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Oromumma and the Elusive Quest for Reconciliation

Megersa Tolera^{1*} 

¹Peace and Development Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia. E-mail: magarsatolera@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of Oromumma and the pursuit of reconciliation among the Oromo people in Ethiopia. The Oromo have a rich cultural heritage that emphasizes the importance of collective decision-making, social accountability, and human rights. The Oromo reconciliation process is an example of a community-based conflict resolution mechanism that prioritizes restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities. However, the process faces several challenges, including a lack of formal recognition and support from the Ethiopian government and judiciary. This essay argues that the pursuit of reconciliation requires a long-term, multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes social and economic justice. Drawing on the principles of Oromumma and restorative justice, alternative conflict resolution mechanisms can be developed that are effective, legitimate, and sustainable. The pursuit of reconciliation for the Oromo people requires a deep understanding of their cultural heritage and values, as well as a commitment to a long-term, multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes social and economic justice.

Keywords: *Oromumma, Reconciliation, Peace, Oromo*

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1. Introduction

Oromumma is a multifaceted initiative with both national and global dimensions. At the national level, it serves as the primary ideology of the Oromo national movement, allowing Oromos to reclaim their cultural heritage, evaluate the effects of Ethiopian colonialism, express their collective grievances, mobilize a variety of cultural resources, connect Oromo personal, interpersonal, and national relationships, and develop Oromo-centric political strategies to galvanize the nation towards liberation. On a global level, Oromumma necessitates an inclusive and democratic Oromo national movement that can form partnerships with other political and social movements that support national self-determination and multinational democracy, with the goal of creating a world free of all forms of oppression and exploitation. This is in line with the idea of cultural revival, which emphasizes the importance of reclaiming and revitalizing cultural practices and traditions as a means of promoting identity and resistance to oppression (Asafa, 2014).

* Corresponding author: Megersa Tolera, Peace and Development Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia.

E-mail: magarsatolera@gmail.com

As a global project, Oromumma requires that the Oromo national movement be inclusive of all persons operating in a democratic fashion. This global Oromumma enables the Oromo people to form alliances with all political forces and social movements that accept the principles of national self-determination and multinational democracy in promotion of a global humanity that is free of all forms oppression and exploitation. As stated by Mohammed Hassen, "Oromumma as a social movement is not only concerned with the welfare of the Oromo people but also with the welfare of all humanity" (Hassen, 2002).

This global Oromumma is based on the principles of mutual solidarity, social justice, and popular democracy. As a social movement, Oromo nationalism understands that the struggle for national liberation is interconnected with the struggle for global justice and social equality. This is in line with the principles of internationalism, which emphasizes the importance of solidarity and cooperation among oppressed peoples and nations in the struggle for liberation (Asafa, 2010).

It is true that historically and culturally speaking, Oromo clans and clan families did not have clear geopolitical boundaries among themselves. This is due to the fact that the Oromo people have a long history of migration and settlement across a vast expanse of territory, and as a result, many clans have members living in different regions of Oromia. This has led to the existence of clans with the same name in different parts of Oromia, as mentioned in the question.

For example, the Jarso clan is found in various parts of Oromia, including East Hararghe, West Hararghe, Arsi, and Bale. Similarly, the Gida clan is found in many parts of Oromia, including Borana, Guji, and Jimma. The Karayu clan is found in West Hararghe, East Hararghe, and Guji, while the Galan clan is found in Borana, Guji, and Jimma. The Nole clan is found in different parts of Oromia, including Bale, Arsi, and East Hararghe, while the Jiru clan is found in Borana, Guji, and West Hararghe (Gallo, 2016).

The lack of clear geopolitical boundaries among Oromo clans and clan families has indeed had important implications for Oromo society and politics. One of the main challenges it has posed is the difficulty in establishing clear lines of authority and governance, which has often resulted in political fragmentation and conflicts between different clans and regions. As stated by Mohammed Hassen, "the lack of a centralized political authority has made it difficult to maintain peace and stability in Oromo society" (Hassen, 2002).

This has also contributed to the fragmentation of Oromo society, as different clans and regions have developed their own unique cultural practices and identities. As noted by Gallo (2016), "the lack of a common language or political structure has contributed to the fragmentation of Oromo society into various sub-groups and regions, each with their own distinct cultural practices and identities."

Another consequence of this lack of clear geopolitical boundaries is the difficulty in resolving conflicts and disputes that arise between different clans and regions. As noted by Abbink (2000), "the absence of a clear hierarchy and political structure has made it difficult to resolve conflicts between different Oromo clans and regions."

Efforts to establish more cohesive political structures within Oromo society have been ongoing for decades, and various political organizations have proposed different models of political organization. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is one such organization that has advocated for a centralized political authority that can represent the interests of all Oromo clans and regions. The OLF was formed in 1973 with the aim of achieving greater political autonomy for the Oromo people, and has since then been one of the main political organizations representing the interests of the Oromo people (Baxter, 1997).

Similarly, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) has advocated for a more decentralized political system that recognizes the autonomy of different regions while also promoting national unity. The OFC was formed in 2009 as a coalition of different Oromo political parties, and has since then been one of the main opposition parties in Ethiopia. The OFC has proposed a federal system of government in which power is decentralized to the regional level, with each region having a significant degree of autonomy (Megersa, 2011).

However, the question of how to establish a more cohesive political structure within Oromo society remains a contentious issue. While some organizations advocate for a centralized political authority, others argue that a decentralized system of governance is more appropriate given the diverse nature of Oromo society. As noted by Hassen (2002), "the lack of a clear consensus on the appropriate model of political organization has been one of the main challenges facing the Oromo national movement."

In recent years, there have been some positive developments towards establishing a more cohesive political structure within Oromo society. For example, the Oromo protests that began in 2014 were a significant moment in the Oromo national movement, as they brought together Oromos from different regions and backgrounds in a common struggle for greater political freedom and autonomy. Similarly, the election of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister of Ethiopia in 2018 represented a significant shift in Ethiopian politics, and has opened up new opportunities for dialogue and negotiation between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian government (Mohammed, 2019).

2. Methodology

The development of the essay followed a structured approach. First, extensive research was conducted on the history, culture, and traditions of the Oromo people in Ethiopia by reviewing academic articles, books, and other relevant sources. Second, the key concepts and themes related to Oromumma and the pursuit of reconciliation was identified, including collective decision-making, social accountability, restorative justice, and human rights. Third, an analysis was carried out on the challenges and limitations of the Oromo reconciliation process and its effectiveness in resolving conflicts in a culturally appropriate manner. Fourth, alternative conflict resolution mechanisms were explored, which are more culturally appropriate for Ethiopia and drawing on the principles of Oromumma and restorative justice. Fifth, evidence and examples were used to support the arguments and conclusions, and sources were cited accurately. Finally, the essay was organized in a clear and logical manner, with a strong introduction, body, and conclusion.

3. Results and Discussion

The quest for reconciliation between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian state has been ongoing for many years, and while there have been some positive developments in recent years, many challenges remain. The Ethiopian government's response to the Oromo protests in 2015-2018 was marked by excessive use of force, mass arrests, and human rights violations, leading to widespread condemnation from the international community (Amnesty International, 2016). While the Ethiopian government has made some efforts to address the Oromo people's concerns, many Oromo activists and politicians argue that these efforts are insufficient and that genuine reconciliation requires a fundamental shift in the political and social structures of the Ethiopian state.

One of the main challenges facing the quest for reconciliation is the deep-seated distrust between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian state. As noted by Mohammed (2019), "the Oromo people's experience with the Ethiopian state has been marked by decades of marginalization, discrimination, and human rights violations, which has led to a deep-seated distrust of the government and its institutions." This distrust has been exacerbated by the government's response to the Oromo protests, which many Oromo activists and politicians view as evidence of the government's unwillingness to address their concerns.

Another challenge is the need for a fundamental shift in the political and social structures of the Ethiopian state. As noted by Abbink (2019), "genuine reconciliation requires a fundamental shift in the political and social structures of the Ethiopian state, which have historically been dominated by narrow elite." This shift would require not only political reforms but also social and economic reforms that address the deep-seated inequalities and injustices that have contributed to the marginalization of the Oromo people.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in recent years. The election of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister of Ethiopia in 2018 represented a significant shift in Ethiopian politics, and has opened up new opportunities for dialogue and negotiation between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian government (Mohammed, 2019). The government has also taken some steps to address the Oromo people's concerns, such as releasing political prisoners and initiating a process of constitutional reform.

However, many Oromo activists and politicians argue that these efforts are insufficient and that genuine reconciliation requires a more comprehensive approach. As noted by Amnesty International (2019), "the Ethiopian government must take concrete steps to address the root causes of the protests, including the long-standing grievances of the Oromo people." This would require not only political reforms but also social and economic reforms that address the deep-seated inequalities and injustices that have contributed to the marginalization of the Oromo people.

Pankhurst argues that reconciliation should be understood as a process rather than a fixed end goal, and emphasizes the importance of addressing the underlying causes of conflict in the reconciliation process. She draws on case studies from various conflict contexts to illustrate the importance of a process-focused approach to reconciliation.

Pankhurst's emphasis on the importance of addressing the structural causes of conflict in the reconciliation process has been particularly influential. As noted by Ellis and Bjorkdahl (2012), "Pankhurst's paper has been influential in introducing the concept of 'structural reconciliation', which emphasizes the need to address the underlying causes of conflict in the reconciliation process."

Pankhurst's paper has also been influential in shaping the practice of reconciliation in various conflict contexts. For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in part based on the principles outlined by Pankhurst. The TRC's emphasis on truth-telling, acknowledgment of past wrongs, and reparations for victims reflects the process-focused approach to reconciliation advocated by Pankhurst (Boraine, 2002).

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was influenced by Pankhurst's emphasis on addressing the structural causes of conflict in the reconciliation process. The agreement included provisions for power-sharing and the promotion of social and economic justice, which reflect the process-focused approach to reconciliation advocated by Pankhurst (Daly, 2016).

In conclusion, Pankhurst's (2009) paper "Reconciliation: The Emphasis on Process" has been influential in shaping the conceptualization and practice of reconciliation in various conflict contexts. Pankhurst's emphasis on a process-focused approach to reconciliation, which addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes healing and transformation, has been widely adopted in both theory and practice.

Not with standing, reconciliation is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been subject to various interpretations and conceptualizations. However, at its core, reconciliation refers to the restoration of relationships between individuals or groups that have been damaged as a result of conflict, harm, or injustice. In the field of conflict resolution, reconciliation has been identified as a key component in building sustainable peace.

The importance of reconciliation as a means of achieving sustainable peace has been recognized in various conflict contexts. For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to address the legacy of apartheid and promote reconciliation between different racial groups. The TRC's focus on truth-telling, acknowledgment of past wrongs, and reparations for victims reflects the process-focused approach to reconciliation advocated by Donna Pankhurst (Boraine, 2002).

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 included provisions for power-sharing and the promotion of social and economic justice, which reflect the process-focused approach to reconciliation advocated by Pankhurst (Daly, 2016). The agreement sought to address the underlying causes of the conflict and promote healing and transformation through a process of dialogue and negotiation.

The concept of reconciliation has also been influential in shaping the practice of conflict resolution in other contexts. For example, in the field of transitional justice, which seeks to address human rights abuses and other forms of injustice in the aftermath of conflict or authoritarian rule, reconciliation is often seen as a key goal (Teitel, 2003). The concept of reconciliation is also increasingly being applied in other areas of conflict resolution, such as intergroup relations, workplace conflict, and family disputes (Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004).

Donna Pankhurst's emphasis on the process of reconciliation is consistent with the work of other scholars in the field, such as Lederach (1997), who have emphasized the importance of a long-term, multifaceted approach to peacebuilding that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes social and economic justice.

Lederach's book "*Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*" is a seminal work in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In the book, Lederach argues that sustainable peace requires a transformative process that addresses the root causes of conflict and promotes long-term structural change. He emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach that includes not only formal mechanisms such as truth commissions and reparations programs, but also grassroots initiatives that promote social and economic justice and empower marginalized groups. This approach to peacebuilding is consistent with Pankhurst's emphasis on a process-focused approach to reconciliation that addresses the underlying causes of conflict.

Other scholars in the field have also emphasized the importance of a process-focused approach to reconciliation. For example, Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) argue that reconciliation is not a fixed end goal, but rather a process of ongoing dialogue and negotiation that involves the recognition and acknowledgment of past wrongs, the promotion of empathy and understanding, and the building of trust and mutual respect between conflicting parties. Similarly, Lederach and Appleby (2010) emphasize the importance of a long-term, collaborative approach to peacebuilding that involves multiple stakeholders and addresses the root causes of conflict.

The Oromo reconciliation grounds are a traditional conflict resolution mechanism practiced by the Oromo people, who are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. The Oromo have a long history of resolving conflicts through community-based processes that prioritize restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities.

The Oromo reconciliation grounds, also known as "Gumii Gaayoo" or "Gumii Gadaa," are community-based forums where disputes are settled through a process of negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation. These forums are attended by representatives from the conflicting parties, as well as elders, religious leaders, and other members of the community. The process is guided by a set of traditional rules and procedures that prioritize restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities.

The Oromo reconciliation grounds have been used to resolve a wide range of disputes, including land disputes, family conflicts, and inter-community conflicts. One example of the use of the reconciliation grounds can be seen in the resolution of a land dispute in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. In this case, the conflicting parties agreed to attend the reconciliation grounds, where they were able to negotiate a settlement that was acceptable to both sides. The process involved the recognition and acknowledgment of past wrongs, as well as the establishment of mechanisms to prevent similar disputes from arising in the future (Megerssa, 2011).

The Oromo reconciliation grounds are an important example of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that prioritize restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities. The use of these forums reflects the Oromo tradition of resolving conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and mediation, rather than through formal legal processes or punitive measures. This approach to conflict resolution is consistent with the restorative justice approach advocated by scholars such as Zehr (1990) and Pankhurst (2009).

The Oromo reconciliation process is initiated by identifying the conflict and selecting a mediator or arbitrator, who is usually a respected elder or religious leader. The mediator facilitates dialogue between the parties, helps them identify the root cause of the conflict, and works towards a mutually acceptable solution. The process is based on the principle of gadaa, a traditional democratic system rooted in Oromo culture that emphasizes collective decision-making, social accountability, and human rights. Restorative justice is emphasized, with a focus on healing relationships rather than punishing offenders. Compensation, apology, and restoration of damaged relationships are used to achieve this. The process is effective in resolving conflicts in a culturally appropriate manner, promoting social cohesion and community harmony. However, it faces challenges such as lack of recognition and support from the government and judiciary, leading to lack of enforcement of its decisions and undermining its legitimacy.

Despite the challenges faced by the Oromo reconciliation process, it remains an important part of the Oromo culture and has been successfully used to resolve conflicts in many parts of Ethiopia. Its principles of restorative justice, collective decision-making and social accountability could provide valuable insights for the development of alternative conflict resolution mechanisms that are more culturally appropriate for Ethiopia.

The Oromo reconciliation process is an example of a community-based conflict resolution mechanism that prioritizes restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities. This approach to conflict resolution is consistent with the restorative justice approach advocated by scholars such as Zehr (1990) and Pankhurst (2009) and has been used successfully in many parts of Ethiopia to resolve conflicts ranging from land disputes to inter-ethnic conflicts.

The principles of restorative justice, collective decision-making, and social accountability that underpin the Oromo reconciliation process could provide valuable insights for the development of alternative conflict resolution mechanisms that are more culturally appropriate for Ethiopia. For example, the use of community-based forums that prioritize restorative justice and healing relationships, such as the Oromo reconciliation

grounds, could be expanded and formalized to provide an alternative to formal legal processes that may not be culturally appropriate or accessible for all members of society.

Additionally, the principles of collective decision-making and social accountability that are central to the Oromo reconciliation process could be incorporated into other conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the formal justice system and government decision-making processes. This could help to promote a more participatory and inclusive approach to decision-making and conflict resolution that is more reflective of the cultural values and traditions of the Ethiopian people.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of Oromumma and the pursuit of reconciliation are intertwined and essential for the Oromo people in Ethiopia. The Oromo people have a rich cultural heritage that emphasizes the importance of collective decision-making, social accountability, and human rights. The Oromo reconciliation process is an example of a community-based conflict resolution mechanism that prioritizes restorative justice and healing relationships between individuals and communities.

Despite its effectiveness in resolving conflicts in a culturally appropriate manner, the Oromo reconciliation process faces several challenges, including a lack of formal recognition and support from the Ethiopian government and judiciary. This can lead to a lack of enforcement of the decisions made through the process, which undermines its legitimacy and effectiveness.

The pursuit of reconciliation, therefore, is an elusive quest for the Oromo people as they strive to overcome the challenges and limitations of the Oromo reconciliation process. The principles of Oromumma, such as collective decision-making, social accountability, and human rights, provide a framework for developing alternative conflict resolution mechanisms that are more culturally appropriate for Ethiopia.

The pursuit of reconciliation requires a long-term, multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes social and economic justice. This approach is consistent with the restorative justice approach advocated by scholars in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

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