over their history, the Oromo have lived under two forms of socio-political orders. The first one was sovereign, democratic, more or less peaceful and secure although not perfect. The Oromo liberation

ideology and theoretical model must emerge from this socio-cultural and historical foundation. Before they were colonized during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Oromo were governed by an egalitarian democratic order called the *gadaa/siqqee* system that encapsulated all aspects of Oromo cultural, political, military, social, and economic, religious, and philosophical thought. According to Mannheim, "Knowledge, as seen in the light of the total conception of ideology, is by no means an illusory experience, for ideology in its relational concept is not at all identical with illusion. Knowledge arising out of our experience in actual life situations, though not absolute, is knowledge none-the-less. The norms arising out of such actual life situations do not exist in a social vacuum, but are effective as real sanctions for conduct."²⁶

The second one has been a colonial order characterized by terror, physical and mental genocide, political slavery, illiteracy, and impoverishment. By committing "genocide of the mind,"²⁷ the intellectual perspectives of the colonialists and imperialists have misled Oromo intellectuals and nationalists to ignore their indigenous socio-cultural foundations and borrow the theoretical and ideological models of the East or the West, that have little relevance for the Oromo situation. Because the Oromo people have not been represented in academic, media, and government institutions, their voices have been muzzled and hidden and most people, including Oromo students, are still misinformed and know little about the Oromo and their institutions. Explaining the similar conditions of indigenous Americans, MariJo Moore argues that the colonialists and their descendants have committed "genocide of the mind" on the surviving indigenous Americans in order "to destroy and/or misrepresent the histories, futures, languages, and traditional thoughts of Native peoples."²⁸ Similarly, the Habasha colonialists not only occupied the Oromo country, they have also controlled the Oromo mind and framed the way Oromos think, act, and behave. Consequently, some Oromos still identify themselves with Ethiopians knowingly or unknowingly and work against the Oromo national interest ideologically, politically, militarily, and culturally.

Oromo nationalists need to achieve total mental liberation by overcoming the devastating effects of the genocide of the mind that Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism have imposed on them. After studying many forms of civilizations, we have reached to the conclusion that an *Oromummaa* that is based on the best elements of

the *gadaa/siqqee* civilization, worldview, egalitarian democracy, and justice for all can help Oromo nationalists overcome the ideological and theoretical confusion that attempts to hijack or abort the Oromo struggle for liberation, sovereignty, peace, and security. Since there are many external and internal forces that directly or indirectly stifle the development of *Oromummaa* by undermining the restoration of *gadaa/siqqee*, what should the genuine Oromo nationalists do? *Gadaa/siqqee* is the central source of Oromo politics, philosophy, wisdom, worldview, moral values, ethics, laws, and customs from which *Oromummaa* flows and develops as the intellectual, ideological, and theoretical powerhouse of the Oromo nation. Because Oromo nationalism is not yet fully grounded in *gadaa/siqqee*, it remains corrupted by alien ideologies and theories that contradict Oromo fundamental values and democratic principles.

Because of this corruption and the lack of a clear ideological and theoretical approach, the Oromo national movement is significantly less effective than it could be and is misused by misguided Oromo organizations and other forces that work against the Oromo national interest. However, those determined Oromo nationalists who are engaged in the liberation struggle by defending Oromo civic institutions and providing indigenous Oromo values have enabled a new generation of activists and leaders to challenge the Ethiopian colonial system. Consequently, the Ethiopian rulers have engaged in the wide-scale violation of human rights of the Oromo and others. These abuses are testament to the fear that is in the hearts of the Tigray and Abyssinian leadership. But, imprisonment, torture, death, and suffering have not prevented Oromo activist from fighting for the rights of their people. Therefore, we are more convinced than ever that Oromo nationalists who are determined to advance Oromo liberation and emancipation must return to the source of a *gadaa/siqqee* civilization that still survives in the minds and hearts of the ordinary Oromo. As Amílcar Cabral notes, "the question of a 'return to the source' or of a 'cultural renaissance' does not arise and could not arise for the masses of these people, for it is they who are the repository of the culture and at the same time the only social sector who can preserve and build it up and make history."²⁹

Inasmuch as Oromo society is the repository of *gadaa/siqqee* principles and practices, when, between 1991 and 1992, the OLF appeared on the Ethiopian political platform by joining the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian Transitional Government, Oromos had high

expectations as they heard talk about democracy and *gadaa* and saw *Odaa* (sycamore) on the OLF flag. In that moment, the majority of the Oromo supported this organization claiming *kayyoon deebitee* (our freedom returned). Unfortunately, the OLF strategies, tactics, and organizational capacity to use *gadaa/siqqee* principles and practices in organizing and empowering the Oromo people to struggle for their liberation and emancipation as a nation were inadequate. Using these weaknesses as a political opportunity and realizing and fearing the Oromo political potential, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—with the support of Eritrea and the West, particularly the US—and its surrogate organizations attacked the OLF, diminished its capacity, humiliated the Oromo people, postponed the Oromo liberation, and continued Ethiopian colonialism under the Tigrayan leadership.

Although significant progress has been made in the development of *Oromummaa*, the Oromo national movement must now focus on the mental liberation of the Oromo people in order to fundamentally break the colonization of their minds and enable the entire society to own and engage in their own liberation and emancipation project rather than be passive observers and reluctant supporters of others. This is only possible by fully developing *Oromummaa* by restoring *gadaa/siqqee*, building civic organizations, and improving Oromo political culture. *Oromummaa* is above individual, regional and religious identities; it is the foundation of Oromo survival and without it, the Oromo cannot practice their culture and religions freely and promote their national interest. Based on tradition, knowledge, and wisdom, *Oromummaa* introduces an ideological and theoretical innovation, facilitating the emergence and development of new cultural elements. As Gramsci explains, "Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual 'original' discoveries. It also ... means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered ... and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of coordination and intellectual and moral order."³⁰

In reviving the best of Oromo culture and diffusing "a critical form of truths already discovered," Oromo nationalist intellectuals play a central role. Such committed scholars must unearth the Oromo past and provide critical theoretical guidance for the development of *Oromummaa*. Again Gramsci asserts that "one could only have cultural stability and an organic quality of thought if there had existed the same unity between the intellectuals and the simple as

there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus *constituting a cultural and social bloc.*"³¹ Recognizing the role of *committed intellectuals* at this time of tribulation in the Oromo *national struggle*, some Oromo nationalists insist that the Oromo *Studies Association* should find a solution by participating in the *struggle*.

Despite the fact that the Oromo, influenced by their *gadaa/siqqee traditions*, recognize the values of competence, intelligence, hard work, moral authority, patriotism, bravery, self-sacrifice, respect for the rule of law, and achievement, these qualities are dwindling in contemporary Oromo society. History shows that *gadaa/siqqee* leaders emerged based on values that are very important for the present and the future. Unfortunately, these qualities are missing among most of today's Oromo intellectual and political leaders. These Oromo leaders are charged with maintaining organic unity with their fellow Oromo so as to further the spread of *Oromummaa*. This can be achieved through developing an Oromo political consciousness, ideology, and worldview. It is very clear that Oromo intellectuals and political leaders have been isolated from the needs of their people by the colonization of their minds; they lack the appropriate knowledge, experience, wisdom, and expertise to effectively organize the Oromo people.

In order to develop their *Oromummaa* and develop their knowledge and skills for establishing organic unity with their society, Oromo intellectual and political leaders and other activists should overcome their internalization of victimization, alienation, arrogance, individualism, and appreciate and promote team or collective work by replacing the knowledge for domination and self-aggrandizement by the knowledge for liberation and emancipation, which is congruent with *gadaa/siqqee* values and principles. The restoration of such values and principles for liberation and emancipation in movements are the product of "heroic courage and contributions of thousands of largely unsung heroes and heroines."³² We know a few names of those leaders who ignited the fire of *Oromummaa* by sacrificing their precious lives, but we do not know the names of thousands Oromo nationalists who have been killed or assassinated.

tortured, punished by life imprisonments, crippled or blinded, and raped by the enemies of the Oromo people.

In Oromia, the main road block to restoring *gadaa/siqqee* and developing *Oromummaa* is the Ethiopian colonial government that has imposed political slavery on the Oromo by denying them the freedom of organization and association for more than a century. But, the Ethiopian government did not and does not have the absolute power to prevent the Oromo people from organizing themselves because Oromo nationalists were able to create the Maccaa-Tuulama Self-Association in the early 1960s openly and the Oromo Liberation Front in the early 1970s clandestinely. Hence, the Oromo have the power to organize civic and political organizations in Oromia clandestinely, despite the brutality of the Ethiopian political system, and in the Diaspora openly and intensify the Oromo national struggle. So why don't the Oromo have effective civic institutions and political organizations both at home and in the Diaspora today?

Building More Effective Civic Institutions and Political Organizations

Oromo nationalists need to address the following four major issues to build more effective institutions and organizations. First, Oromo nationalists need to recognize the importance of civic culture and institutions and avoid subordinating them to politics. Strong independent civic institutions can democratically challenge the Oromo political leadership and force them to make a transparent and accountable decision. Without a strong civic national association, Oromo nationalists do not have the platform for national debate and discussion needed to build national consensus.

Second, building *Oromummaa* as a national culture, nationalism, and an ideology is absolutely necessary for consolidating more effective national institutions and organizations. Third, the Oromo need to develop a clear national self-image based on *Afaan Oromoo* (the Oromo language) on *gadaa/siqqee* democracy.³³ Every society is organized and functions around its dominant preferred self-image, which is determined by its dominant forces; this self-image unites a people or a nation as an identifiable entity.³⁴ According to Mike Cormack, "A society undergoing crisis, particularly a crisis over which groups should dominate, will manifest competing self-images,

but one must eventually become accepted as the dominant image or else the society will lose its coherence."³⁵ The dominant self-image creates "the core of a framework of interlocking concepts (such as democracy, liberty, morality, justice...). These concepts take their place in linguistic and social practices, which provide the means by which any member of that society can produce meaning and thereby communicate with other members of the society." ³⁶

The ideological self-image on which all Oromo agree is Oromo democracy, known as *gadaa/siqqee*, history, culture, and *Afaan Oromoo*. These must be recognized and celebrated in the national ideology of *Oromummaa*. Ideology mainly works in two ways: social cement and social control. As social cement, ideology is the social force that binds society together by providing a framework in which social action can happen; as social control, ideology has a more direct and coercive effects on social actors by focusing on policing the social structure of a society.³⁷ Consequently, the development of national *Oromummaa* facilitates the consolidation of Oromo unity and stops those forces that would undermine this unity from within and without. A national ideology, such as *Oromummaa*, "is a process which links socio-economic reality to individual consciousness. It establishes a conceptual framework, which results in specific uses of mental concepts, and gives rises to our ideas of ourselves. In other words, the structure of our thinking about the social world, about ourselves and about our role within that world, is related by ideology ultimately to socio-economic conditions."³⁸

The Oromo nationalist ideology and national culture cannot be built on simple emotions in the absence of the restoration of the best elements of the Oromo traditions such as the *gadaa/siqqee* and their democratic principles and the rule of law. The borrowed ideologies of modernization and Marxism cannot help in effectively organizing Oromo society. If Oromo activists and politicians want to promote the Oromo national interest, they have no other choices than to become organic intellectuals who know their own tradition and develop it intelligently, borrowing only the portion of those models that may help facilitate the liberation and emancipation of the Oromo society.

Fourth, existing Oromo religious institutions such as Churches and Mosques are not Oromo-centric. Instead, they focus on the life-after-death as well as on the culture, ideology, and values of the West and the Middle East respectively. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. criticized this position by combining the social and otherworldly gospel in leading the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and by expressing his belief that the church has an obligation to deal with moral and ethical issues in society as "the voice of moral and spiritual authority on earth" and as "the guardian of the moral and spiritual life in the community."³⁹ He seriously criticized the white church for ignoring its social mission and supporting American apartheid, colonialism, the racial caste system, and the underdevelopment of Black America.⁴⁰ Like Martin Luther King, Jr., the Reverend Gudina Tumsa—without fear of death—stood up against Ethiopian colonialism and dictatorship without hiding under the ideology of Christian fundamentalism. The Ethiopian military regime imprisoned and killed him. At this movement, the Oromo do not have other Gudina Tumsas coming from the Oromo Christian church.

As Martin Luther King did, Malcolm X developed revolutionary Black Nationalism and challenged the white establishment in the US by mobilizing the African American material, intellectual, and ideological resources and tried to develop a new direction for the African American struggle. His Islamic beliefs did not prevent him from fighting for the liberation of his people. He insisted that African Americans should rethink their past experience 1) by recognizing the importance of history and criticism and 2) by overcoming "the confusion and inaction which resulted from the internalization of the racist ruling class's view of the world."⁴¹ The Oromo have also had their revolutionary Muslim religious scholars such as Sheik Bakari Saphalo who died in a refugee camp in Somalia and Dr. Sheik Muhammad Rashad Abdulle who recently died. Such Oromo nationalist religious scholars are mostly absent in the Oromo society today. Currently, both Christian and Islam fundamentalists misdirect young Oromo men and women by focusing their attention on the otherworld or life-after-death at the cost of ignoring the Oromo national struggle. More or less, Christian and Islamic fundamentalists teach innocent Oromos what they do not believe in and practice. If Christian and Islamic fundamentalists believe what they teach, they should have struggled against their own governments and their geopolitical boundaries in order to open them for other peoples. So why do they teach and mislead innocent Oromos with something they do not believe in it? How can Oromo nationalists mobilize their

people to organize and enable them to take collective action to liberate themselves?

The Transition from Passivity to Collective Action

We know that, until they were colonized, the Oromo were effectively organized in all aspects of life and maintained their sovereignty, *security, and peace for centuries*. So what factors have prevented *them from repeating this history*? The Oromo can recover their *heritage and political freedom* by building national civic institutions and effective political organizations that raise their political consciousness or *Oromummaa* and organize them to bring about their liberation and emancipation. Without effective civic institutions, *political organizations*, and an effective military establishment, a *society cannot defend itself* from those who are organized and ready to attack, terrorize, and kill them in order to expropriate their resources.

Almost all Oromos love gadaa/siqqee because, historically, it *empowered them to have political freedom* and their own country. In the early 1990s, most Oromo believed that the OLF would repeat this reality because it restored some *gadaa* symbols and made declarations about democracy, the sacred principle of the Oromo nation. After bringing hope to the Oromo people between 1991 and 1992, the OLF was attacked and weakened by the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), Eritrea, and Western powers rendering it *unable to build its organizational capacity*, both politically and *militarily*. Furthermore, because of the ideological and political immaturity of the Oromo political activists and the absence of a national leadership that could build the OLF through dialogue and national consensus, the organization that the Oromo people thought of as the rebirth of *gadaa/siqqee* became fragmented into rival camps that were controlled by self-proclaimed leaders. As a result these leaders began to seek personal political power rather than striving for the empowerment of the Oromo people.

When thousands of Oromo openly joined the Oromo People's Democrat Organization (OPDO), a subsidiary organization of the TPLF, without any fear and shame, the mass of the Oromo population become passive and demobilized. Subsequently, the TPLF has engaged in terrorism, genocide, and the expropriation of

Oromo lands and other resources. The TPLF is committing these crimes against the Oromo not because of its strength, but because Oromo institutions and organization are weak and fragmented. One would expect that Oromo nationalists would recognize the danger of the TPLF and work in a collective manner, overcoming their conflicts and divisions through national dialogue and consensus, based on Oromo democratic traditions and their revolutionary commitment. So what should the Oromo nationalists do now to overcome public passivity and institutional and organizational ineffectiveness in the Oromo society?

The raising of *Oromummaa* consciousness and formulating a theory of liberation that will build institutional and organizational capacity in order to empower the Oromo nation requires some committed, determined, and hardworking activists who are ready to sacrifice their intellectual and material resources and when it is necessary even their lives. Such activists must engage in rebuilding Oromo national civic institutions and political organizations based on the rule of law and *gadaa/siqqee* principles, enabling the Oromo people to acquire their freedom. The Oromo national struggle is about social development and "expanding human freedoms."⁴² Identifying institutions and instrumental freedom that advance "the general capability of a person," Amartya Sen identifies five types of freedom. These are "(1) *political freedoms*, (2) *economic facilities*, (3) *social opportunities*, (4) *transparency guarantees* and (5) *protective security*."⁴³

Sen explains *political freedoms* as political and civil rights that include the right of a people to determine who should govern them and on what principles, the right to scrutinize and criticize leaders, the right to political expression and uncensored press, and the right to choose from among political parties. He sees *economic facilities* as free participation in markets and generation of wealth and public resources, the open access to finance, the utilization of economic resources for the purpose of production, consumption, or exchange, and basic economic security and entitlement. *Social opportunities*, according to Sen, involve social arrangements such as education and health care that influence the individual's substantive freedom to live better and to increase more effective participation in the kind of socio-economic and political activities that are absolutely necessary to overcome un-freedoms. Furthermore, having *protective security* involves a social safety net that protects people from misery, starvation, death, and disease. What Sen calls *transparency guarantees* help in preventing

corruption, financial irresponsibility, and underhanded dealings by creating the freedom to be open and honest in dealings with one another in civic institutions and political organizations. The Oromo national struggle attempts to enable the Oromo people to build civic and political institutions that will restore all forms of their freedom by expanding the human freedoms that the Ethiopian colonial state has successfully denied them.

Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism have exposed the Oromo people to terrorism, gross human rights violations, famines, under-nutrition, morbidity, premature mortality. In addition, it has denied them access to health care, clean water or sanitary facilities, and education. To overcome all these un-freedoms, the Oromo national movement must build strong civic and political institutions and auxiliary organizations that will take decisive collective political actions. Explaining the necessity of institutions for societies, Sen states the following: "Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. Not only institutions contribute to our freedoms, their roles can be sensibly evaluated in the light of their contributions to our freedom. To see development as freedom provides a perspective in which institutional assessment can systematically occur."⁴⁴

We believe that Oromo nationalists must reinvent the Maccaa-Tuulama Self-Help Association and the OLF based on *gadaa/siqqee* principles. The Oromo people cannot afford to be divided into different small institutions and political organizations that follow different political trajectories. Above all, all Oromo nationalists who left the OLF and formed other organizations should engage in an open national dialogue building the consensus needed to resolve existing political contradictions and reinvigorate the OLF based on the principles of *gadaa/siqqee* and *Oromummaa*. Furthermore, Oromo communities should build independent associations in the Diaspora and in Oromia that will be linked to national institutions and organizations without being subordinated to them. The Oromo must avoid subordinating their associations to political organizations as a means of avoiding past mistakes. For example, the OLF misused the political goodwill of the Union of Oromo Students in North America in the 1990s because its members agreed to be its mass association. When the OLF opened its office in Washington, DC, it started to discredit and disorganize the union. Independent associations and

civic institutions can stop political organizations from making serious strategic and tactical blunders. If the Oromo had strong associations and institutions, they could have prevented the Oromo national movement, particularly the OLF, from making tragic mistakes in the 1990s and later.

Discussion and Conclusion

History demonstrates that the survival of a people depends on their collective consciousness, national ideology, organization, and the capacity to militarily defend themselves from their common enemies who would subjugate them or commit genocide on them in order to expropriate their homeland and other resources. Consequently, the survival and liberation of the Oromo primarily depends on their capacity to fully develop a deep sense of *Oromummaa* which is enshrined in *gadaa/siqqee* principles. The Oromo need to restore their accumulated historical and cultural knowledge to aid them in developing strategies and tactics for liberating Oromia. In other words, the Oromo must fully develop *Oromummaa* as their national ideology and source of community power in order to have the economic, military, and organizational resources that are required for empowering the nation and restoring the Oromo state. According to Micahel Mann, "The struggle to control ideological, economic, military, and political organizations provides the central drama of social development."⁴⁵

In order to defeat Ethiopianism and its colonial structures and determine their national destiny, the Oromo must first develop *Oromummaa* as their source of personal and political power. According to Mostafa Rejai, ideology covers five dimensions, namely the cognitive, the affective, the evaluative, the programmatic, and the social base.⁴⁶ *Oromummaa* as the cognitive dimension helps in understanding the social and political conditions of the Oromo; as a national ideology "it appeals to sentiments and strives to elicit an emotional response from its followers ... what gives ideology its force is its passion ... in fact, the most important, latent, function of ideology is to tap emotion."⁴⁷ Ideology justifies or denounces an existing social and political order; in its attempt to advance an alternative order, it "is designed to ... transform an existing social and political order; it attempts to evoke a sense of rage, injustice, and moral protest against its counterparts."⁴⁸ Similarly, *Oromummaa*, as the

embodiment of the *gadaa/siqqee* democratic principles, exposes the crimes of Ethiopianism and promotes freedom and justice.

The programmatic dimension of ideology "focuses on how each ideology strives to translate values into active commitments. Each ideology sets forth ... a hierarchy of values and objectives, and each sometimes includes statements of priorities identifying immediate, intermediate, and ultimate goals."⁴⁹ In the same fashion, *Oromummaa* provides the principles that can be used in developing a plan of action for implementing Oromo democratic values and revolutionary commitments in the Oromo national movement. As every ideology has a social-base to which it has mass appeal, *Oromummaa* has the Oromo national base that it mobilizes for action. The transformation of Oromo resistance struggles to form the Maccaa-Tuulama Self-Help Association in the early 1960s and the OLF in the early 1970s and the objectives of the Oromo struggle for liberation are still correct and have yielded some results for the Oromo nation. The central objective of the Oromo struggle has been the empowering of the Oromo people to determine their destiny by using their political power in ways that reflect and practice *gadaa/siqqee* principles.

The attempt to delegitimize the objectives of the Oromo liberation—from without and within in the names of the pseudo-objectives of fake democracy, citizenship, and federation—violates the vision of *Oromummaa* that is engrained in the *gadaa/siqqee* philosophy, values, and practices. The Oromo need not request democracy, self-determination, and sovereignty from the Ethiopian colonial state because Oromos can only achieve these political rights through fully developing *Oromummaa* and building their national organizational capacity based on the best elements of their traditions. Borrowing ideologies without clearly developing *Oromummaa* and formulating a theory of liberation based on the Oromo democratic tradition will not enable the Oromo national movement to overcome its current ideological crises and political paralysis.

Oromummaa celebrates Oromo collective self-image and self-interest that are built on the foundation of Oromo social and political institutions. When Oromo nationalists fail to understand that the individual and the collective self-interests of the Oromo are interconnected, they ignore the need to engage in civic empowerment for the greater good of Oromo society because they assume that they can achieve their individual-interests without engaging the people affected. When an Oromo takes this position, he or she develops an

essentially destructive ideology and develops a rapacious and predatory type of self-interest at the expense of other Oromo. Civic engagement helps in moving beyond a narrow circle, transcending the private by engaging with a wider Oromo public for promoting the Oromo national interest. This engagement involves "people's connections with the life of their communities"⁵⁰ through building trust among diverse individuals by overcoming their suspicions and isolation. "Trustworthiness lubricates social life. Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity. Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility of action."⁵¹

Increased trust, social contact and interaction further develop and widen "our awareness of the many ways in which we are linked" and increase "tolerance and empathy."⁵² Just mere connections are not enough for building trust, but there must be the capacity for civic engagement through participation in giving speeches, running meetings, managing disagreements, and bearing administrative responsibilities.⁵³ The connections based on trust involve friendship, respect, truth, charity, humanity, liberty, patriotism, benevolence, brotherly and sisterly love, justice, and fairness.⁵⁴ Political activism and civic engagement play two essential roles in society: first, they help identify and overcome weaknesses of social institutions and social interaction. Second, they empower citizens by overcoming institutional weaknesses.⁵⁵ They must be put into practice based on a common denominator. Civic engagement and the development of *Oromummaa* are interconnected. *Oromummaa* must be built on a common ground since the Oromo people are a diverse and a multi-religious society. "The more enduring and the more basic the common ground, the more substantial the connection; the more we identify with what is, or is felt to be, essential in the other, the more meaningfully we experience our connection to be. When this more essential identification develops, then we no longer relate as strangers. We feel secure in the connection with the other and less alone in a world of people who are essentially different from us."⁵⁶

During the time when Oromos are developing *Oromummaa*, engaging in civic action, and building institutions and organizations, they also can build alliances with other colonized and oppressed peoples who are struggling for national liberation and egalitarian democracy. Oromo nationalists should realize that in addition to developing their central ideology of *Oromummaa* and building

organizational capacity they must recognize that “[v]ictory has often come to the side of the actor with the deepest commitment to a cause and the greatest capacity to withstand exceedingly high costs for lengthy periods.”⁵⁷ The Oromo national movement must struggle to establish popular power and self-government by going beyond official or elite democracy and by engaging in the process of “democratic imagination” to expand the knowledge of democracy.⁵⁸ Recognizing the failure of official or elite democracy in promoting equity and justice for all peoples in the West and the Rest of the world, James Cairns and Alan Sears see democracy as “an open question” and propose the struggle to promote “democracy from below” to empower people to achieve collective self-government to fundamentally change society, and to promote the principle that real democracy emerges from genuine equity.⁵⁹ Oromo democracy and democracy from below are synonymous since they involve political, social, and economic equity and justice. Therefore, the Oromo national movement must start practicing the Oromo democracy of *gadaa/siqqee* if they want to achieve total human liberation in the Oromo society and beyond.

Endnotes

- 1 Paper presented at the 2013 Oromo Studies Association, Howard University, Washington, Dc, August 3 and 4.
- 2 For further discussion on ideology, see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, translated from the German by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, (New York: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1936); Mike Cormack, *Ideology*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press); Alex Roberto Hybel, *The Power of Ideology: From the Roman Empire to Al-Qaeda*, (New York: Routledge, 2010),
- 3 Alex Roberto Hybel, *ibid.* p. 1.
- 4 For further information, see Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer, “The Oromo, *Gadaa/Siqqee* and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Vol. 9, Issue, 2013, 4: 277-295.
- 5 See Asafa Jalata, “Being and Out of Africa: The Impact of Duality of Ethiopianism,” http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=asafa_jalata

- 6 Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
- 7 Alex Roberto Hybel, *ibid.*, p. 8.
- 8 Alvin So, *Social Change and Development: modernization, dependency, and world system theories*, (Sage Publications, 1990).
- 9 See for example, André Gunder Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966.)
- 10 For further discussion, see Asafa Jalata, “Imperfections in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Oromia and Ethiopia: Will The Obama Administration Introduce Change?, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.4, no.3, March 2011: 131-154.
- 11 Asafa Jalata, “Indigenous Peoples in the Capitalist World System: Researching, Knowing and Promoting Social Justice,” *Sociology Mind*, Vol.3 No.2, April 2013, pp. 158-178.
- 12 William Easterly, *The White Men's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest So Much Ill So Little Good*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2006),. P. 8.
- 13 See for example, Asafa Jalata, *Contending Nationalism of Oromia and Ethiopia*, (Binghamton: Global Academic Publishing, 2010).
- 14 For more discussion of the importance of freedom and democracy, Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (New York: Knopf, 1999), pp. 146-159.
- 15 See for example, Asafa Jalata, “The Impacts of Colonial Terrorism and Capitalist Incorporation on Indigenous Americans,” *Journal of World-Systems Research*, XIX, 1(2013): 130-152.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Karl Mannheim, *ibid.* p. 3.
- 18 Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer. 1970. *Political Terror in Communist Systems*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), pp. 111-112.
- 19 Contrary what they promised, the policies of these countries resulted about 20 million deaths in the former USSR, 65 million in China, 1 million in Vietnam, 2 million in North Korea, 2 million in Cambodia, 1 million in Eastern Europe, 150,000 in Latin America, 1.7 million in Africa, 1.5 million in Afghanistan, and 10,000 deaths in other places—totally about 100 million deaths. This is historical tragedy that has dashed the hope of humanity. China is currently engaging in imperialism and the exploitation of many poor countries as Western countries by extending its domestic policies. See Stéphane Coutois, N. Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, et la. 1999. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 4.
- 20 Karl Mannheim, *ibid.* p. 108.

- 21 Asafa Jalata, *ibid.*
- 22 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (New York: Knopf, 1999), pp. 3-4.
- 23 Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusaders, Jihads and Modernity*, (London: verso, 2003), p. 67.
- 24 Karl Mannheim, *ibid.* p. 95.
- 25 See for example, William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Pau Hirst, *War and Power in the 21st Century*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).
- 26 Karl Mannheim, *ibid.* pp. 85-86.
- 27 For further understanding of the phrase, see Marijo Moore, *Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing*, edited (New York: Nation Books, 2003),
- 28 Marijo Moore, *ibid.* p. xv.
- 29 Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 61.
- 30 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, editors Quinin Hoare and G. N. Smith, (New York: International Publishers, 1985), p. 325.
- 31 *Ibid.* p. 330.
- 32 Quoted in Richard A. Couto, "Narrative, Free Space, Political Leadership in Social Movements," in *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 55, no. 1, February 1993, p. 58.
- 33 See Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer, "The Oromo, Gadaa/Siqqee Democracy, and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous people*, Vol. 9, Issue 4: 277-295.
- 34 See Mike Cormack, *Ideology*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 12.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.* p. 20.
- 38 *Ibid.* p. 13.
- 39 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 96; *Stride Toward Freedom*, (New York: Perennial Library, 1964), p. 185.
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- 42 For detailed discussion of development as freedom and expanding human freedoms, see Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*.
- 43 Amartya Sen, *ibid.* p. 10.

- 44 Amartya Sen, *ibid.* p. 142.
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- 47 Alex Roberto Hybel, *ibid.* p. 12.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 R. Putnam, "Turning In, Turning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28 (4), 1995, p. 665.
- 51 R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon and Schuster 2000), p. 21.
- 52 *Ibid.* p. 288.
- 53 *Ibid.* p. 66.
- 54 T. Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From membership to Management in American Civic Life*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), p. 116.
- 55 David P. Levine, *The Capacity for Civic Engagement: Public and Private Worlds of the Self*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 7.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 169.
- 57 Alex Roberto Hybel, *ibid.* p. 199.
- 58 For detailed discussion of "the democratic imagination," see James Cairns and Alan Sears, *The Democratic Imagination: Envisioning Popular Power in the Twenty-First Century*, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2012).
- 59 *Ibid.* pp. 1-23.