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# **African Journal of History and Culture**

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## **ARTICLE**

**Theorizing Namummaa: Oromo relational philosophy  
(Oromos' Gift to the World)**

Wake Jeo Gerbi

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Theorizing *Namummaa*: Oromo relational philosophy (Oromos' Gift to the World)

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This article attempts to theorize the concept of *namummaa*, Oromo relational philosophy which is complex, dynamic and has values that are connected to behavior and character of a person. *Namummaa* is Oromo philosophy of humanness that claims what makes a person human being, not just human, is her or his potential to grow into good and mature vertical and horizontal relationships: relationship with community in which a person lives and with human community as the whole, and relationship with *Waaqa/Waaqayoo Uumaa*-God the Creator and with all that is created respectively. Since there is a limitation of written sources on this particular concept *namummaa*, the aim of this article is to do systematic readings of available written and oral sources from primary and secondary data. To this end, the article critically used the data that is relevant to the subject under discussion and secondary data to structure and theorize the notion of Oromo relational philosophy. Based on primary and secondary data, the article uncovers that *namummaa* is humanity or humanness from Oromo perspective. The study articulates that *namummaa* is complex, connected to the strong quality of human beings, meaningful and loaded with values that govern the people's way of life. It further argues that *namummaa* has been established on Oromos' epistemology, cosmology and ontology through oral tradition and passed from generation to generation. It also examines the nature and characteristics of Oromo relational philosophy. What is more, the article uncovers that the knowledge that we have today about *namummaa* is fragmented due to lack of a replicated literature on Oromos' oral tradition and other internal and external factors that have been employed by human agents, and recommends that there is a need of further research to know more how *namummaa* was understood and to be well understood in the current days.

**Key Words:** *Namummaa*, values, indigenous institutions, religious customs, social relations, moral code, peace, social justice, *Waaqayoo*.

## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Africans have been misunderstood and misrepresented by non-Africans. Regarding this, Ramose (2002) asserts that non-African overlooked Africans and described them as neither having their own philosophy nor able to define, explain and develop a philosophy. He

argues that Africans were subject to the violence of colonization by the Westerners, who once colonized many African countries. The colonizers assumed that not only African but also Amerindian and Australian were not rational but animals which struggle for reason and

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thinking rationally. Only the Westerners, the White people, can do so. They constructed this unholy idea not only to intensify colonization, slavery and racism, but also to disregard and eliminate non-Western value system, belief system, culture and mythology that preserve the subjects' world view and to replace them with their own culture and philosophy (Ramose, 2002). *Ubuntu*, a powerful South African philosophy of humanity suffered disregard and endured continual denial of recognition by colonizers for a long period of time. Although it is widely accepted by many African societies as African philosophy of humanity, many western scholars still consider that *Ubuntu* is ethnic philosophy and has no sound scientific foundation and universality (Brookryk, 2002).

In African philosophy of humanity, spirituality of a person is seen as the quality of a person that forms the value and good character in a person. African society believe that inner values and humanness were given to human beings by God (Masango, 2006: 931). As African philosophy of humanity, the concept of *Ubuntu* was centered on inner values and dignity of human personality. *Ubuntu* concedes that God has endowed these two things (values and dignity) to human beings. These two vital elements change material (man) into human beings (Masango, 2006). The notion of humanness has a religious aspect. For instance according to Barker (2008), it is further enhanced through Jewish philosophy of human beings which was described in the Bible particularly in Genesis narratives in which God has created human beings in His own image (Genesis 1: 27). The New Testament also teaches communality and oneness of Christian community in Christ. Christ taught his followers to be exposed to others. Jesus taught his followers to develop communal life with others (Erickson, 1998). In this regard, the Christianity shares the concept of *Ubuntu* that discourages people for living in isolation.

*Ubuntu* is not a single element of culture rather it represents a wider philosophy or worldview. It is a belief system and a value system which is seen as the spine of the African society (Nyathu, 2004). *Ubuntu* captures the important elements that qualify any person to be human (Murithi, 2006). Mangaliso (2001) describes *Ubuntu* as a persuasive spirit of caring, hospitality, harmony and community. It is responsiveness that a person or individuals display to one another. He argues that the spirit of *Ubuntu* is able to stimulate genuine harmony and continuousness throughout the wider human system.

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is not merely restricted to one ethnic group in Africa but is found among African communities (Ramose, 1999). Ramose states that *Ubuntu* serves as the spiritual foundation of many African communities. Spirituality of *Ubuntu* communities is manifested through important African ontology such as hospitality, communalism, interdependence, caring, humility, solidarity, obedience, respect for human life and dignity. Further, he sums up *Ubuntu* with the Africans'

common expression "I am human because I belong" and pointed out that this African core value is contrary to the Western philosophical thinking of value "I think therefore I am". This opposing understandings, according to Nussbaum (2003), affected the Western philosophical and theological discourses and led them to the misrepresentation of African indigenous knowledge system and oral nature of traditional culture. The Western scholars and media negatively portrayed African society as incapable society to construct philosophy and this negative attitude made them fail to accept *Ubuntu* as African philosophy (Nussbaum, 2003). There were many African scholars who rejected *Ubuntu* invoking different criticisms. They argued that *Ubuntu*, for instance, in Shona language is *hunhu* which is very vague. Although *hunhu* means humanness, it does not admit to make rationale decision. They also argued that *Ubuntu* is group-thinking that undermines individuals freedom and it opposes the notion of liberal tradition. Further, they argued that *Ubuntu* cannot provide strong foundation for public morality. Hailey (2008) states that those scholars rejected *Ubuntu* with three main objections: 'vagueness', 'collectivism' and 'anachronism'.

The concept of *Ubuntu* is found in many African societies holding different names but similar characters and behaviors. Although I am not going to explain them in this article, I will just list some of them based on Hailey (2008) work: *ujuma* and *bumuntu* (Tanzania), *umuntu* (Uganda), *umunthu* (Malawi), *vumuntu* (Mozambique), *gimuntu* (Angola), *bomoto* (Congo), and *botho* (Setswana). Hailey argues that all these terms express humanness or a personhood from different African societies' perspectives.

The notion of *Ubuntu* is not limited to Africa, but it also flourished in non-African societies. For instance, Brookryk (2002) argues that even though they were developed and practiced in socio-political and economic conditions which were different from African situations, *loob* of Filipino, *obschina* of Russia and *jen* of China have common characters with African philosophy of *Ubuntu*.

## Organization of the article

As the aim of this article is to outline some of the main components, characters and behaviors of *Namummaa* and introduce them from philosophical point of view, the article has explained the etymological nature of the word *Namumma* and casting light on the theoretical and academic history of Oromo relational philosophy, it continued to examine other components of *Namummaa* which can be extended as independent articles with their own. The theoretical framework of Oromo relational philosophy in this article was either borrowed from the culture which is alien to Oromo people or the school which is not relevant to Oromo indigenous knowledge and totally relied on them. But indicating the similarity of

*Namummaa* with the concepts of humanity in different cultures and using them in the form of dialogue, the article mainly based on the people's expressions, proverbs, mythology and experiences that connect and help them to interact, to understand other people as well as to be understood.

This article aims to theorize the main concepts of *Namummaa*. It describes and analyses *Namummaa* from different aspects within its philosophical framework. As it consciously bring many aspects of this philosophy that demand separate and through research to fully understand this concept, the article will deal with etymology and academic approaches of Oromo relational philosophy. It analyze some aspects of this philosophy such as personhood and community, value, moral regeneration, religious concepts, law and politics, and peace. Further, the article examines *Namummaa*'s nature and character, and its sociological aspects. It explores a normative-theoretical philosophical account of the subject matter that grows out Oromo indigenous understandings of what it means to be human beings. It clearly accounts the importance of individual liberty and oneness of community and addresses the current situation of Oromo society.

While the bulk of this article is concerned with *Namummaa* from Oromo perspectives, it also draws on the wider debates about humanity and the experience of cultures of many African societies. Although various disciplines such as theology, sociology, politics, anthropology, development and linguistics are employed, the article focuses on philosophical explanation of Oromo relational philosophy. I will describe materials and methods used in this article. Then, I will brief history of the Oromo people before I will turn to explain the ethnography of *Namummaa* and its conceptual definitions. The current academic discourse concerning Oromo relational philosophy will be discussed followed by the main focus of the article that is theorizing *Namummaa* based on some fundamental concepts of Oromo relational philosophy such as personhood and community, value, moral regeneration, religious concept, restorative justice, law and politics, peace and nature of Oromo relational philosophy will be theorized and examined.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is conducted through a systematic collection of available written and oral sources both from primary and secondary data. Since the idea of *Namummaa* as Oromo traditional philosophy has never been privileged to be written and read in Oromo oral literature, the article is done by knitting the primary data collected by semi-structured interviews for different research topics at different times. This article deliberately documents the collected data related to the interpretation of Oromos' expressions and proverbs, culture and religious customs, knowledge system, concept of social relations and moral codes that conceptually cast light on the notion of *Namummaa*. The data is presented by cross examining with existing literature on Oromo oral tradition in order to establish solid academic understanding of this concept in line with

existing knowledge. Key informants who have a bountiful knowledge about Oromos' culture, religious customs and political worldview were purposefully selected and interviewed on different subjects including Oromos' religion, politics, economic, culture, traditional justice system, indigenous institutions and self-help associations in which they have provided immense information that indicates the people have been practicing the concept of Oromo relational philosophy for centuries. They have different educational backgrounds, have different ages and all gender. So, this article critically and systematically used the idea of *namummaa* that the informants articulated when I interviewed them when the above stated subjects were under study.

The interview was made in *Afaan Oromo* (Oromo language) which is informants' mother tongue; it also my mother tongue. The collected data were transcribed into Oromo language and then translated into English (Table 1). The translated data were clearly presented described, discussed and analyzed in the form of dialogue with literature on Oromo oral tradition related to *Namummaa*. I used semi-structured interview to collect data from purposely selected custodians of Oromo culture and tradition. Ten informants were interviewed. The interview was based on the willingness of the informants. The interview was conducted through skype with the interviewees who live in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), and Sulultaa and Burayyuu which are Oromian cities around Finfinnee. Also, face-to-face interview was conducted in Oslo with Oromo traditional scholars who live in Oslo, the capital city of Norway. The anonymity was respected. While the details about them were provided in (Table 1), the index, each informants were given anonymous names 'Inf' followed by the numbers of the informants.

## Brief History of the Oromo people

The Oromos are the largest ethnic group and occupies vast size of land in Ethiopia (Jalata, 1998; Gadaa, 1999). Eide (2000) describes the Oromo people as follows.

The Oromo are spread over a wide geographical are, mainly in the east, south and west of Ethiopia with a branch in Wallo region in the north. Oromo are also found in northern Kenya. Among the people of Africa they hold a special position in that they are among the most expansive societies on record. The Oromo are one of the most numerous peoples in Africa, and by far the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (Eide, 2000: 42-43).

The Oromos are peace loving people who have advanced different indigenous mechanisms to protect peace of their nation and to organize their social, political and economic systems (Etefa, 2012). The Oromo people speak the language called *Afaan Oromo* (Oromo language) which is one of the eastern Cushitic language. "In spite of their wide geographical spread, their language is mutually intelligible even though they speak different dialects" (Eide, 1996: 48). They follow three main religions: *Waaqeffannaa* (Oromo Traditional Religion) and two Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Islam). These Abrahamic religions were introduced to the people by foreign Christian and Islam missionaries (De Salviac, 2005; Eide, 2000). The Oromo claim that their country Oromia was incorporated into Ethiopian Empire in 1890s (Jalata, 2002; Bulcha, 2011). Today, Oromia is the biggest of all nine regional states in Ethiopia (Temesgen, 2015). Legesse states that the Oromo people have their own democratic governing system called Gadaa system that regulates their social, economic, politics and religious life and enormous indigenous knowledge system and mechanisms of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, socialization, economic organization, judicial administration and social harmony. The same author articulates that Gadaa system is the most complex and mature social institution and governing system ever derived in human history (Legesse, 1973). Likewise, Etefa (2012) argues that Oromos' Gadaa system and other indigenous



**Table 1.** Lists of Informants (peasant farmers, scholars, religions leaders and political leaders).

Number	Informant's anonymous Names	Sex	Age	Occupation	Status	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
1	Inf1	F	58	Trad. Scholar	Married	10.01.2017	Oslo
2	Inf2	M	64	Lawyer	Married	20.04.2018	Finfinnee
3	Inf3	M	50	Trad. Scholar	Married	13.02.2015	Oslo
4	Inf4	F	79	Social Worker	Married	21.04.2018	Finfinnee
5	Inf5	M	81	Trad. Scholar	Married	21.04.2017	Burayyuu
6	Inf6	F	78	Trad. Scholar	Married	25.04.2017	Finfinnee
7	Inf7	M	63	<i>Qaalluu</i>	Married	15.03.2015	Oslo
8	Inf8	M	55	Social Worker	Married	05.03.2016	Oslo
9	Inf9	M	62	Anthropologist	Married	26.04.2017	Sulultaa
10	Inf10	F	70	Trad. Scholar	Married	26.2.2018	Finfinnee

F=Female, M= Male, Trad. = Traditional.

institutions like *gumaa* (murder case), *siqqee* (women's rights) or *iyjaa siqqee* (*sike cray*), *michuu* (friendship), *harma-hodhaa* (breast sacking) and *qalluu* institution (the office of spiritual leader in Oromo traditional religion called *Waaqefannaa*) are great Oromo civilization that became treasures not only for the Oromos but also for their neighbors, for other ethno-nationals in Ethiopia. These indigenous institutions and self-help associations served as vehicles and transmitters of the notions of *Namummaa*.

### Etymology

Before discussing and analyzing the main elements, nature and characteristics of *Namummaa*, I will explain its etymological concepts and situation in Oromo oral literature. Etymologically, *Namummaa* is the Oromo word derived from the noun *nama* 'human being' and the suffix *-ummaa*; whereby the final vowel sound 'a' in the former is deleted followed by the suffix. It is an abstract word that carries common qualities and behaviors of human beings distinctive from animals. Wiirtuu fi Qorannoo (1996: 311) describes *Namummaa* as "*Waan nama nama jechisiisu, kan akka, yaaduu, dubbachuu, w.k.f. danda'uu*" meaning *Namummaa* is what makes a person human beings. For instance, such as thinking, taking and the like. They also describe it as *bifa namaa*, meaning a person's physical appearance. (Wiirtuu fi Qorannoo, 1996: 311). According to this, Oromo relational philosophy deals not only with aspects of human consciousness but also with physical body.

Semantically, *-ummaa* may correspond to the English '-ity or -ness'; thus *nama* 'human being' plus *-ummaa*, thus translating into *Namummaa* meaning 'humanity' or 'humaneness'. The suffix does not only help to derive another noun from one noun, it can also change adjective into a noun. For instance, the Oromo adjective *gaarii*, means 'good', and *gaarummaa* means 'goodness'. The Oromo adjective *qulqulluu* means 'clean', 'holy', and *qulqulluummaa* means 'cleanliness', 'holiness'. This tells us that *ummaa* is the state of being or quality of being 'human'. *Ummaa* (ness) is the state of original adjective that can be converted into nouns. For instance, 'open' plus 'ness' is openness meaning the state of being open.

The word *Namummaa*, the prefix *nama* evokes the concept of being as the whole. *Nama* is enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form of existence a particular entity. It is concerned with material or concrete manifestation through a particular forms. In this sense *nama* is always oriented towards *ummaa*. Ontologically, there is not clear separation between *nama*

and *ummaa* because, on the one hand, if there is no *ummaa* there is nothing that manifests through *nama* to enable *nama* to be assumed as human being. On the other hand, if there is no *nama* which has concrete form or mood of being through *ummaa* can be manifested because *ummaa* cannot manifest itself without *nama* which has concrete forms. *Nama* and *ummaa* are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of 'being' as an indivisible 'oneness' or 'wholeness'. Hence, *Namummaa* is an essential epistemological, cosmological and ontological category in the Oromo worldview.

### Conceptual definitions of *Namummaa*

*Namummaa* is Oromo relational philosophy. In this article, *Namummaa* and Oromo relational philosophy will be used interchangeably. *Namummaa* is a philosophy of life and purpose of living. It is as a philosophy of life from Oromos' perspective in which a person becomes strong within a communal frame of the community and achieve identity of belongingness. It is the spirit of harmony to knit individuals, parents, families, neighbors, relatives, village, lineage, clans, tribes, nation and nations as human race where human beings behave with respect, empathy, generosity and dignity towards one another. It is a knowledge system through which the Oromo people understand, interpret and practice the laws of *Waaqayyoo* (God). Oromo relational philosophy is how the people understand creation and human beings, society and strive to govern their daily lives based on norms and moral principles that keep *nagaa* (peace) and *safuu* (moral balance or respect) vertically (with God) and horizontally (with fellow human beings and nature). Hinnant states that the Oromo people, in their *Gadaa* system, established the laws of society that interpret and reinforces the laws of God to maintain peace and respect among *Uumaa* (God the Creator), nature and sociality (Hinnant, 1978: 210). Maintaining moral balance and peace in the society is essential to achieve full human destiny (Knutsson, 1967). That means according to Oromo worldview human beings cannot maintain their peace and incapable to achieve their full destiny if they have no respect for the laws of God and moral balance in the society. *Namummaa* is all inclusive worldview. Inf7 and Inf4 argue that there are some crucial elements that run through the vein of Oromo relation philosophy: compassion, solidarity, goodness and respect. They argue that social, political, economic and spiritual ethos of *namummaa* reveals through love, respect, unity in diversity, tolerance, sharing, care, empathy, hospitality, solidarity, forgiveness, restorative justice, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. Inf10 agrees with Inf4 and

Inf7 that these elements are essential concepts that make a person human. They are shared by all human beings (Inf10). That means, this all-inclusiveness of Oromo relational philosophy characterizes it as a philosophy of humanness towards others. In other words, *Namummaa* is a universal bond that connects all humanity.

*Namummaa* is *Ubuntu* from the Oromo perspective. In this sense, *Namummaa* connects the Oromo people to other African societies who adhere humanity- "I am because we are" (Tutu, 1999). Just as *Ubuntu* has been under severe attack by western colonizers in Africa particularly in South Africa, Oromo relational philosophy has been under systematic attack by Abyssinian colonial settlers since Oromia (the Oromo country) was incorporated in the modern Ethiopian state. The Abyssinian political elites and scholars have been misrepresenting and devastating Oromo indigenous knowledge, culture and identity. They also misinformed the history of the people to the outside world. Therefore, many European anthropologists, journalists, Christian missionaries and travelers overlooked the Oromos' belief system, culture and value system and assumed that the Oromos were incapable to innovate their culture and produce knowledge (Bushaa et al., 1998).

To verify their unjustified violence against the Oromo culture, they Abyssinian colonial leaders used different tactics to devastate everything that assumed as vehicles of Oromo philosophy (Bokku, 2011; Jalata, 1998; Gadaa, 1999). Menilik banned Oromo cultural and traditional religious practices so that the transmission of indigenous system would be stopped from passing from generation to generation and creation of the new knowledge in the people's philosophy would come to an end (Jalata, 1998). Haile Selassie and Mengistu Hailemarima established and implemented political, social and economic policies that attacked Oromo indigenous institutions, culture and other things connected to history and identity to weaken the people's innovation, knowledge production system (Bulcha, 2011). As Wake (2016b) argues, their educationalists and social scientists also, particularly up to the last three decades, deliberately excluded the people's cultural values, mythology, proverbs, sayings, poems, songs and other metanarratives that cast light on Oromo worldview from the education system in Ethiopia. Thus, Oromos were reduced to silence about themselves. Even after 1991, that is, after the rights of developing language, culture and religion was enshrined in the constitution of the country, the TPLF-led Ethiopian government has been systematically eliminating culture (Wake, 2016b). The TPLF have been destroying institutions, artistic works, literature, and custodians of Oromo culture and other human intellect-based patents, inventions and symbols that manifest and preserve Oromo worldview (Jalata, 2008; Bulcha 2011). Although it seems that the current Oromos' struggle for decolonization in Oromia removed some of this problem, still it is important to assert and uphold that the people should take the opportunity to speak for and about themselves and to rewrite their history and develop their own philosophy.

Many Oromo and non-Oromo scholars in their studies related to anthropology, sociology, philosophy, history and ethics, attempted to explore some aspects of *safuu* (moral code) and other value system and customs in Oromo culture (Gnamo, 2014; Jalata, 2007; Choma, 2001; Ta'a, 1980; Tegesse, 1973; Kelsessa, 2011; Gemechu, 1996; Bartels, 1989; Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi, 1996). Their work indicates that *safuu* is appropriate moral balance, relationship and distance between human being and God and between human being and nature. It is a thread of moral conduct that govern the people's daily life. Kelbessa, particularly, provided sounding philosophical explanations of *safuu* in the context of Oromo traditional environmental ethics. As we will see in the discussion part of this article, this understandings of *safuu* illustrate that the notion of *safuu* is intrinsic to *Namummaa*. However, none these scholars touch this rich area of research to bring the notion of *Namummaa* philosophy into academic discussion.

In a time like this, when the external force- the Abyssinian scholars and political elites are systematically eroding Oromo knowledge system and internal force- Oromo scholars are reluctant to innovate this essential philosophy, one may ask simple questions such as: why is that Oromos' right to life, to develop their own philosophy still continued to be denied and remain unprotected by both colonial settlers and indigenous scholars? What kinds of theoretical perspectives and methods should be used to develop this crucial aspect of philosophy? What kind of elements should be included and how the argumentations and possible recommendations are to be included in the construction of this knowledge? These questions should be answered directly or indirectly through this article. Using the people's culture, symbols, proverbs, sayings, poems, songs, mythology and indigenous institutions as tools to define, explain, develop and argue for the people's philosophy to avert the unholy and unjustified Abyssinian understanding and European misrepresentation of Oromo culture. Having in mind to answer the above questions in the following section, I am also interested to bring the notion of *Namummaa* into academic discussion.

Therefore, this article examines Oromo relational philosophy as significant human experience from Oromo point of view. Accordingly, attempts are made to describe the sources and methodology used in this study. The article further explains the etymology of *Namummaa* and analyzes the main elements through which the concepts of Oromo relational philosophy manifest. Moreover, it analyzes the nature and characteristics of philosophy of humanness.

### Academic approaches

There has been no academic understanding of or literature on *Namummaa*. The main factors for this were that the Abyssinian colonialists, particularly from 1890s to 1991, systematically repressed Oromo identity, culture and worldview. They destroyed and banned Oromo indigenous institutions and replaced by Amhara culture. They deliberately excluded Oromo philosophy and knowledge system from Ethiopian education system. They discriminate and persecuted Oromo intellectual and traditional scholars who attempted to preserve Oromo mythology, pomes, history, and heritage (Bokku, 2001; Bulcha, 2011; Jalata, 1973) The other factor that hindered and mired the notion of *namummaa* into academic discourse was the introduction of foreign religions to Oromo people: Islam and Christianity. Christianity and Islam expanded and developed at the expense of Oromo culture. They overlooked the people's worldview. For example, they changed Oromo names into Islam names and Christian names (Jalata, 1998; Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Bokku (2011) argues that this is systematic cultural genocide Oromo family, Wake argues, give names that reflect their history and experiences to their children. According to him, names carry families' and community's understanding about God and nature. Names are vehicles of identity and worldview (Wake, 2018). This is true in other African society. They are essential indicator of a person, or family, or community identity (Mbiti, 2008). This undermining once culture or name and replacing it by foreign name is nothing but cultural genocide. Although he uncovers that Christianity has affected Oromo culture, Bulcha recognizes that many Evangelical Oromo intellectuals contributed to develop Oromo culture and identity (Bulcha, 2005). Similarly, Temesgen (2015) argues that Evangelical Church, particularly the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) has made immense contribution to preserve and develop Oromo culture.

Irrespective of all the above stated hindrances that Oromo culture suffered from, still we can navigate the Oromos' way of life, their worldview or perceptions of humanity, their belief system and understandings of the relationship between universe and the

Supreme Being, their expressions, songs, proverbs, poems and mythologies that give immense indication that the concept of Oromo relational philosophy have been existing since the Oromo people started to live together as humankind. Oromo relational philosophy is an old Oromo philosophy of life which has been sustaining the life of the Oromos for centuries. It is comprehensive ancient Oromo worldview that still has great influence in the people's daily life. Even though there has been no systematized study and written documents on the concept of philology of being human being, there are many written documents collected from Oromo traditional scholars that cast light that this relational philosophy has been practiced among the society from immemorial time as we will see it in this article. Most of these oral literature embark on rigorous Oromos' values, knowledge systems, traditional religion, institutions and self-help associations which have been used as vein of *Namummaa*.

Some of these indigenous institutions, cultural values and knowledge systems that encompass various aspects of Oromos' way of life (social, political, economic and religion) are *Gadaa* system, *qaalluu* institution, *ilaaf ilaamee* (Jalata, 2002), *muchuu* institution, *gumaa* institution, *harma-hodha* institution (Etefa, 2012), *siqqee* institution (Kuwe, 1997), *nagaa*-peace (Etefa, 2012; Bulcha, 2011; Aguilar, 1996; Bulcha, 2011; Wake, 2016), *qixxee* institution (Gnamo, 2013; Jalata, 2002), *aadaa* (culture), *seera* (law), *heera* (regulation) (Bokku, 2011), *hirboo* association, *daboo* association, *daadoo* association, *afoshaa* association, *hirpha*, *dhiifama*, *dhugaa galchuulbaasuu* (Wake, 2015, 2016 and 2018), *finna*, *guddiffachaa* or *Oromsisuu* (Jalata 2002), *araaraa*, *jarsummaa* (Gemechu, 2002) and *safuu* (Bokku, 2011; Bulcha, 2011; Gemechu, 1996; Bartels, 1989).

Oromos' horizontal relationships are with fellow human beings and with all creatures that *Waaqayyoo/Waaqa* (God) has created and their vertical relationships is with God. The Oromos developed these institutions, self-help associations and cultural values, and knowledge systems to exercise their system of government, social relations, military life, communal solidarity, sustainable development, peace maintenance, or peacebuilding, environmental protection and rituals.

The notions of *Namummaa*-humanness or human being and the people's epistemology, ontology and cosmology have been experienced and practiced directly and indirectly in the above indigenous institutions and associations. Some scholars who studied Oromo traditional religion and culture argue that humanity is at the center of Oromos' worldview. Regarding this, De Salviac (2005) says that Oromos' worldview is based on values trying to insure happiness, unity and equality of human community. Bartels (1989) states that in Oromo culture community is based on family, caring, sharing, compassion, respect and focusing on humanity as a center of the universe. *Safuu*-modal code is another comprehensive elements used as life guidance in Oromo culture. *Safuu* needs to be explained more at this juncture. Everything a person thinks, says and does is influenced by *safuu* and determined Oromo worldview (Baxter et al., 1996). *Safuu* is Oromo moral philosophy (Bulcha, 2011). It is a code of conduct (Bokku, 2011). In Oromo worldview, health, prosperity and relationships of one's family and the neighbors are the most important things in Oromo culture (Etefa, 2012). As Inf3 explains, one's family relationship with the neighbors connects *Namummaa* to *safuu* in a sense that the latter is moral guidance that govern human behavior. That means Oromo relational philosophy does not act alone, is one of the part of more complex set of rules of life enshrined in *safuu*. In other words, this radiates that the concept of norms and values that have been practiced and orally transforming across generations are springs of Oromo relational philosophy within oneself and the society. The above proverb, as it is established on long experiences of the people and used for long period of time, express the place of humanity in the universe encapsulates the fundamental elements that qualify any person to be as human who have inviolable and

alienable dignity. The concept of Oromo proverb- *Namummaan keessa*; *alli rifeensa* (what defines a person is her or his inner quality) is essential in this regard. The notion of *namni namaaf* or *namin namaa wajjiin* which literary means 'a person is for a person or human is for human' is another crucial proverb on which Oromo understandings of *Namummaa* is founded. As we will explore in this article, we will see that this proverb has philosophical meaning that 'person is a person through other persons' or 'people are people through other people'.

## DISCUSSION

Having in mind the above etymological explanations of *Namummaa*, its conceptual definitions, and its place in the current academic discourse, now I turn to the main discussion of the article and analyze the findings. It is plausible for the readers to note that we will also encounter various definitions and an in-depth explanations of Oromo relational philosophy in the following discussion more than the one we had above.

### *Namummaa* in relation to personhood and community

One of the crucial questions when it comes to the idea of personhood in Oromo philosophy is whether or not *Namummaa* is strictly communitarian? This question instigates another question regarding the notion of communal life which was noted somewhere else in this article where it was argued that being human is not sufficient for a person. One should create harmonious relationship in the society and act in a human manner to maximize his potential and to pursue his dream (Inf2). The place of personhood in *Namummaa* philosophy is better understood in the ideological frame of communitarianism in *Gadaa* system. According to Jalata (2002), in *Gadaa* system individual rights is respected in the community and the community is not considered as complete if the individual is not allowed to express herself or himself freely and should live in peace with fellow human beings. This idea casts light on the notion of Oromo relational philosophy that the communal focus of *Namummaa* does not allow belittles of the identity and autonomy of the individual person. Oromo relational philosophy recognizes individuals as vital members of the community which consists of people who are interrelated through common values, interests and goals. It is important to note that this notion of communalism in Oromo culture is protected from breeding dictatorship by encouraging participation of every member of the community in dialogue and negotiation to reach on mutual understandings and to achieve communal goals (Bulcha, 2011; Legesse, 1973). Discussion to reach on mutual understandings is essential.

Like a person in other African societies does, one learns best to know oneself through others in Oromo society. In Zulu society of South Africa and according to Akan people in Nigeria a person is considered as a full

person or full human through others, and others or the community is not complete without individuals (Broodryk, 2002; Mbiti, 2008). That means, a person can be an individual through others. An individual can be helpful to others and vice versa out of moral responsibility, not just out of duty. This makes an Oromo individual, who can make choices about moral responsibility and consciousness. According to Wake, this responsibility and cognizance embrace different aspects. For instance, creating harmonious relationship in the society, fulfilling social commitment, providing the support they need for those who cannot do for themselves, respect for elders, keeping the Oromo land from external enemy and having voice on *Gadaa* government (Wake, 2016). As all-encompassing system of laws that regulates Oromo cultural, social, political, religious, military and economic life of the Oromos, and gives the rights of be or not be adopted as an Oromo for no-Oromos and deploys granted legal and moral protection for enemies or war prisoners, *Gadaa* system embraces social relations (Jalata, 1998: 30-33). This is what made Legesse to describe *Gadaa* system as a complex system that regulates economic, religious expression, social, economic, and political life and indigenous mechanism of economic organization, peacemaking and peacebuilding, socialization, education, conflict resolution, social and cultural harmony, and judicial administration (Legesse, 1973). *Gadaa* system enforces individual and communal moral conduct and behavior. According to Bartels, this moral conduct and behavior are regulated by *safuu* (Bartels, 1989). In this regards, *safuu* is used as arsenal of *Namummaa* to crystalize the importance of a person in the community because in the frame of social relations and human behavior *safuu* informs the knowledge of right and wrong. In other words, *safuu* urges a person to strive to pursue uprightness and to restrain wrong acts.

*Namummaa* philosophy teaches that Oromos are capable of making other choices in their own life. According to De Salvaic, (2005), the Oromo society have a lot of experiences to develop and sophisticate their own way of life. Legesse (1973), who lived more than a decade among the Borana Oromo and has done important research on *Gadaa* system argues that the Oromo people are one of the most innovative societies which created very sophisticated democratic governing system that govern their religious, social, political and economic life. That means, the Oromos are not submissive robot but a people with capabilities of thinking individually for the common good and can act collectively for the common goal. According to Jalata (2007), they have tremendous indigenous knowledge systems and culture to take collective actions. Reaching at a common good and a common goal is not automatic like when we click on to send after we finish writing an email to friends. It incorporates characters which a person reveals. In *Namummaa* philosophy, when a person is incorporated and earns his or her personhood she or he become more

and more of a person as she or he grow in her or his sociological community (Inf6). This may include the process of undergoing expressing humanness through birth, naming ceremonies, initiation rituals or rituals of passing from one grade to the next grade, marriage, procreation and burial rituals (Dugo, 2001). Through all these processes, the notion of *Namumman keessa; alli rifeensa* (what qualify a person is his inner quality) is comprehensively important because it holds philosophical understanding of 'I am because we are' or 'We are, therefore I am' which is common to many African societies. In Oromo philosophy, even after death, a person incorporates into the extended family of the dead in the form of *ekeera* meaning ghost of the dead person. The family can interact or communicate with their ancestors (Wake, 2015). That means mutual relationship is a key value in Oromo society. They consider relationship only between the livings but also between the living families and their families' members who have died. It is not only does among the Oromo's but relationship or communal life is especial in many African societies. Regarding this, after his through research in many African countries and collecting data from many ethnic groups in the continent, Mbiti asserts the following,

The individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes this existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore, make, create, or produce the individual; for the individuals depends on the corporate group... whatever happens to the individuals happens to the whole group (Mbiti, 2008: 106).

The above quotation articulates that an individual is incomplete without the community. This is similar with Oromos philosophy humanness. In *Namummaa* philosophy, a person or individual is defined in the context of community web. An individual is understood or viewed as a reflection of her/his community provided that a family background is the core center of the whole layers composed of the worldview (Inf10). Community also cannot be created or existed without individuals who make the community to come into existence (Inf2). This means that in *Namummaa* philosophy individual's human freedom and autonomy will not be forgotten or infringed. Wake (2016a) the relationship between a person in the community and the relationship between the person and the community are voluntary. It is a free choice in which a person takes it for granted to be part of the community. Because the community has enough space where individuals can express themselves, their individuality. The Oromo believe that a person carries many attributes as part of who she or he is (Inf1). According to (Inf9), it is the structure of the community that passes on the goals and values of the community to a person who enters into membership of that community. This means the community is important for a person, and makes the person a product of the community. One cannot exist

without the other.

In Oromo culture, communal life is very important and everybody is welcome to the communal life. Individuals are seen through others, through the community. The community is incomplete without individuals (Wake, 2015). In Oromo worldview, philosophically, the community is the context for the indicator of both *nama*- a person, human being and *Namummaa*- humaneness. In philosophy of *Namummaa*, the value and dignity of a person is best evident in relationships with others (Inf5). Individual is a communal being, inseparable from and incomplete without others (Inf1). Based on Inf1 and Inf5, I argue that the sense of belonging is vital and central to Oromo relational philosophy because everyone belongs and there is no one who does not belong. This is where personhood and community meet each other.

The above explanation of Oromo relational philosophy gives us chance to embark on the totality of Oromo civilization. Note that *Namummaa* has been developed, practiced and lived in the epistemological, ontological and cosmological frame of *Gadaa* system. According to Legesse (1973), *Gadaa* system is a complex social institution and at the same time a mature system of government practiced at least over the past five centuries. It constitutes what it is to be Oromo as individual and as a nation while the notion of Oromo relational philosophy which inculcated and flourished in the Oromo culture constitutes what it is to be human being as a person and as a community. It is this philosophical understanding of the place of a person in the community that guaranteed not only adults, but also, I argue, children starting usually from the age of seven the rights to express themselves in *gumaa* reconciliation process. Children have such a rigorous value in the community and have vital voice to be heard as they express their grievances for the loss of their loved one. Their concerns should be considered by mediators without any pre-condition (Wake, 2015). This tells us that in *Namummaa* philosophy, a person is comprehensively important to make the community complete and the vice versa.

### ***Namummaa* as Oromo Value**

Oromo relational philosophy is the best description of Oromos' homogeneity empowered by the insistence of the Oromo religio-cultural identity and represents their cultural unity. As stated before, the concept of *namummaa* has developed over centuries from a pre-literature Oromo culture. Hence, all the proverbs and expressions used in this article and Oromo mythologies give historical authenticity of *namummaa*. Oromos' indigenous institutions like *harma-hodha*<sup>1</sup>, *Michuu*<sup>2</sup>, *gumaa*<sup>3</sup>,

*qixxee*<sup>4</sup>, *siqqeee*<sup>5</sup> and self-help associations like *daboo*<sup>6</sup>, *daadoo*<sup>7</sup>, *hirboo*<sup>8</sup> and *afooshaa*<sup>9</sup> give historical authenticity that Oromo relational philosophy has been practiced by the Oromo people over many centuries (Etefa, 2012; Bokuu, 2011). Because these institutions and self-help associations have been practiced among the Oromos for many centuries, and they exhibit the people's religious customs, cultural values that have implications in demonstration of the concept of *Namummaa*. Many scholars admit that our knowledge about Oromos' religious customs, belief system, cultural values and governing system are fragmented due to systematic Abyssinian colonial policies that have been attacking these cultural elements and philosophies (Bulcha, 2011; Jalata, 2002).

Even though the Abyssinian colonial leaders and settlers have been tirelessly working to control the psyche of the Oromo people and to detach them from exercising their cultural values that deeply inculcated in their epistemological, ontological and cosmological understandings (Jalata, 1998), Oromo relational philosophy has not disappeared in the face of colonization, globalization and urbanization. We see the spirit of *Namummaa* in different Oromo civic and political organizations, in Oromo individuals and groups or clans both in Oromia and in Diaspora in the form of solidarity, self-expression, fighting for justice, religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence with other people (Jalata 2007). However, I do not contest that these values are known by everyone everywhere and cannot be challenged or changed. Because there is a possibility that contact with certain religious and political ideologies and cultures may erode these values and create new worldview. Jalata argues that Christian and Islam ideologies and Abyssinian colonial system and cultural dominations have aided the erosion of Oromo culture and institutions (Jalata, 2002). Likewise, Wake asserts that

<sup>2</sup> *Michuu* is one of Oromo indigenous conflict resolution institutions especially when conflict arises between the Oromo and others. The word also literally means a 'friend' (Etefa, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Gumaa* is the Oromo indigenous institution that handle murder case (Wake, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Qixxee* is equality. It also refers to the Oromo indigenous institution in which two or more people agree to trade together or to plow the farm land of the other to get equal benefit from the result of their work (Gnamo, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> *Siqqee* is Oromo indigenous institution of Women's rights and power (Jalata, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> *Daboo* is indigenous Oromo self-help association in which people work together to plow land, to gather crops, to build homes voluntarily, and also work for others who cannot do such works by themselves due to sickness, old, age, etc. (Wake, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> *Daadoo* is social self-help association, which is similar to *daboo*, but *daadoo* has limited number of people who go and work together in order to help one another. One who is the member of the *daadoo* is obliged to go and work for all the members in the *daadoo* according to the schedule set by the members. But there is no such an obligation in *daboo* (Wake, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> *Hirboo* It is an agreement between a person who gives the land to another person who wants to farm on the land for some years and give about one fourth of the harvest from the land to the owner of the land (Wake, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> *Afooshaa* is volunteer self-help association, especially during birth, sickness, death and burial, etc.

<sup>1</sup> *Harma-hodha* is indigenous Oromo institution developed to make peaceful trade in international context, with non-Oromo (Etefa 2012)

today the knowledge we have about Oromo indigenous institutions and self-help associations are fragmented (Wake, 2016). Lack of literature on Oromo oral tradition, for instance, hinders us from fully understanding the philosophy of how the Oromo understood and practiced their philosophy before centuries (Jalata, 1998). This accumulated challenge of lack of enough literature of Oromo oral tradition also directly affect our understanding the philosophy of how the people practiced *Namummaa* before centuries. Irrespective of all this encounters, today, Oromo parents are showing interest more than ever to teach culture, values, and history to their children. (Bokku, 2011). This kind of upbringing of children or generations will provide a sense of self-worth and passes on Oromo relational philosophy values to others. For example, upon completion day activities, fathers used to teach their children at table round in home during evening using counting stars in sky as a tool to naming back all their forefathers to make them stick with high knowledge of their genealogy. This genealogical tracking back up to fourteen plus names of forefathers strengthen a sense of self-worth of *Namummaa* in connection to the different layers of the contemporary community.

### ***Namummaa* as moral regeneration**

Various definitions and large picture of *Namummaa* will be provided in discussion about theory of Oromo relational philosophy in this article. Now, I briefly discuss what is wrong and right in Oromo worldview. Moral aspect of this philosophy relate morality to something internal in the human individual as well as in the community. In both cases, morality is related to human dignity. Doing wrong to someone, therefore, degrades humanity. That means, in Oromo culture value is inherent in human nature and should be honored. and cherished. This is similar with Kantian theory of fundamental human rights. Kant argued for intrinsic dignity of human rights and his philosophy influenced Western theory of human rights (Cortright, 2008). The promotion of life is a prime factor of the *Namummaa* philosophy. This is what interconnects *Namummaa* to Oromo Traditional Religion (OTR). OTR places human beings at the center of the universe while harmony among human beings and human beings and creation is pivotal force to be promoted (Wake, 2018).

Another moral aspect of *Numummaa* is that it has utilitarian concept. According to utilitarian philosophy, individual's action should produce happiness to the majority or community. It focuses on the group, not on a person or individual (Miller, 1996). That means, the society should feel happy and comfortable with a person's action. However, it is essential to note that the arguments of my informants elucidate that *Namummaa* is not totally follow "the principle of egoistic hedonism" that strongly focuses on individual's action (Miller, 1996, 447).

For instance, they argue that the community also should have enough space for individuals would define themselves and have their voice heard (Inf2; Inf8; Inf10). Inf6 argues that *Namummaa* aims to improve the quality of life, human development. It encourages prosperity and well-being of individual and the community at the same time (Inf8). It emphasizes that prosperity comes through acts such as stealing, systematic exploitation, robbing the poor are unacceptable and should be ferociously condemned (Inf8; Inf10).

One of the most significant moral aspects of *Namummaa* is that it purports that individual's self-realization and peaceful relation in the community and community's positive relation of individuals in community make an action right, whereas the act is wrong if it takes away a person from the community and it degrades the humanity of the community members (Inf1; Inf5; Inf9). Self-realization of a person benefits the community as a person is established as a being a community and engages in harmonious relationships in the community in which a person lives. The person can maximize her or his self-realization and support others in her or his community.

In Oromo culture, it is believed that evil should be punished and justice should be restored to maintain relationship (Inf8). Togetherness is important based on reciprocal respect and mutual understandings. This is also related to moral aspect of Oromo relational philosophy is social justice and appropriate response to the wrong done, the act of punishment accepted by the community (Inf10). In the former case, *Namummaa* emphasizes to support the disadvantaged and the poor in the community. In the latter case, it urges reconciliation than retaliation.

### ***Namummaa* as religious concept**

Oromo relational philosophy-*Namummaa* has religious aspect. The maxim of *namummaan keessa; alli rifeensa* has deep religious meaning. It has something to do with *Waaqayyoo Uumaa* (God the Creator) created human beings bestowing on them especial quality, human dignity which means human beings are different from other creations that this quality makes 'person is a person through other persons' (Wake, 2018). This means *Namummaa* is not only a package of positive qualities of humanity but also essence of itself, which enables a person to become *nama* - human. In Oromo worldview speaking human language, eating, drinking, walking and working do not make a person human being. (Inf9). Just being human is not sufficient for a person; one has become human being by living in a world of self-expression to create nonviolent relationships in the community, and the world beyond to radiate her or his humanness. In this regard, Oromo relational philosophy has theological implication because it has religious

expression in Oromo society. The expression of *Namummaa* in religious frame in Oromo philosophy goes beyond its relevancy during rituals and divination because it is relevant in the daily life of the Oromo people; religion is a daily life experience of the people. Oromo relational philosophy has strong connection with OTR. Both permeate all share of life in Oromo society.

The elements of *Namummaa* manifest through various aspects of peoples' daily life. These elements through which Oromo relational philosophy is manifested are found in the teachings of *Waaqeffannaa* related to social, ethical issues and legal judgment of human worth and human behavior. OTR teaches, for instance, Oromo and nature are interconnected with the ideology and practices of natural and environmental conservation or keeping the security of all creatures in the world (Inf1). A single leaf of any tree in the gardens and forest should not be fallen down due to the mismanagement or violation of human being (Inf3). OTR teaches that human beings should teach each other and practice no conspiracy against nature and creatures in the world beyond (Inf9; Inf5; Inf8). This also shows that religion is important for the people. Because their understandings of Oromo relational philosophy is interconnected to their religious environmental philosophy. Inf6 asserts that religion plays crucial role in Oromo society.

### **Arsenal of *Namummaa* in the Practice of Restorative Justice**

According to Marshall (2011), the term restorative justice first appeared in the literature in the 1970s. But Gade (2013) argues that the term was used even in the pre-1950 period. Both scholars argue that the concept of restorative justice had been used long before the term was coined and appeared in literature. I agree with them at this point. Because old literature like the Bible (both the Old Testament and New Testament) tells us that restorative justice was practiced before Christ. In the New Testament, the gospel of Luke 19: 8 says that Zacchaeus told Jesus of Nazareth that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back fourfold if he has cheated anyone of anything. (Barker, 2008). Similarly, in Oromo culture, the term 'restorative justice' has not been used, but the people have been practicing it for centuries. It has been practiced and lived without the meaning of the term being explained. (Wake, 2016b). Thus, in this article the meaning of the term is explained based on some essential literature on Oromo oral tradition that casts light on its meanings and by interpreting the meanings.

*Namummaa* encourages that restorative justice should be practiced in a way that it repairs the damage caused by the wrongdoer to the wronged and restore the dignity of both the victim and perpetrator. According to Wake (2015) restorative justice is, in Oromo culture, to repair

the wronged and to make a person who inflict pain on the victim hold responsibility in a way that the victim does not repeat similar offence. That means the concept of restorative justice in *Namummaa* philosophy has the idea of technique of punishment of the offender for crime or offence done against the victim. Gemechu (2002) states that the perpetrator should offer restitution to the victim. He asserts that the process of restoration is appropriate and active participation of all affected parties. This includes not only the parties in conflict but also extended families, relatives and the whole community based on the scope and magnitude of the conflict and the damage done. *Namummaa* teaches that *miidhamin kee miidhama kooti* (meaning-your pain is my pain) and *qabeenyi koo qabeenya keeti* (meaning- my property is your property). Thus, I argue that *Namummaa* shares *Ujuma* of Tanzania and Ubuntu of South Africa philosophy which says 'Because people are people through other people' or 'I am because we are'. That means restorative justice in *Namummaa* philosophy is not only a kind of taking therapy but also a way of thinking and behaving individually as well as collectively. In other words, it focuses on creating conducive environment by parties in conflict, all concerned bodies and the entire community to heal the victim rather than to revenge.

### ***Namummaa* as Beacon of law and politics**

As said before, understanding of *Namummaa* is comprehensively interconnected in and interwoven with OTR and culture. In this section, I will discuss Oromo relational philosophy as the marker of law and politics. As it is unfold reality in religion and culture, *Namummaa* is the basis for politics and law in philosophical domain. This can be better understood in the Oromos' concept of peacebuilding, restorative justice and reconciliation because they are unfold in the people's daily life. According to Wake, the act of reconciliation and restorative justice whenever they occur in Oromo society, they have full force of recognition, legitimacy and sovereignty of the society (Wake, 2015). These elements are the essential components in *Gadaa* system political sophistication and decision-making legal system. This is why Jalata insists that *Gadaa* system is linked to peacebuilding, reconciliation, justice, morality and reasonableness (Jalata, 1998: 19-21).

As indicated above, *Namummaa* is the marker of politics and law in Oromo worldview. Because *Namummaa* is spiritual vessel from which *Gadaa* system law makers fetch moral codes to generate positive laws. It encourages to make a kind of law that does not create offence. Inf3 states that it directs how individuals and communities should behave toward each other. *Namummaa* focus on keeping a balance between penalty and reward and restoration of justice and promotion of equality. Therefore, the Oromos claim that their laws

which are based on *Namummaa* are living law that aims to insure the recognition of a person through other person or being a people through other people, that is, oneness and wholeness of the living community, the unborn and the living dead. This is why Bulcha 2011; Etefa, 2012 Bulcha 2011; Etefa (2012) argue that *Gadaa* system-Oromo political philosophy responds easily and organically to the demand of peacebuilding. That means, Oromo relational philosophy enhances the Oromo political philosophy to respond organically to the demand of keeping the rule of law and reconciliation as a means of restoring the equilibrium of the flow of life when it is disturbed.

### ***Nagaa* as Political, Religious, Moral, Social and Cultural Webs of *Namummaa***

In *namummaa* philosophy, *nagaa* (peace) is seen as intricate webs and threads that maintain good relationships among human beings, between humanity and God who is the guardian of peace and between humanity and other creations (Inf7). *Nagaa* is, in this sense, the foundation of political scheme, social relations, cosmos and human relations and moral command, religious philosophy and on which *namummaa* forms its moral, social, religious, political and cultural dimensions (Inf9). As it permeates peace, reciprocal respect and mutual understandings or mutual support, and promote negotiation, reconciliation and restorative justice, Oromo relational philosophy uses *nagaa* as theory of social world and material world to prevent conflict from occurring, from escalating and to reconcile the parties in conflict. This in turn tells us that *namummaa* employs *safuu*-moral code or code of conduct, justice for all, *ilaaf ilaamee* (negotiation) to promote peace should permeate the social world and material world. One of the informants argues that Oromo culture prohibits *nama ajjeesu*-murder, *hatuu*- theft, *jibba*- hatred and *soba*- to lie. He argues that a person whose words and deeds incline indicate these immoral elements can't be trusted because he can't respect the laws of God, and he can't keep *safuu* (moral balance) in the society and nature (Inf8). *Namin aadaa Oromoo beeku fi kabajju safuu qaba. Hin ajjesu, hin hatu, hin sobu*-meaning a person who knows Oromo culture and respects it doesn't murder, steal and lie (Inf5). Inf5' description of *namaa* (human being) here casts light on the notion of *namummaa*, humanness. This tells us that, according to Inf8 and Inf5, *safuu* and *Namummaa* reinforce each other.

*Namummaa* is a complex traditional behavior which has been developed in religious, political, social, economic, moral, and cultural perspectives, and learned and exercised by successive generations. Its cultural norms have been transmitted from generation to generation for centuries through oral tradition but have never been produced in Oromo oral literature.

### **Sociological aspect of *Namummaa***

From the sociological perspective, *Namummaa* is seen as representing the kind of human behavior that inculcated in the individual by society through established traditional institutions for long period of time (Inf3). As said before, Oromos' indigenous institutions, self-help associations, proverbs, expressions, poems, mythologies, songs, and religious customs explain how Oromo relational philosophy is attained, particularly, through socialization. These normative descriptions show where the idea of *Namummaa* originated and how it is achieved and manifested. This implies that *Namummaa* is more than just a manifestation of single person acts or individual acts, but also communal deeds. In its sociological frame, Oromo relational philosophy comprehensively uses *safuu* as web of spiritual foundation and threads of human relations (Inf7). *Namummaa* is an orientation and disposition towards, good behavior that makes an individual or community feel and act in a human manner towards others (Inf10). Sociologically, Oromo relational philosophy is explained as an inner state and a way of life that seeks to promote and displays itself and is best realized in harmonious relations within sociological community. My informants As Inf5; Inf10; Inf9 states that every human being has connection to each other through family, lineages, relatives, friends, culture, religion, politics, economic, professions and expertise (Inf5; Inf10; Inf9). People practice *Namummaa* through these networks and systematically define themselves as human beings.

### **Nature and characteristics of *Namummaa***

*Namummaa* is Oromo relational philosophy. Inf8 and Inf5 point out that it echoes the Oromo thought of acceptable ideas and actions in mystical and material worlds. It describes the character of being *nama* which is a noun. Further example is the abstract noun *jaarsummaa* formed from *jaarsa* 'an elder' plus *-ummaa* together meaning 'a passion to reconcile and make peace between the parties in conflict'; thus, *Namummaa* 'humanity' or 'humanness' is a behavior that makes human beings different from other creation. It is an inner quality of human being bestowed by deity or Supreme Being according to the commonly held worldview of Oromo. The Oromo call this Supreme Being *Waaqa/Waaqayyo* (God). Hence, as inner quality of human being, *Namummaa* constitutes wholeness or oneness. It expresses oneness of human beings; it is incessant and continuous in motion. It is innermost quality of all human beings. From the Oromo perspective, *Namummaa* 'humanity' is their relational philosophy developed through their epistemology (Inf10), ontology and cosmology (Inf6). It is the qualities and common denominator for all human beings. There is Oromo proverbs which clearly describes how the people



define their relational philosophy, humanity. In order to explain this philosophy, I shall use Oromo proverb. The Oromo have a rich catalogue of proverbs which are preserved ancient belief, amassed and accumulated experiences and wisdom of past generations. The people have highly regarded proverb to express *Namummaa*. They say, *Namummaan keessa; alli rifeensa* which can be translated as “humanity is from inside, the outer is just hair”. In other words, it means what defines a person is his inner quality. It expresses the people’s common understanding of the place human beings in the universe. This cardinal spirit of *Namummaa* signifies that human beings have equal dignity and value. As we will see in this discussion, there are many proverbs and expressions that explain the notion of the above proverb in various ways in different contexts.

*Namummaa* is humanism from Oromo perspective. It is Oromo cultural knowledge and understanding from within. Oromo relational philosophy is embodied in the cultural values, (Inf2) and “ideological and belief systems, and it put human beings first” (Inf8). It encourages flexibility and reciprocity of human interaction with each other, with the Supreme Being and with creation (Inf10). Like *Ubuntu* philosophy- “I am because we are” does for other African societies especially for Zulu of South Africans places human beings at the center of the universe (Brookryk, 2002), *Namummaa* is Oromo relational philosophy that places emphasis on humanity. Oromo uses expression *Namummaan keessa; alli rifeensa* (what defines a person is his inner quality; it is not what he/she looks like). As Inf3 describes, what matters who the person is (human beings), what is she or he accomplishes or does not accomplish. A good person radiates his goodness being guided by moral dimension of *Namummaa* that is *safuu*.

*Safuu* guides an individuals’ or a group action (Bartels, 1989). The Oromos teach their children to do good things in the society so that the community in which they live will bless and respect them. and accept them as part of the society. They also encourage them that God will also protect them from evil when they do good things in their families, or for their friends (Inf5). While desiring unconditional respect and trust for humans, *namummaa* rejects unsatisfactory work and rebukes a person who does not want to work. That means, it is not soft and does not risk others because of a person who is ignorant. The Oromos sometimes express this saying that *namin namaaf* meaning a person is for a person (Inf1).. The Oromo uses different proverbs and expressions to express this relational philosophy. For instance, they often say *namummaan keessa; alli rifeensa* (what defines a person is her or his inner quality), *namin namaaf* (a person is for a person or human for human), *nutu kan waliiti* (we belong to each other), *situ anaaf jaala* (you are my cloth friend) and *qofa nyaatuun qofaa duutii* (a person who doesn’t share with others, there is no one to bury him when he dies). These proverbs are used to express

solidarity, mutual understanding and oneness of human beings in different situations.

*Nu kan waliiti* (we belong to one another or we are human together). The Oromos use this expression when they talk to individuals or group or groups to express solidarity. They also say *situ anaaf jaala* (you are my close friend). Even though the expression address second person singular, it has reciprocal implication. This is similar to the *Ubuntu* idea of “being human through others”. However, just to put aside naivety, it is not only Oromos and Zulu of South African who have such fascinating philosophy. For a matter of fact, as we have seen before there are similar philosophies in other part of the world. *Namummaa* is one of the philosophical views of the Oromos that connects the people to other African societies and others. It is similar to the popular saying of Zulu of South African, “*Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” which means *I am because we are, I am human because I belong* (Savory, 1988; Bongmba, 2012).

There are further expressions of *Namummaa*-humanism, humanness in the Oromo culture as it can be seen in the following phrases. *Wal malee maal qabna* (we are most treasure to each other), *nu kan waliiti* or *nutu kan waliiti* (we belong to each other or we are human beings through each other or I am because of you or we are because of ‘We’). All these expressions assert the maxim of *Namummaa* that is to be humanity or to be human beings is first and for most to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others without any preconditions. These phrase express the idea of *waloomaa* (harmony). Oromo relational philosophy, on that basis, establishes *safuu*-respectful human relations with others, solidarity and receptiveness that expresses the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence (Inf5; Inf8). This function of *safuu* illustrates that *Namummaa* has high voltage of *safuu*.

*Namummaa* teaches how to give social service for the widows, sick, orphan, stranger, elderly, and the disabled and the dehumanized and to empower them (Inf8). Those who are weak, those who are victims and the poor have the rights to get help from the strong or from those who are physically good enough and those who are materially in a better position to help them. It teaches why and how to distribute resources based on the principles of justice, equality, equity, transparency, accountability (Inf1). In other words, Oromo relational philosophy teaches to resist unjust system that robs the poor, it discourages exploitation in any of its forms.

In relation to resource distribution or resource management, preventing conflict and peacebuilding, *Namummaa* manifests through other Oromo indigenous institutions like, *gumaa*, *harma-hodha*, *michuu*, *dubbissa* and *qixxee*. In relation to promoting social justice and development, it manifests through traditional local associations or traditional self-help associations such as *daboo*, *daadoo*, *afuoshaa*, *hirboo* and *afuoshaa*. These institutions and associations are manifestations of

spiritual aspect of the people's culture. According to Inf3 and Inf68, building and practicing team spirit among the people is a prominent manifestation of an organized cultural institution of *Namummaa* as collective non-profit organization provided all classes of the community with no discrimination factors. The above institutions and self-help associations depict the peoples' social, political and economic systems and spiritual life. That means, Oromo relational philosophy touches all aspects of people's life. It teaches us do to others what we want others do to us. It seeks to enable an individual to be the most helpful, humble, honest they can be to others and to be more conscious and courageous to define their destiny (Inf9). Similarly, another informant's explanation of Oromo cultural values indicates that Oromo relational philosophy teaches a group not to undermine the rights and dignity of the individual in the group because individual's wellbeing makes the group complete (Inf6).

Bokku (2011) contends that everything belongs to the *Umaa* (the Creator) and we have moral responsibility to share with others what *Umaa* has given us; especially with those who are in need for our help. Bokku's understanding of solidarity casts light on the notion of *Namummaa*. This 'help' we give for those who need can be material or spiritual. Oromo relational philosophy is concerned about the necessity of solidarity, hospitality and compassion in the society (Inf3). It is believed that, as (Inf4) explains, Oromo relational philosophy maintains justice, peace, equality and equity among humanity. It gives moral empowerment fight against injustice individually and collectively. It is the influence of this cultural understanding of humanness that made the Oromo people to fight against the exploitive and dehumanizing Ethiopian colonial structure restlessly since their country incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire (Wake, 2016b). Oromo relational philosophy seeks to enable the society not to let go injustice and evil deeds without proper response. It condemns violence and conflict, and it places emphasis on peace, because peace is the bread of life on the earth. It gives prize for those who nurture and protect peace. It is because of this metaphysical understanding of peace in Oromo culture that Bulcha described that the Oromo use most of their time on peacebuilding (Bulcha, 2011). Likewise, Wake agrees with Bulcha and argues that it is this philosophical understanding of *nagaa* Oromo (peace of the Oromo nation) even forces the Oromo to declare *lola-male* (just war) as a last resort to protect *nagaa-peace* of the Oromo if the enemy threatens their existence (Wake, 2016a). In the Oromos' *gadaa* system *lola-male* (just war) should be declared after all possible means of peaceful negotiations have failed, after thorough discussions regarding why to declare such war, how to put it into practice and possible result of the war, after women's consensus according to their rights enshrined in *siiqqee* institution within the *gadaa* system whether they agree or not concerning to go to war.

*Namummaa* relates peace and social justice with Oromo cultural spirituality. The Oromo believe that natural resources are God's gift for humanity, and these resources should be used properly (Wake 2016a). In Oromo culture, people have responsibility to share and use the resources fairly and peacefully based on democratic principles enshrined in the *Gadaa* system (Inf4). The Oromos believe that distributing resources is not to make political friends or not to get psychological domination over the recipient but it is fulfilling ethical obligation of the community. This is spiritual aspect of the people's culture; it is way of life. Henceforth, Oromo relational philosophy is a deep democratic character and spiritual manifestation of Oromo democracy. This is good example of what contextual theologians argue for that every culture has a kind of divine element (Hiebert, 2008). The concept of *Namummaa* is one of the elements that has an apparatus of divine elements in its practice.

The Oromo relational philosophy teaches that human beings qualify for humanness because the *Umaa*- the Creator has installed *ayyaana* (grace, the free gift of the spirit of *Waaqa*-God)). According to Bokku God has installed this *ayyaana* in human beings when he created them (Bokku, 2011). This *ayyaana*, divine element, (Bartels, 1989), in this context, is a divine element that connects all human beings and the *Umaa* and humanity and other creation. The one who has been given special *ayyaana* can be seen as a mediator between the *Umaa* and the created beings. That means, *Namummaa* has two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. The former aspect is relationship between Deity and humanity. *Waaqayyoo* who of the Father of human beings wants them to live in freedom and in peace having good relationship with Him (Wake, 2016). The second one is the relationship among human beings themselves and between humanity and cosmos. Given the idea of Deity, the theological aspect of *Namummaa* has resemblance with Biblical accounts and *Ubuntu* philosophy as long as human value is concerned. For instance, Broodryk's description of humanness can give us comprehensive understanding of the divine elements that God bestowed on human beings. According to him, Man was declared 'Human' as soon as the element of 'divine' (image) goodness (likeness) was instilled in him. This divine element that transformed man (matter) into a human being was nothing but a humanness, '*ubuntu*' that manifested the "Image and Likeness" of God in each individual person of human race (Broodryk, 2002: 1).

The spark of life that transformed humanity in living souls that process divine elements distinguishes them from the rest of created beings. It is important to note that one of the differences between the notions of *Ubuntu* and that of *Namummaa*. The former is more anthropocentric and it gives less considerable place for spirituality (Lenkabula, 2008) while the latter shares anthropocentrism and the idea of Supreme Being (Inf9). *Namummaa* goes beyond anthropocentrism and

spirituality; it gives huge place for the connection between human beings and cosmos.

*Namummaa* is similar to Egyptian concept of 'logos'-creative word which implies the inner value of human beings and dignity that God has installed in humanity. It is inner quality of human beings. Savory has asserted that the Egyptian concept of 'logos' is nothing but God's insemination of divine element into all humanity (Savory, 1988: 29). This divine element is what we call human dignity which is an alienable and an inviolable. It is similar to what is known as *Namummaa* in Oromo philosophy. *Namummaa* echoes the idea *gammachuun kee gammachuu kooti* which means 'Your happiness is my happiness' or 'My happiness cannot be perfect unless you are happy'. This means that the happiness of one person cannot be fulfilled without the happiness of the other person, because as humans we are related to one another. *Gammachuun keee gammachuu kooti* expresses the notion of 'I cannot be free unless you are free and vice versa'. In other words, my happiness and freedom cannot be fully attained unless you are enjoying your freedom. We are the voice for one another. This is why *Namummaa* is "I am because we are" or "we are because you are". *Namummaa* is not 'Me' or 'You' or 'They' but it is all about 'We' as a children of humanity. One of the informants articulated the idea of humanity as follows.

The notion of humanness in Oromo culture seeks to enable individuals that person is a person with others. Inevitably, it gives moral guidance to individuals to choose and find ways to have peaceful relationship with *Uumaa* and to live well with others (Inf7). The above notion elucidates that *Namummaa* teaches that individuals should capitalize their own worth by creating mutual recognition which is essential to prolific relations with other people. *Namummaa* teaches a person not to claim 'what my country can do for me' but to ask oneself 'what can I do for my country'. It is all about the connection between humanity and ecology, and humanity and the *Uumaa*- God the Creator who embraces the fundamental principles of justice and ethics.

*Namummaa*, that is humanness, places greater emphasis on ethics rather than on material because it is believed that moral subjects are more meaningful and long-lasting than materials in this physical world (Inf10). It places greater weight on the fact that the ideal society should be established on five pillars: peace, freedom, equality, equity and unity. It believes in pure humanity and dignity. It acknowledges the necessity in society (Inf8). In other words, *Namummaa* can be seen as normative concept of equal rights and respect and equal responsibility to get or to face justice.

*Namummaa*, in its diverse settings, is the center of Oromo philosophy of life (*jiruu fi jireenya*-work and life, or working and living) and belief systems in which the people's daily life experiences are reflected upon. In their cumulative knowledge which they have built up for a very

long time since the time they have started to live as human society on earth. This philosophy is used on daily-bases to resolve disputes, show solidarity and practice just reconciliation. Wake has clarified that this philosophical understanding of reconciliation in Oromo culture cannot be fully achieved without understanding the Oromo ontology and epistemology. He clearly show that reconciliation process in Oromo culture particularly *gumaa* reconciliation process is very sophisticated and long process that can avert malicious enmity in to mutual understandings long-lasting new relationship. *Gumaa* reconciliation cannot always be achieved especially when the killer is not willing to be accountable, instigates other violence and disobeyed the order of elders, *qaalluu* (spiritual father in *Waaqeffannaa*-Traditional Oromo Religion) or *yoba* (retired *qaalluu*). In such cases, reconciliation can be ended by retributive justice which is also acceptable in the society in former times. The killer has taken away life of a person, which is the greatest gift that God has given to human beings is a gift of life. Anybody who takes away such precious gift of God will not be let go without receiving proper response from the community and from the one who gives life, God (Wake, 2015). This testifies to the vibrancy and vitality of *Namummaa* for the reason that it seeks deep recognition for human worth and it is pleased in justice. However, it can be argued that reconciliation may go beyond established institutions, normative rules and procedures because they may not be always adequate to deal with the conflict. Thus, Oromo relational philosophy seeks to recognize that reconciliation is a creative and a flexible human actively that is undertaken of the sake of human beings as a shared community. (Inf1) states that *Namummaa* does not take reconciliation at face value. Nevertheless, it urges sources of authenticity including invisible things. Reconciliation is not alternative to conflict, but it is transformation for the society. It even defines the unborn. It facilitates peaceful milieu even for the unborn (Wake, 2016a). Likewise, (Inf6) explains the notion of Oromo relational philosophy in reconciliation context saying that it seeks to enable the parties in conflict that reconciliation needs performance of rituals, overt public verbalization of termination of conflict that caused enmity, restoration of justice and creation of hope. Reconciliation, as Inf9 describes, is to heal or restore the wronged by making the wrong doer hold responsibly for damage that has done against the victim and to bring mutual understandings between the former enemies. *Namummaa* encourages a kind of reconciliation in which both victim and the wrong doer heal and establish mutual understanding.

Inf9 states the act of reconciliation in Oromo traditional justice system, also in the framework of Oromo relational philosophy is inevitably based on the laws and ethics of the socio-political understandings of the Oromos as they unfold in life. In this sense, *Namummaa*, can be argued, is maker of politics, law and ethics, and it guides their

(law, politics and ethics) moral aspects in the sociological set up in the community. In other words, at the philosophical and theological domains, *Namummaa* is the basis of politics, laws and belief systems. Wake argues that what makes reconciliation to have full force of recognition, legitimacy, people's sovereignty (mutual understandings to be reconciled and restore justice) and the *Umaa* (God) is seen as active participant in the reconciliation process (Wake, 2018).

*Namummaa* seeks to give enough spaces for the victims, perpetrators and the community to come together to have a say or express their grievance and to agree on to resolve the conflict at hand (Inf2). This is particularly essential in *gumaa* reconciliation process. Wake has explained how the parties in conflict are involved in the reconciliation process in *gumaa* case. The interesting lesson one can learn from reconciliation at local community in Oromo society is that it is essentially organized based on norms and values that is guided by the principles of *ilaaf ilaamee* meaning respect or negotiation in which the victim, the offender and the entire community involve in conflict resolution and establishing mutual understandings (Wake, 2015). *Ilaa fi ilaamee* is one of the vital elements of *Namummaa* (Etefa, 2012). *Namummaa* offers a unique insight in dealing with the conflict resolution in community in a sense that community involved in reconciliation process would encourage the wrong doer to take responsibility for the damage inflicted in the wronged (Inf7). This conflict resolution approach is entrenched in Oromo culture and heritage. As a symbol of re-integration or reconciliation, there needs to be rituals in a reconciled society or 'new society'. These rituals embody Supreme Being (God) and *ayyaanaas* (spirits of God) as participants in reconciliation. God, as ultimate judge of human feelings and deeds, has the highest place in this process. The offender is expected to make peace with God, 'Father of peace' and with 'spirit'- *ayyaana* assigned to him by God. Otherwise, the wrong doer, namely the killer has no divine protection for his life (Wake, 2016b). Making peace with fellow human beings is cultural filament in Oromo society; it is devoutness of the culture. The Oromos believe that it is divine obligation to make peace (Inf9).to hold accountability for the wrong done and not to trigger conflict (Etefa, 2012).

It is important to note that when we speak about *namummaa* in Oromo culture, we tend to mean diverse things. For instance, we talk about way of life, conscience or virtue. In this regard *namummaa* is similar with Oromo moral philosophy, *safuu*. *Safuu* is a way of life with a given correlation of worldview periodically held by the Oromo people; their epistemology, ontology and cosmology (Inf3). In addition to that, as one of the informants states, the quality a person can display to various degrees is what the people refer as *safuu*, moral philosophy (Inf1). When they want to give high praise to a person who demonstrates quality of *namummaa*, the

Oromo say *akkas ilmi namaa or akkas kunoo dhalli nama or akkas namni!* This is literally, it is translated as, 'this is true humanity' or 'this is what a son of humanity does' or 'humanity is like this!). As we can see in this phrase '*nama*' is a basic root word. It means 'humanity' or 'a human being'. All human beings have the quality to display human excellence that the *Waaqa Umaa* (God the Creator) bestowed to human beings. This is *namummaa*. In order to display this human excellence, a person should grow up by learning and practicing genuine way of life guided by *safuu*, moral code.

According to Bokku, *Safuu* helps a person to accept and respect the distance between son and father, daughter and mother, young and old, man and God, man and other creations. *Safuu* is way of life accepted by the society (Bokku, 2011). Oromo relational philosophy discourages a person who disrupts *safuu*.

In order to understand *namummaa* better, it is significant to understand the concept of *namni namaaf* which means 'a person is for a person'. Rationally, this phrase implies that 'personhood' can be developed. 'Personhood' here is the same as *namummaa* (humanness). 'A person is for a person' suggests two things. The first maxim, *namin-* 'a person' foremost denotes equality of human beings. All human beings share equal dignity regardless of their differences in age, social status, physical appearance, race, thought, and belief system. Being 'a person' alone, an individual is eligible to be respected and valued above all things because, in Oromo culture it is believed that human beings have divine element that make them valuable. Bartels refers this divine element as *ayyaanaa* which is different from and superior to *ayyaanaa* of animal, maintains, revers and trees (Bartels, 1989).

The whole expression 'a person is for a person' suggests that one should struggle to become a good 'corporal' and 'a real person'. To become 'a real person' is to live sincere way of human life to display *namummaa* as much as one can. In this sense, a genuine way of life symbolizes *namummaa* (humanness), personhood. In other words, Oromo relational philosophy manifests in degrees a person has succeeded in exhibiting *safuu* (ethical traits) that human beings are in a place to display the quality of human beings.

Having said this, it is good to note that this does not mean that those who fail to display good human character are not human beings. As Inf7 explains, social, economic, political and religious conditions in which an individual lives can influence the individual's moral and excellence to exhibit *namummaa* (humanness or humanity).

The full maxim *namin namaaf* (a person is for a person) in the Oromos' philosophical understandings of humanity is similar with "a person is a person through other persons" (Tutu, 1999: 35) in *Ubuntu* philosophy. In Oromo epistemology, it is believed that 'a person is for a person' is when an individual enters into communion with

other persons. It should be clear that this is not collective taking precedence over the individual, because *namummaa* maintains that 'precedencing' over individual contradicts the notions of human dignity and human rights. 'A person for a person' in the Oromo epistemology is similar with what Mandela said, 'a person is a person through other persons' (Hatang and Venetr 2013: 227) when he summed up the notion of *Ubuntu* of South Africa. According to Hantang and Venter, Mandela summarized *Ubuntu* as communal life. 'A person for a person' in Oromo relational philosophy is understood as entering into community to live communal life with mutual understanding and reciprocal respect and support for each members in the community. In Oromo culture, Bulcha argues, harmonious life is achieved by sympathetic social relationships with in the group and enthusiasm to fulfill social commitment (Bulcha, 2011). This is again moral version of humanness that connects *namummaa*-relational philosophy to *safuu*-moral philosophy.

The above maxim is potential element in the teaching of *namummaa* that designates that this philosophy works towards a circumstance that allows a communally beneficial situation. While it discourages 'I-ness', *namummaa* encourages 'We-ness' by seeking to reward those who conjoin to or collaborate with one another for the common good as contrast to competition that could lead to violence, poverty and inequality that create instability in the community. The Oromos encourage or advice their children by saying *namta ta'i ilma koo*, *nama ta'i intala koo* which has multiple meanings. It means be a real person, be a human being, be yourself, be independent, or be a person with a good character. It also means be a person accepted by the society or be a real member of the society. The later meaning of *nama ta'i* can be better understood in connection with Oromos' expression such as *namin namaa wajjin* which means a person can't live alone or human being is social. *Namin nama wajjin* explains the advice *nama ta'i* which has the message to encourage a person to accomplish his or her social responsibility as member of the community in which she or he lives. It is important to note that in the Oromo worldview when the elders bless a child or a person they believe that a child or a person carries the blessing with her or him wherever she or he goes to stay or live. So the philosophy behind *nama ta'i* is that a kind of sending envoys who transmit the Oromos' gift to other fellow human beings. In Oromo philosophy the most precious thing that a person or a given society renders or gives to others is peace. The Oromos believe that peace is a vital element that enables human beings, all creations and God to live in good relationship (Wake, 2016b). *Namin nama wajjin* is focus on community in which a person lives. A person has to accomplish her or his social responsibility in any community anywhere (Inf7). In this sense, the philosophy of *namin namaa wajjin* tells us that the philosophy of *nama ta'i* is promotes 'We-ness' and

daunts 'I-ness'. In this regard, *nama ta'i* contradicts with extreme western individualism.

*Namummaa* discourages unjust law that robs or exploits the poor and dictators who repress the helpless. Rather it empowers the poor to fight for justice and peace. It works for the success and respect of the other person (Inf4). Another informant describes the nature of Oromo relational philosophy saying that it discourages dishonesty, stealing, gossip, greediness, falsehood, meanness, oppression, hatred, violent, injustice, and slavery. It encourages faithfulness, self-control, compassion, freedom, peace and equality (Inf5). The Abyssinian colonial elites failed to understand this vital philosophy that can promote unity, love, equality, peaceful co-existence among human beings, and respect for human dignity. Rather they have propagated massive natural and human resources exploitations, and human rights violations in Oromia. Although they have been living in Oromia at least since 1890s, the colonial elites and their setters failed to learn the *Namummaa* philosophy of the oppressed. They treated the people as the enemies of the state. They did not give the peace even to live with them in the so called 'federal system' within the Empire established by destroying our culture and national identity (Gadaa, 1999; Jalata, 1998). The current situation of the Oromo people under the TPLF-led Ethiopian from 1991 to the end of 2017 proves this. It is plausible to see if there is any similarity between *Namummaa* and Western philosophy: *Cogito ergo sum*. *Namummaa*, one the one hand, shares Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* which mean 'I think therefore I am' (Hankela, 2014). *Namummaa* shares the idea of *cogito ergo sum* in a sense that individual can independently think and expresses himself or herself as an independent being. An individual can contribute for the well-being of the community. *Cogito ergo sum* was one of the key elements that proliferated the idea of 'I culture' in Western society during the Enlightenment era. On the other hand, *Namummaa* contradicts with the notion of *cogito ergo sum* because *Namummaa* emphasis on 'We-ness' rather than 'I-ness' to maintain its principle of *namin namaaf* (a person is for a person). Oromo relational philosophy shares the *Ubuntu* concept which says 'I am human being because I belong or I am human being because I share and because I participate'. *Namin namaaf* or *namin namaa wajjin* focuses on 'a person is perceived complete when she or he cooperates with others' or 'a person exists in the network of others', or 'we are all related'. The Oromo relational philosophy as explained in moral aspect of *Namummaa*, leads the whole emotional states and shared fellowship of the entire community while giving enough space for individuals to express themselves to make their voice get heard and to be recognized as an individual who makes the community complete. On the contrary, Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* emphasizes that an individual is separate and independent from the rest of the community

(Hankela, 2014).

As Inf3 states, *Namummaa* is the potential of being human to explore the value of good community above personal interest. Oromo relational philosophy strives to help and secure people in the spirit of service without expecting any reward. It also shows honesty to others and respect to creation. One of my informants has expressed that good community is a community in which everybody shows honesty to others and respect not only to *Uumaa* (the Creator, God) but also to creation (Inf6). That means, *Namummaa* esteems human beings as a fundamental part of the ecological community that lead to a communal charge to sustain life. It is collective respect for human dignity, and it is compassionate to share resources on the principle equality and equity among humanity. Everybody is welcome to participate in radiating Oromo relational philosophy and experience it.

The spirit of *Namummaa* presents in all Oromos' self-help associations like *daboo*, *daadoo*, *afoosha*, *hirboo*, *qixxee* and indigenous institutions like *siqqeee*, *michuu*, *gumaa*, *harma-hodhaa* and *Gadaa* system. In all these associations and institutions, *Namummaa* influences the Oromo society to be cohesive, productive, working together as a team or as a group in their social grouping (Jalata, 2007). and to work towards peace-building rather than inflicting violence (Etefa, 2012).

As pointed out earlier, as golden rule of Oromos' holistic philosophy which teachers 'do to others what you would have them do to you', *Namummaa* suffered from severe destruction by successive As Bulcha states, Abyssinia colonial rulers who have been implementing systematic cultural genocide against the Oromo people. The colonizers have been working on controlling the mind of the people to cut them off from this cultural understanding and knowledge that their ancestors transformed to them (Bulcha, 2011). For instance, they excluded their culture which is a vehicle of their world views from the education system in the country. They distorted the meanings and the concepts the people's culture and history that they (colonial elites) have included in education system so that those included cultural elements and history should not reflect the true history of the people (Bokku, 2011; Jalata, 2008). By so doing, the colonizers distorted educational system by including only what served their political goals.

Abyssinian colonial elites have been destroying Oromo religious customs, belief systems, cultural values and languages in order to subdue the people (Jalata, 2002; Bulcha, 2011; Bokku, 2011; Gadaa, 1999). By following what their predecessors were doing have done, TPLF also caused social disturbance, psychological turmoil and cultural genocide. Any Oromo intellectual or traditional scholar or activist who is known to be part of the struggle for the revival of the history of the people that was destroyed by Abyssinian colonial powers is subject to maltreatment, torment, death and disappearance under this regime. TPLF accuses Oromos who are social

activists as terrorists (Jalata, 2002). This group imposed inhuman conditions on the people to attack their indigenous knowledge including *Namummaa* and civic and political organizations. Oromo identity that stores dignity and hope for the people as a nation has been for a long time repressed, marginalized and attacked by Abyssinian colonizers under the cover of the name Ethiopian state, although both the Amhara colonizers and TPLF never represented the peoples of Ethiopia (Gadaa, 1999; Jalata, 2002). The 'I-ness'-selfishness of Abyssinian colonizers suppressed the 'We-ness', the *Namummaa* of Oromos'.

The above Ethiopian history of colonization in Oromia elucidates that *Namummaa* has been suffering under the successive Ethiopian colonial elites from Yohannes of Tigray and Minelik of Amhara to the current TPLF-led Ethiopian brutal handed state (Bokku, 2011). As Jalata uncovers, the oppressors have been destroying the Oromo's indigenous knowledge, institutions, associations, cultural values and belief systems. They have been persecuting, torturing, dehumanizing and killing custodians of our culture, proverbs and indigenous knowledge to cut off the people from each other, from their culture and value systems, to destroy their history and to impose psychological, economic, societal, political and spiritual death on them as a nation and to make them feel that they are inferior to the oppressors (Jalata, 2002). The 2015 and 2016 massive human rights violations, protracted human and natural resources exploitations, killings and disappearances of thousands of the Oromos are the signs that tell us that punitive genocide is taking place in Oromia (Wake 2018). TPLF has continued the policy of the former Abyssinian elites to attack Oromos consciousness to cut off them from their worldviews and from the world (Bokku, 2011; Bulcha, 2005). All these and other factors that had been perpetuated by the oppressors' affected Oromo culture and identity (Jalata, 2002; Bulcha, 2011). This systematic destruction of culture, in turn, deteriorated the development of the value of Oromo relational philosophy. Today, our knowledge about *Namummaa* is fragmented. Even the disjointed knowledge that we have about it is under systematic attack by the conquerors who are applying similar policy to control the Oromo people.

We have to remind one another that if we are serious about our current situation, we should start to relearn the organic concept of *Namummaa* and the strengths of our ancestors and the mystical power and beauty of our heritage that our ancestors built based on the philosophy of *Namummaa*. Oromo traditional scholars, elders and *yuba* played essential role to preserve Oromo culture (Bokku, 2011). "The *qaallu* institution has played an important role in protecting original Oromo culture, religion and worldview" (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013: 285). In other words, the *qaallu* preserved Oromo identity. We should look past and current despondency towards our heritage which includes *Namummaa* and critically reflect

**Table 2.** The attributes and meanings of *Namummaa* philosophy can be summarized as follows.

<b><i>Namummaa</i> Attributes</b>	<b>Meanings of <i>Namummaa</i> philosophy</b>
<b>N:</b> Negotiation	Democracy, consensus and diversity
<b>A:</b> Action	Compassion, caring, sharing and respect
<b>M:</b> Mutuality	Community, solidarity and belonging
<b>U:</b> Universal	Global, inclusive, togetherness and openness
<b>M:</b> Magnanimity	Diplomacy, fairness, generousness and selflessness
<b>M:</b> Mastery	Proficiency, capability, empathy, kindness, forgiveness, rule, jurisdiction, sovereignty and victory
<b>A:</b> Appreciation	Love, integrity, honor, recognition and accountability
<b>A:</b> Assumption	Belief, opinion or process of knowledge production

on our current social, economic, political and spiritual situation in a way that it will bring life back, and restore hope and optimism in the future Oromia and all oppressed people in Ethiopia. That is when *Namummaa* is celebrated by Oromo and by others at local, national and international levels. Although it grounded in Oromo culture, *Namummaa* has potential elements to speak universally. It is Oromos' gift to the world.

I argue that the spiral of *Namummaa* touches all aspects of people life and human agents who operate in the society. Oromo relational philosophy urges all Oromo civic and political organizations, leaders, Oromo intellectuals, elders, nationalists and all concerned Oromo from all walks of life to teach and to empower each other with mutual understandings and reciprocal respect, to develop readiness to hold responsibility and to maximize their material capacity to continue struggling for peace, equality and democracy. Hence, it is plausible to note that *Namummaa* seeks to urge the people that they have the power to emancipate themselves. It is not the oppressors who define the people's destiny, but the people do.

*Namummaa* philosophy is integrated in all aspects of a day-to-day life of the Oromo people (Inf5; Inf8). Table 2 summarizes the derivatives of Oromo relational philosophy.

The above attributes of *Namummaa* show that the Oromo society is humanist in nature and their life is community-based life in which individual's liberty is respected. The Oromo society believes that a universe is a connection or bond that shared by humanity. Further, the above attributes of *Namummaa* cosmologically describes that there are two major categories of worldviews in Oromo philosophy, namely, religious worldview and material world view. One the one hand, the religious worldview perceives the cosmos as having purpose and meaning. Everything is interpreted based on what the people perceive is their meaning and purpose. On the other hand, the material worldview sees the cosmos as a product of chance which has no meaning and no end. The explanation of the cause and consequence of this chance seems to be the dependent of the religious worldview. For instance, chance is often related to *ayyanaa* of individual who decides the fate of

the person. Sickness and natural catastrophe is the product of chance.

## Conclusion

Before concluding the study, this article has embarked on some of the main challenges that *Namummaa* has been facing for many years. There are external factors which have immense negative consequences on the development of Oromo relational philosophy. The study shows that there have been also external factors that had affected the development of *Namummaa*. Now, we will briefly articulate the former factors and proceed with the latter factors.

The first and ferrous external factor was and is Abyssinian colonial power. According to Jalata (2002) the successive Ethiopian colonial elites and scholars from Yohannes of Tigray and Minelik of Amhara to Dergue (Mengistu Hailemariam) regime have been deliberately formulating the policy aiming at destroying the Oromos' knowledge system, religious customs and cultural values. He articulated that they have been spitefully excluding the Oromo indigenous institutions and philosophy from the Ethiopian education system to disconnect the people from their history and destroy their civilization. Likewise, Bulcha (2011) critically analyzed the current situation in Ethiopia and articulated that the TPLF-led Ethiopian government has been persecuting, torturing, dehumanizing and killing Oromo traditional scholars: custodians of Oromo culture, proverbs and mythologies and storage of indigenous knowledge system. He asserted that the regime has never been stopped from terrorizing and murdering Oromo intellectuals and nationalists who show passion to rewrite the true history of the people misrepresented by colonizers. Both Jalata and Bulcha uncovered that the colonizers political leaders and scholars have been implementing the policy that aims to intimidate Oromo traditional scholars, intellectuals, singers, artists, farmers, students, civil organizations and political leaders to repress mind of the people.

The above socio-politico analysis elucidates that the Abyssinian colonizers have been suppressing Oromo

epistemology, cosmology and ontology. They have been employing systematic policy to cut off the people from each other, from their culture and value systems, to destroy their history and to impose psychological, economic, societal, political and spiritual death on them as a nation and to make them feel that they are inferior to the oppressors. The ongoing massive human rights violations, protracted human and natural resources exploitation, killings and disappearances of thousands of the Oromo are the signs that tell us that punitive genocide is taking place in Oromia. TPLF has continued the policy of the former Abyssinian elites to attack Oromos' consciousness to cut them off from their worldviews and from the world, and perpetuated attack on *Namummaa*.

Another external factor that affected Oromos' religious customs, knowledge system and culture that carry the people's worldviews is the expansion of Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Islam) among the Oromos. These religions have developed in the cultures which are alien to the Oromos (Jalata, 2002). They marginalized indigenous culture and Christianized and Islamized millions of Oromos who are interested to rehearse Quranic and Biblical verses and identifying themselves with these imported religions than adhering the (OTR) which is attached to Oromo culture than others (Bokku, 2011). Wake also uncovers that the missionaries from Europe and Arab countries have excluded the indigenous system of knowledge production, concept of social institution and system of government from their teaching in their respective faith based schools. For instance, have never ever included indigenous institutions such as *gumaa*, *qaalluu*, *harma-hodhaa*, *michuu*, *siqqee*, *gadaa* system in their curriculum (Wake, 2018). By so doing, they have contributed to fragmentation of *Namummaa*, Oromo relational philosophy.

There are also internal factors that have violated the Oromos' egalitarian political culture and its moral philosophy. According to Jalata (2002) and Bulcha (2011), there have been times when Abba Gadaa (Oromo political leaders) intoxicated with their own personal interest and stayed in office more than eight years. This is complete violation of *Gadaa* democratic principle. Likewise, Dawit (2004) states that the *qalluu* (spiritual leaders in *Waaqeffannaa*, OTR) have been misusing the spiritual power and forced their clients to provide them sheep, goat, milk, butter and even to hand over their daughters to work for them. Wake also asserted that there are many leaders and preachers in non-*Waaqeffannaa* religions who attempt to demonize some Oromo cultural elements and symbols that carry centuries developed Oromo way of life and identity. As discussed before, Oromo relational philosophy manifests through the people's culture which in turn encompasses the Oromos' knowledge system, religious customs and material culture. So, all the above described factors particularly external factors directly and indirectly

exposed Oromo relational philosophy, *Namummaa* to distraction to the extent that Oromo indigenous knowledge production system would be interrupted from transmitting from generation to generation (Wake, 2016a). As the result of this, the knowledge we have today about *Namummaa* is fragmented, even the disjointed knowledge that we have about it is under attack by the current conquerors, TPLF who are applying similar policy with that of Minelik to control the Oromo people under systematic repression.

*Namummaa* is still facing cruel attack by TPLF-led Ethiopian state terrorism and Abyssinian elites. According to Wake, TPLF have been attacking Oromo worldview including *Namummaa* by violating its character manifestations and indigenous institutions that have used as blood vehicles of Oromo relational philosophy. It replaced the core teachings of mottos of Oromo relational philosophy far carrying and sharing by massive human and natural resources exploitation (Wake, 2016a). TPLF have been restlessly working to erode Oromo cultural values of collective solidarity and community, peaceful relationship among humanity, cooperation, justice, people's sovereignty, importance of individuals and community, rule of law, respect of environment and the Almighty and established state terrorism, dictatorship, self-centeredness, dehumanization, torture, squad killings, and land grabbing. Bulcha points out all these inhuman acts of TPLF that have exposed the Oromo as individuals and groups are evident that the people are under scale full colony (Bulcha, 2005). Concerning this, Jalata argues that the Oromos are under national humiliation and should stand in unison and continue to fight against the Abyssinian colonial system to prevent their cultural values, religious customs, social institutions and traditional government system, and to rewrite their true history (Jalata, 2008). In the time like this, when their way of life and their existence as a nation are under severe direct and indirect attack by state sponsored terrorism, Oromo elites, politicians, nationalist, farmers, students and every able-bodied Oromo should develop new bran innovative technique strategies for how-way forward to rethink and re-establish their own centuries lasting philosophy of life, *namummaa*. In order to do this, Oromo scholars should consider *namummaa* in various areas of research and disclose their findings to public so that people from all walks of life can get access to know more about the concept of *namummaa* and practice it in the daily life.

*Namummaa* is deep concept and indispensable in Oromos' social, political, economic and religious life. However, not everything that pertains to the philosophy of *Namummaa* has been covered in this article. I would like to remind the reader that all the subtopics I have outlined as nature and characteristics of this philosophy deserve detailed explanations and analyses on their own rights. I advance this theoretical concepts of Oromo relational philosophy not to preclude other ways of



analyzing this philosophy, but simply as one useful means for understanding its notion in the past as well as in contemporary Oromo situation. Oromo relational philosophy is the most abiding principle, old Oromo philosophy and way of life that has for many centuries sustained the Oromo as an individual, as a nation and as human community. Its meanings and effects are relevant today. *Namummaa* emphasis that community is essential and then individual to understand humanity. Human beings can exist to their full ability only when they have harmonious relationship in the community. That means human beings can use their ability to create the situation in which they can live and harmony only when they are willing to live in human manner; when they commit themselves to give peace to each other. Community is important for a person to fully develop herself or himself to being human being. Community does not exist without an individual. The study showed that according to the Oromos worldviews, individual and communal actions come back to *Namummaa* which is shared identity of human beings. Oromo relational philosophy in all individuals' or communities' or peoples' actions has ultimate goal of communality. This interconnects *Namummaa* to the Oromos' understanding of politics, economics, social and religion. Human being is nothing but Oromo relational philosophy.

Without the rethinking about and innovating the concept of Oromo relational philosophy and teaching how to practice it, can enhance empowerment of the people through their cultural heritages. So, the process of reconstruction of Oromo indigenous philosophy like *Namummaa* in the present study, should contribute towards the re-empowerment of the Oromo nation so that they can dismantle ideologies of colonial supremacy that detach them from their values and lead to conflicts. To put it in other words, the current Oromos' resistance against the TPLF systematic economic exploitation, political exclusion, mass killings and cultural genocide must be focused to reclaim power in their own country. What is more, the article conceptualized that the foundation of *Namummaa* is built on the overarching values and principles that are embedded within the Oromo culture, religion, institutions and knowledge system. It also examined that Oromo relational philosophy feeds pluralism in political, social, religious and cultural arena of local, national and global communities. Therefore, the article urges scholars and policy makers to consider *Namummaa* in their instinctual perspectives and policy because it can contribute to develop an aspiration to resuscitate peaceful co-existence, social justice, human development, just reconciliation and production of new knowledge and create a better community.

It is recommended that this new concept, that is, theorization of *Namummaa* along with utilization of some fundamental elements in Oromo culture and the worldview should not impede other ways of analyzing the

notion of this philosophy, but simply as one useful means for understanding humanity from the Oromo people's viewpoint. Further studies on Oromo relational philosophy for exploring and defining the scope and limit of *Namummaa* are necessary.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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