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DEMOCRACY AND THE LIBERATION OF  
ETHIOPIAN COLONIAL SUBJECTS**

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# THE OROMO, GADAA/SIQQEE DEMOCRACY AND THE LIBERATION OF ETHIOPIAN COLONIAL SUBJECTS

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the potential role of the Gadaa/Siqqee system of Oromo democracy in the development of a democratic multinational liberation movement of the colonized nations within the Ethiopian Empire in order to dismantle the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian terrorist government and replace it with a sovereign multinational democratic state in the Horn of Africa based on the principles of indigenous democracy. After a brief introduction, this study describes the presence of a democratic, Siqqee/Gadaa administration among the Oromo in the Horn of Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries and the subsequent changes that made them vulnerable to colonization. It further examines the essence and main characteristics of Gadaa/Siqqee, showing that it provides a contrasting political philosophy to the authoritarian rule of the Ethiopian Empire. The study shows that in the face of oppression and exploitation the Oromo people have struggled to preserve and redevelop their indigenous democracy, written records of which go back to the 16th century, long before European nations embraced the principles of democratic governance. It also explains how it can be adapted to the current condition of the colonized nations within the Ethiopian Empire in order to revitalize the quest for national self-determination and democracy and to build a sovereign democratic state in a multinational context. Furthermore, the piece asserts that this struggle is truly a difficult one in the 21st century as the process of globalization is intensified and regional and local cultures are being suppressed under the pressure of dominating cultures.

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## Keywords

Gadaa (indigenous democracy), Oromia, Oromo/Oromummaa, Ethiopian colonial subjects/nations, national self-determination, Ethiopian colonialism

## Introduction

The Oromo people are the largest of about 80 ethnonational groups in Ethiopia today. The Oromo population is estimated at 40 million of the 80 million people living in Ethiopia (Demie, 1997, p. 165). Although they are the largest population group, they are a political minority because, along with all but two of the ethnonational groups, they have been colonial subjects within the Ethiopian Empire since the last decades of the 19th century. The conquered peoples lack genuine political representation; they have been ruled by the successive regimes of the Amhara-Tigray (Abyssinian) ethnonational groups that have been supported by Western powers (see Jalata, 2005a; Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990). Before the conquest of their land and their subjugation, the Oromo people were organized both culturally and politically using the social institution of Gadaa/Siqqee\* to main-

tain their security and sovereignty. Although Siqqee was a component of Gadaa and women were denied formal leadership positions in politics, the military and religion, the latter could not function without the full participation of women.

The historical legacy of Oromo political leadership is the sovereignty the Oromo people experienced under the Siqqee/Gadaa government and its egalitarian framework. Long before democracy and social equality were the norm in Europe and North America, the design of Siqqee/Gadaa as a social and political institution worked to prevent exploitation and political domination in Oromo society. Consequently, under the Siqqee/Gadaa system, Oromo society enjoyed relative peace, stability, sustainable prosperity and political sovereignty. Before their colonization by the alliance of European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993), the Oromo people were independent and organized both culturally and politically using the Gadaa/Siqqee system to promote their wellbeing and to maintain their security and sovereignty. As Virginia Luling (1965) asserts, "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" (p. 191). We do not know when and how the Siqqee/Gadaa system emerged, but we know

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\* Although this paper recognizes that Siqqee is a sub-set of Gadaa, it uses the terms Siqqee/Gadaa and Gadaa/Siqqee interchangeably (with upper case initial letters) to designate the concept of Oromo democracy that is elsewhere designated in the literature, including the writings and speeches of the current authors, as gadaa. To date, most of the research on Oromo democracy has been conducted by male researchers who have focused on the male role, designated in this paper as gadaa (with a lower case initial letter), to the exclusion of the female role, designated in this paper as siqqee (with a lower case initial letter). Female researchers including Kuwee Kumsa have pointed out, in conversations with the current authors, the male gender bias in the research to date on the institution of Oromo democracy and the essential interrelationship between male and female gender roles in sustaining democratic institutions that protect the rights of all, including women and girls. Kumsa describes siqqee and gadaa as two sides of the same coin, inseparable. Implicit in this change in the orthography surrounding the institution of Oromo democracy is the recognition that Gadaa/Siqqee, like all human systems, has failed to live up to its ideals, by historically failing to imbue women and men with the same political rights, including the right to hold roles in spiritual

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and political leadership. In this way, Siqqee/Gadaa differs little from American democracy that took over two centuries to begin to fully extend political participation to women and minorities. This paper recognizes the need for further research in Gadaa/Siqqee that more fully develops a deeper understanding of the original social, political and economic roles played by women and the various relationships between the two gender roles as they work to live out the essential values of Oromo democracy.

that it existed as a full-fledged system at the beginning of the 16th century.

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, 2000/2006). Discussing the philosophy of Oromo democracy, Asmarom Legesse (1973) 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. (p. 2)

When gadaa was an all-encompassing institution of politics, military, defence, economy, religion, ethics, culture and tradition, siqqee was used by women as a check and balance system to counter male-dominated roles in the gadaa system. The siqqee institution gave a political and social platform for Oromo women to effectively voice their concern and address their social justice issues. The gadaa system excluded women from its politico-military-administrative structures, and they were only married to men in a gadaa grade (Kelly, 1992, p. 125; Kumsa, 1997). However, the gadaa prevented the transformation of gender-role-segregation into gender inequality, and women and men “had a functional interdependence and one was not valued any less than the other” in the system (Kumsa, 1997, p. 119). Of course, further research is required to know more about siqqee and its relations with the gadaa system.

### The Oromo under the Gadaa/Siqqee system

Recorded history shows that between the 16th and the mid-17th centuries, all the Oromo

people lived under one Gadaa/Siqqee administration (Baissa, 2004, p. 101; Jalata, 2005a, p. 20) in which Siqqee/Gadaa had played the central role in checking and balancing gender roles. In the Gadaa/Siqqee republic, the Oromo were organized around political, economic, social, cultural and religious institutions. According to Lemmu Baissa (2004):

*Gada* [sic] 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* [leaders] council formed from [male] 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 defence, management of intra-Oromo clan conflicts, and dealing with non-Oromo people. (p. 101)

By the mid-17th century, with an increased population and extended territorial possessions, different Oromo groups began forming autonomous Siqqee/Gadaa governments (Baissa, 2004; Jalata, 2005a). While establishing autonomous local governments, the Oromo groups formed alliances, federations and confederations to maintain their political and cultural solidarity and defend their security and interest from their common enemies (Bulcha, 1996, p. 50; Etefa, 2008). The case of the Tuulama Oromo group demonstrates that “autonomous local governments were answerable to the overall *gadaa* of the main branch” (Etefa, 2008, p. 21). However, as some Oromo branches moved to regions at a distance from the Oromo cradleland of northern Oromia, interacted with other peoples and started working as settled farmers and traders, they began to accept the idea of class differentiation, a process that gradually led to the transformation of the gadaa system into

the moottii (autocratic kingdom) system, such as monarchies in the Gibe region and northern Oromia and the kingdoms of Leqa-Naqamte and Leqa-Qellem (Jalata, 2005a, pp. 36–37).

Constant wars led to the transformation of abbaa duulas (military leaders) into hereditary moottiis (monarchs) in northern and western Oromia. In other words, the emergence of class differentiation and the rise of the Oromo kingdoms suppressed the Siqqee/Gadaa system in some parts of Oromia. During the second half of the 19th century, the Oromo people were ill-equipped to effectively unite and defend themselves from the expansion of European imperialism and the Ethiopian colonial system, partly as the result of the decentralization of Gadaa/Siqqee and the emergence of the moottii system. However, it was the Ethiopian colonial state and its access to European weapons and technology that effectively suppressed the traditional democratic system in most parts of Oromia. Despite the internal challenge and the external attack on the Siqqee/Gadaa system, the system has been the foundation and pillar of Oromo society with its principles remaining as the hallmark of the Oromo nation. We cannot fully understand how the Ethiopian colonial system destroyed the Oromo democratic institution without studying and critically comprehending the relationship between Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism and their consequences for the colonized peoples in general and the Oromo in particular.

### **European imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism in the Horn of Africa**

During the period from the 16th century until the middle of the 19th century, the various ethnonational groups in the Horn of Africa maintained a relative balance of power (Jalata, 2005b). This balance of power in the highlands was to change with the introduction of firearms into the region as European colonial powers sought to extend their power beyond the coastal

areas of Africa into the interior (Jalata, 2005b). In the entire continent outside of Abyssinia/Ethiopia, the colonial powers established direct control over the interior. In the case of Ethiopia, the Abyssinians (members of the Amhara and Tigray cultural groups who share a common Orthodox Christian faith) under Menelik II were able to use a Christian discourse in the context of a three-way struggle among the British, French and Italians to obtain weapons, infrastructure and military knowledge that allowed them to colonize neighbouring ethnations, including the Oromo, and establish an Abyssinian Empire (later given the name Ethiopia) (Jalata, 2005a; Melbaa, 1999).

For more than four centuries, the Oromo effectively defended their country from the Christian Abyssinian and Muslim empire builders in the region. There is adequate evidence to indicate that the Oromo people dominated the areas from Abyssinia proper, 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, p. 176). During Abyssinian 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, 1901/2005, p. 349). Martial de Salviac (1901/2005) calls this event “the theatre of a great massacre” (p. 349). 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, famine and diseases during and after the colonization of Oromia.

During the Scramble for Africa, the Abyssinians were able to use a Christian discourse and conflict among three European powers to obtain weapons and other resources that allowed them to complete a violent conquest of the Oromo and many other nations in the Horn of Africa. The Abyssinians, who later preferred to call themselves Ethiopians, sought

to consolidate their conquest of these nations through a deliberate programme of physical and cultural genocide in order to weaken any possible resistance, on the part of the conquered, to the Abyssinian extraction of wealth/capital and resources from the colonized nations. According to Martial de Salviac (1901/2005), “With equal arms, the Abyssinians [would] never [conquer] an inch of land. With the power of firearms imported from Europe, Menelik [Abyssinian warlord] began a murderous revenge” (p. 350).

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, 1901/2005, p. 28)

The Ethiopian/Abyssinian government massacred half of the Oromo population (five million out of 10 million) and their leadership during its colonial expansion (Bulatovich, 2000, pp. 66–68; de Salviac, 1901/2005, pp. 608, 278). According to Alexander Bulatovich (2000):

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. (pp. 68–69)

The destruction of Oromo lives and institutions were aspects of Ethiopian colonial terrorism and genocide.

The surviving Oromo who used to enjoy an

egalitarian democracy known as the Siqqee/Gadaa system were forced to face state terrorism, political repression and an impoverished life. Bulatovich (2000) explains about Gadaa/Siqqee 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. (p. 68)

The 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 [which] used to shoot up from the soil” (de Salviac, 1901/2005, pp. 21–22). As de Salviac (1901/2005) also notes:

The greenery and the shade delight the eyes all over and give the landscape 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. (p. 21)

As the Oromo people were killed, terrorized, and repressed, the Oromo natural resources were depleted and their environment and natural beauty were destroyed.

Once the Abyssinians effectively colonized the Oromo with the help of European colonial powers, they started to propagate their ruling ideas and mythology in the discourse of Orthodox Christianity. The reign of Menelik must be seen from the perspective of the Solomonic myth into which the Abyssinian rulers placed themselves. The Solomonic myth narrates a continuous 3000-year chain of rule beginning with the liaison between Solomon

and Sheba (Hassen, 2009; Jalata & Schaffer, 2010; Melbaa, 1999; Sarbo, 2009). The successive kings of this putative Solomonic dynasty claimed that they were elected by God and placed themselves at the top of the secular and religious hierarchies, asserting the power to appoint or dismiss their administrators and church officials (Jalata, 1993, p. 33). The document known as the *Kebrā Nagast* (*The Glory of the Kings*) rationalized and legitimized the monarchy using this Solomonic narrative (Budge, 2000) and, by extension, related the Abyssinians to the chosen people of Israel. According to the *Kebrā Nagast*: “God has appointed all these rulers and given them authority; one that opposes the ruler and is against him, rebels against the ordinances of God, his creator. Those who rebel against the rulers secure their condemnation” (Strauss, 1968, p. 29).

This authoritarian top-down worldview not only shaped the way Menelik conducted his conquest of territory in the Horn of Africa, it continues to mould the way successive regimes deal with issues of cultural preservation, political opposition and respect for the rule of law. The authoritarian mindset of Abyssinian culture does not fit well with the disparate cultures of more than 80 conquered ethno-nations, nor does it fit well with the concept of robust democratic debate and disagreement. It views Abyssinian culture as God-given and thus other cultures and practices are an offence to God. The only acceptable roadmap for the empire is the destruction of the cultures of the conquered peoples and the Amharization of all.

Menelik, an Abyssinian warlord, began conquering parts of the Oromo territory surrounding his Shewan stronghold in 1869 as other Abyssinian leaders, Tewedros and Yohannes, began expanding the traditional Abyssinian stronghold in the north (Jalata, 2005b; Melbaa, 1999). However, it was Menelik who successfully colonized Oromia and other regions creating the Ethiopian Empire with the help of European powers during the Scramble for Africa (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990; Jalata,

2005a). With the death of Yohannes in 1889, Menelik became emperor with the title “the Conquering Lion of Judah, Menelik II, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia” (Melbaa, 1999). While he had a coterie of Shewan supporters, Menelik was the supreme authority in Ethiopia, personally controlling all three functions of government: legislation, administration and adjudication (Sarbo, 2009). Menelik appointed military and political administrators over portions of his empire, but there was no question that his rule was characterized by the above passage taken from the *Kebrā Nagast* (Jalata & Schaffer, 2010; Sarbo, 2009).

Menelik sought to stamp out the democratic traditions of the Oromo. He and his followers destroyed the political function of the Gadaa/Siqqee institution and officially abolished all pilgrimages to the Abbaa Muuda, the spiritual leader of the Oromo who among other roles was the person responsible for maintaining the democratic nature of Oromo society (Legesse, 2000/2006). Menelik took all these and other actions to prevent the possibility of these pilgrimages developing into an Oromo insurrection and to eliminate any memory of a democratic tradition among the Oromo (Hassen, 2009). As we will show, the attempt to commit cultural genocide was partially unsuccessful.

### **The essence and main characteristics of Gadaa/Siqqee**

Gadaa/Siqqee has four interrelated meanings: it is 1) gadaa—the grade during which an age-based group of people move into politico-ritual leadership; 2) gadaa—a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones; 3) siqqee—the institution by which women, who left their own families and communities to live with their husbands’ families and communities, protected themselves and each other from abuse and allowed women to control essential economic assets within the sphere of the household; and 4) Siqqee/

Gadaa—the institution of Oromo democracy (Legesse, 1973, 2000/2006). The Gadaa system has the principles of checks and balances (such as periodic transfer of power every eight years and division of power among executive, legislative and judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five gadaa grades) 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, the protection of women from abuse, the protection of women's economic resources, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation and the respect for basic rights and liberties.

There are five gadaa grades; each has different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of the population expansion of the Oromo and their establishment of different autonomous administrative systems. For example, in central Oromia, these five grades are called itim-akko, daballee, foollee, dorooma/qaondala and luba. Oromo males are involuntarily recruited to both age-sets and generation-sets or gadaa grades. 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 luba class 40 years after their fathers, and since one grade is eight years, fathers and sons are five grades apart. Male children also join generation-sets at birth, joining men or old men who are considered to be members of their genealogical generations. In these cross-cutting generation-sets, older men mentor young males in teaching rules and rituals, but the former treat the latter as equals since there is no status difference between the two groups in a gadaa class (or grades).

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. 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. As Paul T. Baxter (1978) notes, the Oromo have used age-sets for war because generation-sets “cannot be an efficient means to mobilize troops, and a quite distinct organisation based on closeness of age ... exists for that purpose” (p. 177).

The rule of law is the key element of the Gadaa system; those leaders who violated the law of the land or whose families could not maintain the required standard of the system were recalled before the end of their tenure in the office. Leaders selected under Gadaa implemented the laws that were made by male representatives of the people (though women undoubtedly had informal/indirect influence). Oromo democracy has allowed the Oromo people through their representatives to formulate change or amend laws and rules every eight years. The Siqqee/Gadaa system accepted the Oromo people as the ultimate source of authority and believed nobody was above the rule of law. Gadaa officials were elected by established criteria by the people from the qaondala grade and received rigorous training in Oromo democratic philosophy and governance for eight years before they entered the luba grade (administrative grade); the main criteria for election or selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability to govern, etc.

Today, aspects of Siqqee/Gadaa still exist in some Oromo regions. In the Boorana Oromo community, for example, the Gumii Gaayyo (assembly of multitudes) brings together almost all important leaders, such as living Abbaa Gadaas (presidents of the assembly), the qaallus (spiritual leaders), age-set councillors, clan leaders and gadaa councillors, and other concerned individuals to make or amend or change laws and rules every eight years. In August 1996,



the 37th Gumii Gaayyo Assembly, reflecting a tradition that began in 1708, was held to make, amend or change three kinds of laws that the Boorana Oromo classifies as cardinal, customary and supplementary laws (Huqqa, 1998). The Gumii Gaayyo assembly has a higher degree of ritual and political authority than the gadaa class and other assemblies because it “assembles representative of the entire society in conjunction with any individual who has the initiative to the ceremonial grounds”, and “what Gumii decides cannot be reversed by any other assembly” (Legesse, 1973, p. 93). However, under the Ethiopian colonial system, the surviving Gadaa/Siqqee does not have the sovereignty it used to have.

If the peace between men and women was broken, a siqqee rebellion was initiated to restore the law of God and the moral and ethical order of society. The gadaa and siqqee institutions greatly influenced the Oromo value system in pre-colonial (pre-1880s) Oromo society. These two institutions helped maintain safuu (Oromo moral and ethical codes) in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.

The Oromo indigenous religion (Waaqeffannaa), worldview, philosophy and politics have been interconnected and influence one another. The Oromo religious and philosophical worldview considers the organization of spiritual, physical and human worlds as interconnected phenomena, and Waaqa (God, 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, Aneesa Kassam asserts 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. (in press)

The Oromo use three concepts to explain the organization and interconnection among the human, spiritual and physical worlds. These three concepts are ayyaana (spirit), uumaa (nature) and safuu. The Oromo believe that through ayyaana, Waaqa creates and regulates the human and physical worlds in balanced ways. This ayyaana also maintains the connection between the creator and the created.

Like any society, Oromo society has organizing principles for its known and unknown universe; ayyaana is a major organizing principle of Oromo cosmology through which the concepts of time and creation are ordered (Kassam, 2007). Ayyaana, as a system of classification and an organizing principle of Oromo cosmology, establishes the connection between Waaqa 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 who created ayyaana, uses it to organize scattered things into order. As Gemetchu Megerssa (1993) explains:

Ayyaana 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. (p. 95)

The concept uumaa includes everything created by Waaqa including ayyaana. Safuu is an ethical and moral

code that Oromos use to differentiate bad from good and wrong from right ... *Safuu* 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, p. 255)

The Oromo claim that the understanding of the 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/Siqqee system of democracy to maintain *nagaa* (peace) and *safuu* among Waaqa, society and nature to achieve the full human destiny known as *kao* or *kayyo* (Hinnant, 1978, p. 210). Respect for the laws of Waaqa and the institution of Siqqee/Gadaa have been essential to maintain *nagaa* Oromo (Oromo peace) and *safuu* (moral balance) in society (Hinnant, 1978, pp. 207–243; Knutsson, 1967; Van de Loo, 1991). Most Oromos believe that they had full *kao* before their colonization because they had freedom to develop their independent political, economic, cultural and religious institutions.

Qaallus have had a moral authority and the 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 *safuu*, *kao*, Waaqa and *uumaa*. The qaallu

is thought to possess sacred characteristics that enable him to act as intermediary between the people and ... [God] ... 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, p. 166)

The qaallu institution has been committed to social justice, the laws of God, 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, p. 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 religions. 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 qaallu 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, pp. 66–67). The leader of all qaallus was known as the *Abbaa Muuda* (father of the anointment) who was considered to be the prophet and spiritual leader of Oromo society. Oromo pilgrims travelled to the residence of the *Abbaa Muuda* to receive his blessing and anointment to be ritual experts in their respective regions (Knutsson, 1967, p. 148).

The *Abbaa Muuda* served as the spiritual centre and symbol of Oromo unity and enabled all Oromo branches to keep in touch with one another over the centuries: "As the Jews believe in Moses and the Muslims in Muhammad, the Oromo believe in their *Abbaa Muuda*" (Hassen, 1991, pp. 90–106). The *Abbaa Muuda*, like other qaallu leaders, encouraged harmonious and democratic relations in Oromo society. According to the qaallu mythology, the *Abbaa Muuda*, the original Oromo religious leader, was descended from heaven (Gololcha, 1988; Knutsson, 1967). Oromo representatives travelled to the highlands of the mid-south Oromia to honour the *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, p. 148). When Oromo representatives went to him from

far and near places to receive his blessings, the 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, p. 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, pp. 133–135). The qaallus of Guji and Borana are ritual leaders, advisors and ritual experts in the Gadaa/Siqqee system. The qaallus “possess the exclusive prerogative of legitimizing the different gada [*sic*] officials, when a new gada [*sic*] group is initiated into the politically active class” (Knutsson, 1967, p. 142). The Oromo still practise some elements of Oromo democratic values in the areas where the Siqqee/Gadaa system was suppressed a century ago. The Gadaa/Siqqee system is still practised 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 practise rituals among some clans and regional groups (Van de Loo, 1991, p. 25). The current Siqqee/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/Siqqee, and some Oromo nationalists struggle to restore genuine Oromo democracy.

Gadaa/Siqqee of the Oromo and the *Kebra Nagast* of the Abyssinians (Amhara and Tigray) are contrasting political philosophies. While both are divinely inspired, the one is top-down and authoritarian in its structure and view of the role of citizens. Under the *Kebra Nagast* there is little room for dissent from the political decisions of the ruler who functions as the implicit regent of God on earth. While the

connection to the Solomonic myth was severed with the revolt against Haile Selassie, the underlying authoritarian political philosophy remains intact. While today, the death of Meles Zenawi provides some hope for change, the likely outcome will be a putsch in which one of the ruling elite will come to dominate the others and the empire as a whole.

Siqqee/Gadaa is a divinely inspired political philosophy in which the desire of God is not for obedience but for safuu—an overarching harmony in the universe, which implies harmony in society and respect for all peoples. It also has an ecological component, which recognizes the interconnections among humans and their environment. In some sense it could be argued that Gadaa/Siqqee is democratic to a fault. In the present context that fault can serve as an asset as it recognizes not only the democratic rights of Oromo men, but also the democratic rights of Oromo women (a recognition not fully acknowledged in the past). But it does not stop there. It recognizes the democratic rights of all peoples and in the Ethiopian context the democratic rights of the people of each of the ethno-nations and cultures that live within the empire. It is that belief in a common humanity and right to cultural identity and self-determination that is much in need in an Ethiopia where the violation of human rights and the subjugation of democracy are daily events. The principle of an indigenous democratic political philosophy can be enriched by the democratic cultures of others to bring about a lasting improvement in the lives of peoples who have suffered the loss of cultural, political and human rights at the hands of an autocratic/colonial elite.

### **The struggle to revitalize Siqqee/Gadaa**

The struggle for the revitalization of Siqqee/Gadaa has been a process that, to date, has focused almost exclusively on the Oromo and

their liberation from bondage at the hands of the Ethiopians/Abyssinians and their collaborators. After their conquest, despite being assigned the status of colonial subjects and second-class citizens by the Ethiopian Empire, Oromo cultural and political resistance to Ethiopian colonization has endured. Various Oromo groups challenged Ethiopian settler colonialism with the goal of regaining their freedom and independence. Over the years there have been numerous local uprisings in different parts of Oromia. For a long time, various acts of resistance took place without a central national organization. Scattered Oromo resistance movements continued until the 1960s, when they gave rise to the Oromo national movement. Even after a century, the brutality and depredation of colonial rule had failed to crush the Oromo human spirit, erase their cultural memory and dampen their commitment to the establishment of democracy, the rule of law and the formation of an egalitarian society.

Nurtured by their elders, a small number of educated Oromo increased their understanding of the negative 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. These activists facilitated the emergence of the Oromo national movement by developing Oromummaa (Oromo culture, identity and nationalism). The emergence of the Maccaa-Tuulaama Self-Help Association (MTSA) 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 main organization's Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, Oromummaa based on the concept of Oromo democracy has emerged as the central political ideology of the Oromo national movement led by the OLF, even though this organization has failed to adequately practise the principles of the siqqee/gadaa system.

In attempting to solidify resistance to Ethiopian colonialism and the violation of their human rights, some core Oromo nationalists have asserted that without refining and adapting some elements of the original Oromo political culture of Siqqee/Gadaa, the Oromo society cannot fully develop the Oromummaa 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 and religious foundations of Oromo 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. These nationalists have already begun 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/Siqqee, nagaan, and kao or kaayyo (prosperity and peace). Furthermore, core Oromo nationalists assert today that all concerned Oromos should participate in revitalizing the Oromo national movement by applying some elements of Gadaa/Siqqee, aiming at establishing a future Oromia state, sharing sovereignty with others, implementing internal peace within the Oromo society and promoting peace with Oromia's neighbours. They also note that the Oromo national struggle has now reached a level where it requires mass mobilization and participation in order to succeed. In this mobilization, they recommend the struggle to use the ideology and principles of Siqqee/Gadaa democracy enshrined in Oromummaa to mobilize the entire nation spiritually, financially, militarily and organizationally to take coordinated political and military actions.

Also, a few Oromia and Oromo scholars

have suggested that Oromo political organizations must use Oromo political wisdom and experience in order to develop the national organizational capacity needed to throw off the chains of Ethiopian colonialism. They also recommend that after bringing together Gadaa/Siqqee experts and Oromo intellectuals who are familiar with the Oromo democratic traditions, the Oromo national movement should begin 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, and all serious and independent Oromo liberation fronts and organizations, should carry out their national obligations. This national Gumii must be modelled after the Gumii Gaayyo:

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, is 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 organizations. (Legesse, 2000/2006, p. 211)

The Gumii Gaayyo is an expression of the exemplar model of the unwritten Oromo

constitution. Reframing and transforming the unwritten Oromo constitution into a new national constitution based on Oromo democratic principles require absolute commitment from Oromo nationalists and their organizations. As Asmarom Legesse (2000/2006, p. 255) asserts, "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.

Between the periods the Oromo were colonized and Oromo nationalism emerged, Oromoness primarily existed on personal and the interpersonal levels since the Oromo were denied opportunities to form national institutions and organizations. Expressed Oromoness was targeted for destruction; colonial administrative regions were 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 (that is, languages, customs, values, etc.) and religions and adopted 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 as the result of their political opportunism. The Oromo people who have not developed a national political consciousness confuse clan, regional or religious politics with Oromo national politics.

### **Oromummaa and Gadaa/Siqqee: Visions of democracy and peace in the Horn of Africa**

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 to assist in the development of Oromo-centric political strategies and tactics that can mobilize the nation for collective action empowering the people for liberation. Oromummaa also requires that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons, operating in a democratic fashion. It enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in the promotion of a global humanity that will be free of all forms oppression and exploitation. In other words, Oromummaa is based on the principles of mutual solidarity, social justice and popular democracy.

The foundation of Oromummaa can be built beginning with the overarching principles that are embedded within Oromo traditions 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 lies at the heart of Oromo traditions and culture. At the same time, the fundamentalist elements that imitate Franjisi (Westerners) and Arabs in the two religions despise Waaqeffannaa, Oromo worldview and institutions, and even attempt to destroy them. In Oromo traditions, Waaqa is the creator of the universe and the source of all life. The universe created by Waaqa 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 all oppressed peoples, particularly

those who suffer under the Ethiopian Empire. Just as Oromummaa has been able to include a diversity of religions, it is philosophically structured in such a way as to include concepts and ideas from other cultures and peoples in the quest of creating a democratic society that rejects all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Oromummaa as an intellectual and ideological vision places the individual man and woman in their own particular cultural context at the centre of analysis and at the same time goes beyond the particularities of culture to create an inclusive democratic alternative to the vision offered in the *Kebrä Nagast*. Understanding Gadaa's complex democratic laws, elaborate legislative traditions and well-developed methods of dispute settlement can present a new perspective for African politics. The Oromo and other oppressed peoples can ally with one another on regional and global levels by exchanging political and cultural experiences and by re-creating the ideology of pan-Africanism from "below" and global mutual solidarity based on the principles of popular democracy and an egalitarian world order. Oromummaa challenges the idea of glorifying African monarchies, chiefs, warlords or dictators who collaborated with European slavers and colonizers and destroyed Africa by participating in the slave trade and the projects of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Those Africanist scholars who degrade African democratic traditions, just as their Euro-American counterparts do, devalue the Gadaa/Siqqee democratic system and consider indigenous Africans such as the Oromo as primitive and "stateless". Challenging the view of Euro-American racist and "modernist" scholars, Asmarom Legesse (2000/2006) asserts that acknowledging the variety of democracies practised by the Oromo and others in the 16th century in Africa

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 that are more advanced than their European counterpart was and still is considered quite heretical. (p. 30)

As with other nationalisms, Oromo nationalism has two edges, one cutting backward, and the other forward. The Oromo national movement should reconsider Oromo culture and history, and recognize its negative aspects and avoid them. As the formation of different autonomous Siqqee/Gadaa governments and the emergence of the moottii system contributed to the defeat of the Oromo people in the second half of the 19th century, the political fragmentation of non-Abyssinians will perpetuate their defeat and subjugation in the 21st century. Without coordinating and consolidating a unified multinational movement, the colonized cannot effectively confront and defeat the Ethiopian colonial system.

The project of consolidating a unified multinational movement is necessary for the colonized to build political alliances with others who are interested in the principles of national self-determination and multinational democratic rule. Although, to date, the priority of the Oromo national movement has been to liberate Oromia and its people, at this time the movement has the moral and political obligation to promote social justice and democracy for everyone who has suffered under the successive authoritarian-terrorist governments of the Ethiopian Empire. Therefore, in the spirit of solidarity, justice and democracy, the Oromo movement needs to look beyond itself and build political consensus with all of the national groups that endorse the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy. The Oromo people can play a central role in the development of a multinational democratic state because of its democratic tradition, the size of its population, geopolitics and abundant economic resources by working

alongside others in the formation of a democracy that recognizes the cultural insights and gifts of all. A democratic, multinational liberation movement should demonstrate to people of all nations that it is serious about statehood, sovereignty and democracy for the colonized peoples living within the Ethiopian Empire.

### Regional and global challenges

For the most part, the Gadaa/Siqqee system was suppressed by the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism. Western powers, predominantly Great Britain and the United States, have given external legitimacy to the Ethiopian state, which continues to engage in colonialism, state terrorism and the cultural destruction of indigenous peoples (Jalata, 2005a, 2005b). Successive Ethiopian regimes used Christianity to link themselves to Europe and North America in order to consolidate their power against the colonized population groups, including the Oromo. In addition, between 1974 and 1991, the Mengistu regime utilized a “socialist” discourse to ally itself with the former Soviet Bloc and to consolidate its state power. Currently, the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government uses a “democratic” discourse to make its rule acceptable in the world and to obtain financial and military assistance from the West, particularly the United States, while engaging in state terrorism (Jalata, 2005a, pp. 229–252). Unfortunately, China currently plays a similar role in this empire.

Since 1992, this government has focused on attacking the Oromo national movement led by the OLF and transferring Oromia’s economic resources to Tigrayan elites and the Tigrayan region. The regime started its criminal actions by denying political space to the Oromo people when it “closed more than 200 OLF campaign offices and imprisoned and killed hundreds of OLF cadres and supporters ahead of the elections scheduled to take place on 21 June 1992” (Hassen, 2002, p. 28). Furthermore, the regime

focuses on developing Tigray and its human potential primarily at the cost of Oromia and its population (Adunga, 2006). In 1992, the Meles regime claimed it was imprisoning 22,000 OLF members, supporters and sympathizers in concentration camps at Didheesa in Wallaga, Agarfa in Bale, Blate in Sidamo, and Hurso in Hararge (Hassen, 2002, p. 32). Credible sources estimated that between 45,000 and 50,000 Oromos were imprisoned in these concentration camps from 1992 to 1994 and 3,000 of them died from torture, malnutrition, diarrhoea, malaria and other diseases (Pollack, 1996, p. 12).

This regime has banned independent Oromo organizations, including the OLF, and declared war on the Oromo people. It even outlawed Oromo journalists and other writers and closed down Oromo newspapers (Hassen, 2002, p. 31). The regime also banned Oromo musical groups and all professional associations. It primarily uses its puppet organization known as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) to terrorize, suppress and exploit the Oromo people. While terrorizing millions of Oromos, the regime has established a political marriage of convenience with the governments of Kenya, Djibouti, Sudan and some Somali warlords in order to deny support and sanctuary to Oromo refugees and the Oromo national movement while extending its terrorist activities in the Horn of Africa. This terrorist regime maintains political repression, tight control of foreign aid and domestic financial resources, and direct ownership and control of all aspects of its militarized colonial state, including security and military institutions, and judiciary and other public bodies.

Emboldened by the external support it receives from the West, the current authoritarian-terrorist regime of Ethiopia is using terror to govern the colonized regions, such as Oromia, Ogadenia, Sidama and Gambella, as well as conducting recurrent wars on its neighbours, such as Eritrea and Somalia. The regime also uses the media to attack the OLF and all self-aware

Oromos in order to destroy any possibility of independent Oromo national leadership and to deny the formation of an Oromo political voice. It has targeted officials and members of the MTSA, accusing them of being linked to the OLF and protesting Oromo students. Government security men closed the office of this association in Finfinnee, confiscated documents and properties and imprisoned the chairperson, Diribi Demissie; the vice-chairperson, Gamachu Fayera; and other officers on 18 May 2004. According to Human Rights Watch:

In July 2004, the Ethiopian government revoked the license of the venerable Oromo self-help association Macca Tuulama for allegedly carrying out "political activities" in violations of its charter. The police subsequently arrested four of the organization's leaders on charges of "terrorism" and providing support to the OLF. The four were released on bail in August but were arbitrarily arrested a week later. (2005a, pp. 1–2)

Furthermore, governmental authorities consolidated quasi-government institutions known as *gott* and *garee* from a pre-existing system of local government to maintain tight political control in Oromia; they

imposed these new structures on their communities and ... the *garee* regularly require them to perform forced labor on projects they have no hand in designing. More disturbingly, regional authorities are using the *gott* and *garee* to monitor the speech and personal lives of the rural population, to restrict and control the movements of residents, and to enforce farmers' attendance at "meetings" that are thinly disguised OPDO political rallies. (Human Rights Watch, 2005b, p. 2)

The government has continued to eliminate or imprison politically conscious and self-respecting Oromos.

After being jailed and released from prison



after six years, Seye Abraha, the former Defence Minister of the regime who participated in massacring and imprisoning thousands of Oromos, testified on 5 January 2008 to an audience in Virginia, United States, that “esir betu Oromigna yinager” (“the prison speaks Afaan Oromoo [the language of the Oromo people]”) and noted that “about 99% of the prisoners in Qaliti are Oromos” (Shewakena, 2008, para. 3). According to Human Rights Watch:

Since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations have regularly been used as a transparent pretext to imprison individuals who publicly question government policies or actions. Security forces have tortured many detainees and subjected them to continuing harassment and abuse for years after their release. That harassment, in turn, has often destroyed victims’ ability to earn a livelihood and isolated them from their communities. (2005b, pp. 1–2)

Imprisoned Oromos and others are subjected to different forms of torture. Former prisoners testified that their arms and legs were tied tightly together on their backs while their naked bodies were whipped. There were prisoners who were locked up in empty steel barrels and tormented with heat from the tropical sun during the day and from the cold air at night. There were also prisoners who were forced into pits so that fire could be lit on top of them (Fossati, Namarra, & Niggli, 1996). State terrorism is employed to discourage the Oromo from participating in their national movement. Such terrorism manifests itself in the form of war, assassination, murder, castration, burying alive, throwing off cliffs, hanging, torture, rape, poisoning, confiscation of properties by the police and the army.

The methods of killing also include burning, bombing, cutting throats or arteries in the neck, strangulation, shooting and burying

people up to their necks in the ground. State sanctioned rape is another form of terrorism used to demoralize, destroy and to show that Tigrayans are a powerful group that can do anything to the Oromo. Tigrayan cadres, soldiers and officials have frequently raped Oromo girls and women (Fossati et al., 1996, p. 10). Most Oromos who were murdered by the agents of the Ethiopian government were denied burial and eaten by hyenas. For instance, in 2007, the Meles militia killed 20 Oromos and left their corpses on the Mountain of Suufi in Eastern Oromia. Furthermore, the regime has mobilized ethnonational minority groups such as the Somalis, Afars, Konsos and Gumuz to kill and terrorize the Oromo. For instance, in the last week of May 2008, the Gumuz militia terrorized the Oromo by murdering women, children and others in the administrative region of Wallaga (Voice of America, 2008).

The regime has conducted fraudulent elections several times and has achieved recognition from the international community. Hence, the international community has ignored the principles of democracy and human rights. After the fraudulent May 2005 elections, the Meles regime killed more than 193 demonstrators and imprisoned thousands of them in Finfinnee and other cities because they peacefully opposed the vote rigging carried out by the regime. Today nobody knows for sure how many people the regime killed or imprisoned in the rural areas since it did not allow the reporting of such information. Human Rights Watch (2005b, p. 1) notes that in “Oromia, the largest and most populous state in Ethiopia, systematic political repression and pervasive human rights violations have denied citizens the freedom to associate and to freely form and express their political ideas”. Against the backdrop of such incessant crimes against humanity, the only choice the Oromo people have is to intensify their national struggle in order to re-create Oromo statehood and sovereignty that they had once enjoyed under the Gadaa/Siqqee republic.

## Conclusion

A democratic multinational liberation movement could be developed by refining and adapting some central aspects of the Oromo democratic heritage while welcoming similar insights from the other colonized peoples in the Ethiopian Empire in order to facilitate a fundamental transformation of the political economy of the Horn of Africa. Retrieving the best elements of the Oromo and other democratic traditions and establishing a politico-military organization are necessary to overcome the current political challenge the colonized face from the current Ethiopian government, its sympathizers from all nations and its global supporters, which are all hindering the re-emergence of sovereignty and democracy in the region. Refining and adapting the central elements of Oromo democratic traditions and those of others can help all peoples attain internal unity and peace and external solidarity with regional and international powers that recognize and accept the principles of national self-determination, sustainable development, regional and global peace, and multinational democracy. The survival of the Oromo and other nations requires restoring the Gadaa/Siqqee system, blending it with democratic insights from other colonized nations, consolidating the multinational democratic liberation struggle and mobilizing the entire colonized population to dismantle the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian terrorist government to recreate a sovereign multinational democratic state in the Horn of Africa based on the principles of an indigenous democracy, and to avoid the sectarian violence that has resulted from the overthrow of autocratic regimes elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa.

This study identifies the need for further research in several areas. First, Oromo researchers need to give greater focus to the role and institutions of women that have helped maintain Siqqee/Gadaa democracy in the face of attempts by the Abyssinian colonial enterprise

to de-Oromize the Oromo-speaking population. Second, the quest for alliance and solidarity should be conducted in a way that encourages members of all colonized nations in the Ethiopian Empire to recover and maintain their heritages while identifying democratic elements that can contribute to the establishment of a democratic multinational liberation movement. The concept of indigenous democracy can be a starting point for identifying democratic traditions among the many peoples in the interior of the Horn of Africa. To this end, research into traditions that are democratic, respect the rule of law, and protect the human rights of all needs to move forward as a part of the quest for the resolution of the current crisis in the Ethiopian Empire that subjects all but the authoritarian few who violate the human, cultural and socio-economic rights of the majority.

## Glossary

Abbaa Duula	father of war (the top military leader)
Abbaa Gadaa	father of assembly (the president of the assembly)
Abbaa Muuda	father of the anointment
Afaan Oromoo	formal name of the language spoken by the Oromo people
ayyaana	spirits
bilisummaa	liberation/freedom
daballee	one of the age sets
dorooma/ qoondala	one of the age sets
foollee	one of the age sets
Franjis	Westerner
Gadaa	Oromo democracy
garee	Tigray organizational unit
gootummaa	bravery and patriotism
gott	Tigray organizational unit
Gumii	assembly
Gumii Gaayyo	assembly of multitudes
Gumii Oromia	national assembly of Oromia
itimakko	one of the age sets

jilas	pilgrims
kao	prosperity and peace
kayyo	prosperity and peace (different spelling for kao)
<i>Kebrā Nagast</i>	<i>The Glory of the Kings</i> , a foundational document for Abyssinians
luba	one of the age sets, the leadership age set
moottii	autocratic kingdoms among the Oromo
moottiis	monarchs, leaders of the autocratic kingdoms
nagaa	peace
Oromummaa	Oromo culture, identity and nationalism
qaallus	spiritual leaders
safuu	Oromo moral and ethical codes
Siqqee	Oromo women's sisterhood
uumaa	nature
Waaqa	God, the Creator
Waaqeffannaa	Oromo monotheistic indigenous religion
walabummaa	sovereignty
warra Qaallu	Spiritual leaders who are also electors

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