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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY ON THE WAY: THEORIZING OROMO PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY OF LAND (*LAFI KEENYA LAFEE KEENYA, OUR LAND IS OUR BONES*)

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore and analyze Oromo's philosophical and theological understandings of *lafa*, meaning land in English. Land issue has been a scorching issue in Oromo sociopolitical and economic situations under successive Ethiopian regimes. The chain the people's notion of land has with their understandings of cultural identity, natural environment, economy, national identity, politics, human rights, and religion has never been explored from philosophical and theological perspectives. Commercialization of land was introduced to Oromia (Oromo country) after the Abyssinian colonizers annexed the land in the 1890s. The colonial settlers occupied vast size of Oromo's land and propagated inflation of land price that left many Oromo with no land to call their own. This article focus on analyzing the concept of Oromo's notion of land using the expression *lafi keenya lafee keenya* (our land is our bones) and *lafaa fi lafi keenya lafee keenya* (we live on our land and bones) as meta-concepts, the concepts that cover other ideas in conceptual framework of Oromo philosophical and theological understanding of land. To this end, the article used primary, and secondary sources to analyze the findings. The study shows that Oromo's notion of land has holistic nature with diversified aspects of life linked to different dimensions such as ancestral, political, theological, sociological, anthropological, ecological, psychological, cultural, economic, and liberation. Through their experiences, the Oromo constructed the meanings and values of land and established friendly relations with the environment that connects them to each other as a nation, relate them to nature, universe, and *Waaqayyo* (God). Land is symbolized as a mother. It is referred as *Haadha Morgoo* (life-giver), *baattuu* (carrier) and *obsituu* (patient). Land is not only expressed as life but also as a place where people practice their culture, religion, and the place their bodies rest after death, and their *ekeraa* (spirit of the dead) live. It is also described as a country of the nation that they call Oromia. In order to have a better understanding of the people's question of land and to conceptualize it in national and international contexts, the study recommends that studying Oromo indigenous knowledge is significant.

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## INTRODUCTION

The interest of conceptualizing the philosophy and theology of land from the Oromo perspective was incepted particularly after TPLF-led Ethiopian government declared the so-called "Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan" in 2014, which provoked a reaction from the Oromo people. "Master Plan" is sometimes referred to as "Master Killer" by Oromo intellectuals and activists. The term "Master Killer" was first used by Dr. Gizachew Tesso in his presentation about the "Master Plan" to the Oromo community in Oslo in 2014. As I have been participating in the Oromo peaceful struggle for national self-determination since my school age, the people's

altruistic and courageous protest against the "Master Plan" and the slogans and expressions they attached to land issues gave me momentous chance to ask what is the rationale behind such massive opposition from the people across religions, regions, clans, ages, continents and countries in which they live. Thus, I am convinced that Oromo's philosophy and theology of land should come into the current academic debate about African indigenous Philosophy. This study is committed to establishing an essential conceptual framework of *lafaa* (land) from Oromo's viewpoints for further studies.

Scholars argue that land is one of the essential resources that support the existence of human beings. It is viewed as the air, water, soil, and other natural resources connected to the earth's surface (Bawlowe, 1978). Land is not simply a non-water portion of the earth as it has been regarded for a long period of time, but it embodies the total natural environment of the outer

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part of the land not covered by water. Land embodies and represents not only soil but also mineral deposits and water supply, location concerning the centers of commerce populations, plants, and the others (Brady and Weil, 1999).

In Africans' traditions, land is very cherished and valued from generations to generations. African societies consider all natural resources as sacred (Moshoeshoe, 2011). Natural resources should be protected and used in line with the awareness of the community between past, present, and future for the benefit of the community living in the present and those who will be born in the future. Africans believe that all land and culture belong to the nation, the entire people. Moshoeshoe further articulates that in traditional Africans' attitude, individuals, community, land, and the milieu are amalgamated to each other by sacred oaths and webs. These oaths or bonds are Africans' source of religion, culture, lives and thinking. They cultivate the people's collective sense of responsibility towards the present and future (Moshoeshoe, 2011). Africans' notion of the sacredness of all natural resources and their understandings of these sacred bonds are the facet of the African Traditional Religion (ATR) that supports in the totality of what constitute African philosophy or African thinking and actions (Magesa, 1997).

The issue of land has never been easy for most indigenous people all over the world. Denial of ancestral land by the abusive legal system established by colonial institutions to steal the land in the name of development activities have made millions of indigenous people landless. As Peniel Jesudasson Rajkumar (2012: 84-86) states, denial of land in most cases, as we learn from the history of who exposed to such political manipulation, also exposed the subjects to denial of development, disappearance of their languages, denial of identity, denial of religious rights, denial of economic rights and denial of political rights.

Most indigenous people have never accepted the oppressive situation that denies their land, culture, and identity. For instance, the land struggle of the Aboriginal people in Australia has a long history (Rajkumar, 2012: 86). The indigenous people in America, American Indians, have long experience of struggle for their identity. The Hispanic's struggle for culture and identity is another essential feature to reject political manipulation (Sindima, 2008: 192). In Asia, the ongoing Bangsamoro people's struggle in the Philippines focuses on "entitlement to their ancestral land and self-determination" (Rajkumar, 2012: 86).

The colonial power divided African land among themselves and exploited human resources and other natural resources in the continent. The land was stolen from owners of the land and used, and the binderies of some African countries remain chronic cancer to many ethnic groups and nations. Their systematic colonial presence, particularly in the form of political-diplomatic work, NGOs, and investments, are still essential indications of the new colonial scramble in Africa. In South Africa, the White minority group has occupied a large area of land, while the indigenous people remain in poverty (Reddi, 2012). Emerging great economic powers from Asia such as China is another version of a colony by the name of development in Africa in which few political elites are beneficiaries, and thousands lost their ancestral land. For Africans land is the main sources of their livelihood, identity, and culture (Wake, 2016). If you take away his land from an

African man, you, simply, made him like a fish outside water. Denial of the right to land ownership has an international phenomenon. It causes conflict among individuals or groups, ethnic groups that can spill over to other areas within a state and is likely to spill over to neighboring countries (Wake, 2018b). It can cause forced immigration, slavery of various forms. According to Rajkumar (2012: 86), the largest labor forces, undocumented immigrants, and sex slaves constitute the indigenous people who were denied their ancestral lands. They are those who denied to promote and enjoy their cultures, identities and the rights of their religions.

According to Habel (1995), in Jewish tradition, there are six dominant ideologies of land based on Torah, the book of Moses. It is important to note that I am not going to argue for or argue against these ideologies in this article, but I will briefly describe them according to Habel. First, in royal ideology, the Jewish understand land as "a centralized wealth and glory for the monarch and the empire; the monarch being the earthly representative of YHWH [God] located in heaven; the people are the monarch's labor force in the land" (Habel, 1995: 134). Second, in the theocratic ideology, the land is regarded as a property of God, and God has absolute power to give it to his people, Israel. Israelites should live in godly life to get the land. Third, in an ancestral household ideology of the book of Joshua, the land of Canaan will be given to the conqueror, the Israelites. According to the fourth theory that is the prophetic ideology of the Jeremiah, "land is God's pure and precious *nahalal* [Hebrew word meaning a chosen land]" *Nahalal* suffers when people do injustice in the land (in the country). God also suffers with the people who are injured. The book of Leviticus 23-27, articulates the fifth Jewish land ideology. Land is sacred. It is God's sanctuary and garden, worked by Israelite families as tenant farmers bound by the principle of Sabbath economy. The sixth land philosophy of the people of Israel is immigrant ideology. We can call this as Abrahamic narratives. In this ideology, land is described as a host country where Abraham interacted with God at a sacred place. Abraham or immigrants learned that there is future hope there, and they established a relationship with the indigenous people of the land (Habel, 1995: 153).

The above described Biblical theories of land favor the people of Israel. According to these ideologies, based on Biblical narratives, the Israelites were the first people in human history that God gave them a particular land as a nation. This issue has been facing hot debates not only among social scientists and theologians but also religious communities, particularly, Jewish and Islam. It is plausible to recognize that the idea of the spy was attached to land. Spy was practiced by the Israelites for the first time in human history, at least according to Biblical narratives, that is, when Moses has sent 12 spies to Canaan, Palatine. 'Spy' or 'intelligence issue' is one of the Jewish gifts to the world. Theologically, the Jewish people took the promise land from the hands of God after they spied the land, Canaan. Intelligence studies that we have today have in many Universities all over the world has got its root from the Hebrew Bible, Torah. The narratives in the Books of numbers provide us the accounts that Moses has sent 12 spies, Israelites chieftains to the land of Canaan. Thus, I can argue that the concepts of "spy" or intelligence security that is deterring the enemy from the citizen are the Jewish gift to the world.

Dickason (2009) states that the European philosophy of land-person relationship is also dominated by Jewish land-person relationship narrated in the book of Genesis 1:28. This text articulates that Adam and Eve were put in Garden by God, who blessed them to fill the earth, to subdue and cultivate the land, and dominate over everything on earth. The European cosmological understanding was emanated from this Jewish's notion of tradition to rule over everything on earth. They transferred this to the ideology of colonization when they developed their relationship with their colonial subjects. This cosmological understanding of land in Jew-European tradition is in contradiction with African cosmology. Dickason uncovers that the European philosophy of land-person relationship is opposite to the African worldview towards land-human relation, "which saw humans as part of a cosmological order depending on a balance of reciprocating forces to keep the universe functioning in harmony" (Dickason, 2009: Xii-Xiii). According to Dickason, the colonials' land philosophy and settlement policies have never been favorable, conducive, and inclusive for the colonized people in many countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Canada. De Salvaic (2005) and Kelbessa (2011) state that the Abyssinian (Amhara) colonial settlers in Oromia introduced their own land-person relationships idea, a philosophy which is anti-to the indigenous philosophy of cosmological order. In Oromo cosmology, a person and land have balance and mutual relationship. However, the colonial settlers have in Oromia have documented information which their behavior of cutting, tearing up and burning trees/forests. Kelbessa (2011) clearly states that such an attitude towards the environment is alien to Oromo culture. The Oromo understands such action as *aad-malee*, meaning unethical or immoral.

As an ancient and a great African nation (De Salviac, 2005), Oromo people suffered from denial of land by Abyssinian colonizers since the 1890s (Bulcha, 2011). From the time of incorporation of Oromia into the Ethiopian Empire in the 1890s to the present, the successive Abyssinian/Ethiopian rulers have been developing and implementing the social, economic, political and land policies that reduce Oromo culture, identity, religion, economy, and land (Jalataand Schaffer, 2013). Persecuting and killing Oromo intellectuals, traditional scholars and nationalists as the enemy of the Ethiopian Empire, and evicting Oromo farmers from their ancestral land has been widely practiced the Ethiopian governments (Jalata and Schaffer; Wake 2016; Bulcha 2011). As Bokkuu (2011) and Jalata (2002) state, the Oromo people have never accepted this inhuman condition. The people have been struggling to govern their affair and to have control over their land.

The Oromo's ongoing national struggle focuses on averting eviction from their ancestral land by the name of "Developmental State" and "Master Plan" which is manifested through systematic cultural, economic, and political marginalization of the people by the central power (Wake, 2018a). The dominance of a Judeo-Euro-Ethiopian philosophy of land over the holistic and religious perspectives of the Oromo people is a trend one can find in Jewish settlement ideology in Palestine, European colonization in Africa, and Ethiopian colonial settlement ideology in Oromia. The discussion about Oromo theology and philosophy of land is routinely ignored in Oromo oral literature. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the main components of Oromo philosophy and theology of land. While utilizing Oromo oral

literature as a secondary data and primary data collected by qualitative interviews to explore and theorize Oromo philosophy and theology of land, the study will also examine what land means for the people from sociological, anthropological, political, economic, cultural, ancestral, psychological, and ecological aspects. These aspects explain how the Oromo understand land, particularly within the philosophical and theological frameworks. Hence, the fundamental theories of land utilized in this research were based on the theological and philosophical concepts of land in the Oromo Traditional Religion (hereafter-OTR), and their indigenous knowledge system.

**Materials and Data Collection Technique:** The study is established on two fundamental sources. These are primary and secondary sources. The available literature on Oromo oral tradition related to the notion of land in Oromo culture is utilized and systematically constructed. As the main source of this study, the primary data was collected through a semi-structured interview with purposely selected five informants. The informants were selected based on their traditional knowledge regarding land and many years' experiences as farmers. They are custodians of Oromo culture. The informants were interviewed in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), and Sabbataa and Sulultaa towns through a Skype with *afaan* Oromo (Oromo language). The interview was based on the willingness of the informants. All informants were asked the same questions about their understandings of land in Oromo culture and their personal experiences about their landownership issues under the current Ethiopian regime. As indicated in Table 1, the informants were given anonymous *Inf* followed by the numbers of informants. To construct Oromo's philosophical and theological understandings of land, the article used Oromo's expressions, proverbs, and slogan in line with existing knowledge regarding land in various traditions. Some Oromo's mythologies are also used because myth helps to understand people's philosophy, history, and cultural values and religion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Oromo Philosophical Theology of Land

In this discussion, first, the article provides a systematic explanation of Oromo's philosophical theology notions of land from epistemological, ontological, cosmological, and ecological perspectives. Ontology is a theory of being, and cosmology is a theory of origin and development of the universe. It is one's worldview, particularly regarding our environment. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge or reality and what describes reality to be. Ecology is a balance or a relationship between people, animals, and the natural environment as a whole. Cosmology is a philosophical contemplation of the universe as a totality.

According to Gebeno (2017: 73), *lafa* is the Oromo word for land in English. In the Oromo language, *lafa* has three meanings. First, it refers to *biyya* which means country. For instance, *lafa* Oromo means *biyya* Oromo or the Oromo country, Oromia. Second, it refers to *biyyoo* meaning ground or soil. Third, *lafa* refers to *biyya-lafaa* meaning the earth or the world. In this discussion, we will focus on the Oromo's view of land as their natural resources, sacred and identity.

In Oromo epistemology, the concept of land and its ownership is entirely connected to the very existence of people as individuals as a nation and to their religious view.

Table 1. Lists of informants, anonymous names farmers and traditional scholars)

Number	Names	Sex	Age	Occupation	Status	Date of interview	Place of interview
1	Inf1	Male	76	T.S	Widower	10.03.2017	Sabbataa
2	Inf2	Male	58	T.S	Married	22.02.2018	Finfinnee
3	Inf3	Male	64	T.S	Married	15.03.2017	Finfinnee
4	Inf4	Female	50	F.T.S.	Married	10.06.2017	Sulultaa
5	Inf5	Female	54	F.T.S.	Widow	21.02.2018	Sulultaa

F: Farmer, T: Traditional, S: Scholar, Inf: Informants. Traditional Scholars in this study refers to are those who have good knowledge of Oromo culture and Oromo traditional religion.

It symbolizes their political autonomy and identity. Land, for Oromo, is a common symbol that represents the living political, social, economic, and identity of the people who live on it. They use the proverb to explain their epistemological, ontological and cosmological understanding of the world. Thus, they use the proverb or expression that has been accepted and used by society for centuries to express the significance of land. They say, *dubbiinlafaa*, *dubbiilafeeti*. *Dubbii* in this context means “the matter of” or “the issue” or “things associated with”. *Lafa* means land and *lafee* means bone-it refers to human skeleton. So, *dubbiin lafaa dubbii lafeeti* means a matter of land is the matter of life and death. It is about the existence of the people. This tells us how the land is an essential factor in the political, social, economic and religious life of the people.

The natural and national rights of the Oromo’s concerning their land, Oromia, were established during the time Orma (Horo) lived in Madda Walaabuu. According to Oromo myth of creation, Madda Walaabuu is the *Waaqa* (God) has created the first human beings (Bokkuu, 2011). These laws, that is, the law that protect the people’s national interest, was developed over many generations in the time of our ancestors. The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* (God) would come to assist them in the time of their national need such as protecting their land from their enemy (Wake, 2016).

The Oromo people believe that organized human force is pivotal to protect or liberate their land from the enemy and protect their national interest. They have a unique symbol of political unity and trust in their struggle for peace and multicultural democracy. They use the Odaa tree (the sycamore tree) as their national emblem and unifying symbol. The Odaa tree is a symbol of prosperity, life and peace (Bulcha, 2011). Odaa is a tree of God under which the Oromo lawmakers gather to discuss and debate how to interpret and practice, amend the customary law and to enshrine new law to cope with the changing society and situation and to protect their land.

*Lafee* means a bone. *Lafee* is a collective noun that stands for the skeletal system, and it is not about a single *lafee* (bone) such as the femur or jaw bone, etc. *Lafee* is the part of our body which is the hard connective tissue that forms the substance of our skeleton and supports the entire body that retains its real form and beauty. It helps the movement of the body and all the activities. It holds the person erect and makes him/her to be able to walk and holds our flesh in different shape. The Oromo relate *lafee* to *lafa* to explain metaphorically that their existence is impossible without their land.

One of the informants said that “As we [Oromo] cannot hold all parts of our bodies and cannot move here and there without bones that help to hold the body together as a whole, we believe that our existence, culture, language, and economy,

religion, politics, and our people hood are at risk without our land” (Inf2). One may ask why the Oromo relates *lafa*-land to *lafee*-bone. Anatomically, the body can’t stand if the musculo-skeletal system does not hold it together. In the same way, a nation whose land is taken by colonizers such as a TPLF can’t exist anymore. Wake (2016) covers that the TPLF and its allies who have been grabbing our land knew this truth long before they arrived in Finfinnee. As soon as they arrived in Finfinnee and captured state power, they said that the land belonged to the government, which is the TPLF (Bulcha, 2011). Therefore, it is no wonder today, after they have been in power for twenty-seven years that they own an amazingly large percentage of the land in Oromia as well as in Ethiopia as the whole.

A great percentage of the land which was owned by the Oromo from time immemorial to promote economic growth, human development, and social welfare is now in the hands of the colonizers- the Abyssinian settlers and foreign investors who were invited by the colonial rulers to come to Ethiopia to buy Oromo land at very low prices (Jalata, 2002). After they forcibly acquired the land, the colonizers (from Amhara ethnic group) continued their dehumanizing policy of expelling the original owners. They have achieved this through military subjugation (Gadaa, 1999). After they took political power in 1992 and acquired the Oromo’s land, the TPLF commercialized the land and inflated its price. This left thousands of Oromo with no land they could call their own. Those who oppose this colonial system are imprisoned, forced into exile, or killed (Jalata, 2002). It is painful to note that the Churches remained silent when the subjugated were stripped of their dignity, culture, and spiritualities. Let alone fighting against this unjust system. Sometimes even some religious leaders entered into a senseless competition to grab the land of the poor and the marginalized to line pockets with money that comes at the expense of the powerless.

Almost all of the land in Finfinnee, the city is owned by the TPLF, which they [TPLF] believe has become their second Makele, the capital city of Tigray. Whoever talks about this truth is considered as a terrorist, according to them (Inf5).

The above note shows how the Oromo are worried about their futurity because the ruling party is systematically eroding the Oromo’s culture from the heart of the Oromo land, Finfinnee. It also enunciates that just as a body without a skeletal system is formless and cannot stand, a nation without its land cease to exist.

As the flesh of a person cannot stay united, cannot move but loses its beauty and shape without *lafee*-bone, the Oromo believe that they cannot have a national identity, religion, culture, unity, and sovereignty as a nation if their land is taken away by colonizers. It is because of this philosophical, sociopolitical, economic and religious understandings that the

Oromo from all walks of life, particularly, those who have a direct attachment with land, the Oromo farmers are struggling to call the colonial system in Oromia to an end to have full control over their land.

*Lafa* (land), according to the Oromo understanding, is an area of ground concerning its nature and composition that is arable land. The people consider land as an essential natural resource. They consider that this natural resource to be the source of production and that it should be owned by the people (Inf1). They believe that this right is given by God who gave them *seera Waaqa* or *seera Umamaa*, meaning natural law. The people have the potential to make human law by which man can use the land. Such law, human law, should be debated and made in a way which respects law of *Waaqa* (Inf5). The Oromo have developed the human laws based on the daily life experience and the natural laws given to them by the Supreme Being, *Waaqa*. So, they believe that the use of land should be per under with the laws of land enshrined in the Gadaa system. Any external or internal power that infringes those laws of land and exploits their resource, land, should be treated as aggression (Inf2). Land is also an area of land with specific boundaries or marked off by natural and political boundaries. One of my informants argued that the Oromo have the right to promote and develop their economy, language, culture, religion, and political philosophy in the land which belongs to them (Inf3). Likewise, another informant articulated that the people believe that *lafa* is created by *Waaqayyo* and therefore anybody can enjoy peace and prosperity in the Oromo territory, but not at the expense of the *nagaa* of Oromo or not at the cost of the people's common social, political and economic interest (Inf1).

The Oromo believe that the *Uumaa* (the Creator of the universe and humanity) has given them the right to use their land to which they are attached. In the Oromo word *dubbiin*, "n" is added to "*dubbi*" to make it "*dubbiin*" and indicates how the whole life of the Oromo people is attached to land: their songs, *geeresaa* (lamentation), poems, language, cultural values, economic, spiritual life and growth, philosophy, their relation to other eco-politics and other people. As one of the informants (Inf4) described, land is vital for the survival of the Oromo people and nations in general. It is the most valued heritage they have like any other nation. It carries the culture, values, identity, and resources of the people that identify them as a nation. Another scholar has a similar understanding regarding Oromo's concept of land.

When thinking of the Oromo, we are dealing, with a culture in which the people, the language, the land and their belief systems cannot be divorced without doing injustice to the facts that bind them together in the ethnic, communal and socio-tradition of the dimensions of their existence (Baxter et al., 1996: 93).

The above quotation indicates that Oromo world view, their language, culture, and religion are interconnected to their understandings of land they claim as their own and the meanings they give to their land. As Inf5 has stated, "The *Gadaa* customary law instructs us to keep all human beings and non-human organisms in the land in peace and to do justice to them" This informant added that.

Everybody has the right to enjoy the blessings that the land gives. *Gadaa* system gives us the rights to use our land and

to protect it from any enemy. There are many trees that Oromo see as sacred. No one can cut or abuse those trees. For instance, a man cannot cut trees around *galma* (prayer area in *Waaqeffannaa*, similar to altar in the Christian tradition). Trees and any creature around *galma* have the right to live because the earth is created for them. If animals pass beyond their natural boundaries, humanity should treat them safely because disturbing a creature may offend *Ayyaanaa* (the spirit) of *Waaqayyo* (God) that comes to *galma* to encourage believers. The presence of conflict between humanity and trees or creature shows that there is no obedience to the *Waaqayyo* (the Oromo deity). In such a situation, *ayyaannaa* will not come quickly to comfort worshippers (Inf5).

The above quotation articulates that the Gadaa system recognizes that land is a communal property for all humanity, and creatures and people can use land in the right and respectful manner. Gadaa system promotes environmental protection.

The Oromo use the name of land when they make an oath or swear. They also say *dhugaa Waaqaa dhugaa lafaa* when they swear. Its meaning is literally 'I swear in the name of God and earth'. According to this concept, land can play a role as a witness and tell the truth. All human beings have God-given rights to have a relationship with land. However, not everybody has an equal relationship with land. It is believed that the elderly and retired Abba Gadaa, *Qaalluu* had special relationship with *lafa* because they have accumulated a lot of experiences to respect *lafa*, the mother earth as *lafa* is bequeathed to them by the ancestors.

The more you have the experience, the more you respect land or the more you grow up, the more you have a good relationship with land. The more you respect land, the more you treat trees in a good manner. When people pollute it, land responds as an injured victim, and *Waaqayyo* considers the pollutants as rebellious against His creation, cosmic order (Inf3).

In Oromo philosophical theology, as Inf1 articulated *lafa* is believed to belong to the living, the unborn and the dead. Therefore, a person is not entitled to do what she or he pleases with *lafa* because it is the property of the ancestors, all the living, the unborn and is thus sacred. The stewards of the *lafa* are Abba Gadaa, elders and community leaders. They apply the laws that are established in Gadaa system to protect the land and to advice the inhabitants how to use *lafa*. However, this does not mean that others have no responsibility to protect *lafa* from destruction. Everybody has the duty to use *lafa* properly and to protect it from damage.

The elders advice their children that even though it does not speak as they do, the land communicates to them. They tell children not to cut trees without reasons, but to plant and water trees. In Oromo linguistic philosophy, we call *nameessuu*, meaning personification. The Oromo use personification in their poems, songs, proverbs, and lamentation to show their interaction with *lafa*, the mother earth. According to one of my informants, the people bury dead bodies in the ground, and the land does not resist it. This informant emphasized that,

*Lafa* does not only help us [the Oromo] as a natural resource, but also it teaches us tolerance. Humans and

nature live on it. *Lafa* treats us [humans] and other creations equally. It also treats all that is created equal. It doesn't do injustice to us because it is sacred. In turn, we should also treat it in a good manner and in respect so that *Hadha Margoo, Harmee* (the mother earth) will not be disappointed. We should keep in touch with her. We should defend our land (Inf1).

Another informant stated that *raaba-door* (the armed wing of the Gadaa system) has a duty to protect *lafa keenyaa* (our land, it refers to the mother earth or the country as the whole, i.e. Oromia) when an enemy comes to exploit or to annex it (Inf4). Likewise, Inf3 emphasized that the Oromo never tolerate it when their *lafa* is abused because they consider it to be the sacred gift of *Uumaa* (Creator) to them for their survival as a community and human society. It is this deep philosophical understanding of *lafa* and their relationship to it that empowered them to formulate the laws and resolutions to sustain the security of their *lafa*. In the Oromo worldview, *lafa* has no market value because it cannot be sold or transferred to another. If you attempt to sell the *lafa* it means that you are trying to sell people, and this is an intolerable crime. Accordingly, any human law that attempts to take away this God-given right (to use their land) from them cannot be tolerated, and anybody who inflicts such law on the Oromo nation will receive an appropriate response. It is this sophisticated philosophical understanding of land established for centuries in the people's *Gadaa* democratic system that provoked a reaction and led to the protests in Gincii, Ambo and other cities by the Oromo people in May 2014 against land grabbing in Oromia by the TPLF-led Ethiopian government. The protest was against the land grabbing and the unjust structure that robs the poor in Oromia regional state in Ethiopia (Ayele, 2016). According to East African Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, hundreds of peaceful protesters from early school age to 70 years old people were killed by the Ethiopian army. Thousands were wounded and many are suffering from their injuries, thousands have been detained in unknown places where they faced torture, intimidation, and humiliation by the government's security forces.

Their unreserved confrontation with Ethiopian brutal army showed other ethnic groups in Ethiopia that the Oromo' understanding of peace and justice, their conviction of the values of their culture, identity, language and religion, and their philosophical understanding of land in relation to the survival of their identity as a nation have immense weight compared to the horrific repression they have been experiencing by the Ethiopian government. This, in turn, helps researcher to reinterpret the notion of *dubbiin lafaa, dubbii lafeeti* that is the Oromo way of expressing their deep concern about *lafa* (land). When *lafee*- bone (skeletal system) is added in the phrase before it, particularly, in the context of the Oromo's protest in the last three years against the land grabbing by ruling elites, one can see the seriousness of the situation. It is more likely that nothing will stop them from ruling their own land. Informant (Inf4) said that *lafii jirreenya* (land is life). He explained that the Oromo's connection to the land is very deep.

For us, land is an integral part of the individual, family and community. Land is the very substance of life for the Oromo people as a nation. Our history and identity are profoundly bound up with our land. Land is a primary

means for our continuity as a people. It connects us to our past history when we were once free to govern our affairs, our present being under the colonial system and our hope-our futurity (Inf4).

The idea of land that runs through the above quotation, which indicates that Oromo self-understanding becomes meaningful only if it is related to their land, Oromia. "Our life is meaningless without our land for land is everything for us" (Inf1). Another informant added a very striking comment saying.

The government evicted us from our land without our willingness. Now we became servants for those who took away our land. Many of us forced to move to nearby cities to find a job to feed our family. Very few succeeded, nonetheless, many didn't and we don't know their whereabouts. Our families were destroyed. Our children were exposed to extreme poverty. Today, those who have been putting us in jail and beating our children when protested against the injustice done against us are enjoying abundant life at our expense (Inf5).

This reveals how dispossession of land dismantle family, destroy social capital, and expose people to severe poverty.

*Lafaa*, for the Oromo's, is consecrated or sacred and is central to their entire civilization. It cannot be sold or bought. Exploiting it beyond its capacity for renewal, since it (land) is the living and linking thread between the past, present, and future, is breaking *safuu*. Accordingly, the current land misappropriation in Oromia by the Abyssinians settlers is a misuse of the *lafa* Oromo (Oromo land) which amounts to intolerable exploitation, violation of human rights, and a crime against nature. The Oromo never tolerate violation of precious resources by the exploitive structure that is established to rob the poor. Millions of Oromo from all walks of life who participated in a peaceful struggle against the unjust law that robbed them were treated viciously and violently by Ethiopian government. During the protest against the regime's systematic cultural genocide in 2015 and 2016, they used the popular phrase *dubbiin lafaa dubbii lafeeti* and *lafii keenya lafee keenyaa* (our land is our bone/our skeletal system) in many places as a poetic response to their situation under the brutal regime. The reference to *lafeti* is an idiomatic or an informal way of referring to the Oromo's deepest self. *Lafee keenyaa* refers to the way the Oromo, express their most essential self. That means the Oromo are part of their land and vice versa. So, if justice will not be served for the Oromo, there will be no peace of the land. There will be no peace for exploiters, too. In other words, if there is no justice, there will be no peace. Nowadays, the saying *lafii keenya lafee keenyaa* was used in a slogan in the people's national struggle for freedom. Both in Oromia and abroad, the Oromo use this slogan to oppose the 'Addis Ababa [Finfinnee] Integrated Master Plan' which was a systematic political agenda of TPLF to project cultural genocide on the people. The slogan expresses the people's philosophical and theological notions something like "Our land belongs to us. We belong to our land. God has created us on this land"

According to Oromo cosmology, the mother earth and the Father God cannot be detached. God's spit (rain, as Oromo elders say) which comes down from God the Father and rests on the mother earth and waters plants and trees and provides

food for humanity to ensure sustainability and continuity of life. The mother earth is the absorber and distributor of God's symbol of human blessings; spit of God, rain is God's providence to humanity (Inf5). So, land has a notable value in Oromo culture.

No matter how long they live far away from Oromia, the Oromo connected to their land. During their protests against the land-grabbing in Oromia, they used the same slogan, *lafti keenya lafee keenya* (our land is our bones) and expression, *dubbiin lafaa dubbii lafeeti* (the matter of land is a matter of life and death) across continents. Even when they tortured in Maekelawi, which is the Ethiopian infamous torture center, many Oromo political prisoners wrote on the wall, *lafti keenya lafee keenya*. On 6 September 2019, when the ruling party transformed this torture chamber into a gallery. People saw the expression written on the wall by unidentified Oromo prisoner, who anonymously wrote his name as "B Y, O" This is what the victim has written.

*Lafti keenya*

*Lafee ///*

*B Y O*

Mr. Tolassa Dabala, one of the former inmates, made an interview with Oromo Media Network (OMN) on this day. He witnessed that many Oromo prisoners, when recovering from severe torture, had been writing their names, their families' names, where they were born, heroic messages to the people to continue to fight to liberate their land. Tolassa said that they have used their blood to write on the wall. From torture chambers, on streets and government offices in Ethiopia/Oromia and on streets England, America, Germany, Canada, Australia, Norway, Egypt, and Sweden, thousands of Oromo cry out the same expression, *lafti keenya lafee keenya*. Oromo's understanding of, concern to, and love for their land are profound.

The well-known Oromo poet, Zalalam Abarra, in one of his *walaloo*, meaning poems, called *Safuu Jaalalaa* (as once presented by Namoo Daandii on Voice of America (VOA), *Afaan Oromoo* Program) linked the relationship between God, the Father and the mother earth, to the love between a husband and a wife. Abarra especially presented this mutual relationship between human being and land in connection with the rain which comes from the Father God to moisten and make the earth productive. This imagery of husband and wife which is used to show the relationship between God and the land (the land of Israel), is also in the Bible (Ezekiel 16: 16 23; Hosea 2, etc.). There is a strong connection between God and the earth, and whoever is using the land irresponsibly by transgressing the laws of nature, which is also the law of God, is a transgressor and a criminal before *Waaqa*-God, and that person is like someone who beats or publically rapes somebody's wife. Such a person, such a criminal should be ready to face the consequence.

In Oromo culture, there are crucial environmental ethics attached to *lafa*. De Salviac, who for decades lived and worked among the Oromo, stated how the colonial settlers destroyed Oromo values concerning land and trees. He said that the Abyssinian settlers brought an incompatible culture to the soil. They destroyed trees and made vast areas of the Oromo land

barren (De Salviac, 2005). In his comprehensive ethnographic study of indigenous Oromo environmental ethics, Kelbessa interviewed numerous traditional Oromo scholars and reported similar narratives to those of De Salviac from a hundred and ten years ago. His work revealed that the Oromo traditional scholars, particularly elders in Jimma area are still very concerned about the Abyssinian settlers' behavior towards the environment; they have been cutting down trees, but they have not replanted any trees since they annexed the area. Oromo elders despondently expressed that this kind of mistreatment of the environment is discordant with the Oromo environmental law that was enshrined in the *Gadaa* system (Kelbessa, 2011). The Abyssinian colonial settlers didn't respect the Oromo value of nature. They did injustice to people's ecological ethics. Thus, in Oromia, there is a need for environmental liberation.

In Oromo eco-theology, land is not only used as a socioeconomic resource, but also it makes a significant contribution as a cultural resource and in traditional practices. Rituals related to Thanksgiving and prayer have strong ties with *lafa* (Inf2). In the Oromo worldview, their land is attached to their religion. There is a direct link or relationship between the Oromo' *slafa* and their social, economic and political philosophies. Land is a source of shelter, and health, it is a hunting ground, provides tools, and it is a burial ground. All the major struggles for liberation that the people have engaged in are to liberate their land, Oromia (Jalata, 2002). One of the main Oromo's grievance is that their land, Oromia is being stolen from them by colonial ruling elites and ordinary settlers (Bourince, 2018). Their grievances and complaints be unending and their peace will not be assured as long as the colonial system continues to exist directly or indirectly. Informants' understandings, ideas, feelings, and arguments focus on Oromo's philosophical and theological understandings of land navigates through various aspects of humans' discussed beneath.

**Ancestral Dimension: Origin:** To understand the expression *lafti keenya lafee keenya* (our land is our bone) in the context of the Oromo's social, economic, political and religious paradigm, it is essential to examine the people's epistemological, ontological and cosmological understanding of the world and belief. As Bokkuu (2011) articulates, although we do not know exactly when it happened, mystical explanation of the creation of human beings and the universe from the Oromo perspective indicates that *Waaqayyoo* (God) created human beings, the earth, and all creations. The first human being is created at *Madda Walaabuu* in Bale in Oromia. *Waaqa* (God) created the father of the Oromo people called Horo or Orma (Adam in the Bible), and one day he took him to the top of the mountain around *Madda Walaabuu* where God's first creation took place in human history. The Oromo believe that Horo is the son of God. God created him from *Walaabuu* which is a special water that gives life. *Waaqa* told Orma to stop on the top of this mountain and God showed him *Orom-biyya* or *biyya* Oromo or Oromia with all its rivers, forests and all gifts of the Father, God. He showed him a beautiful green land. Then, he commanded him to descend from the top of the mountain and establish his homestead on a selected place at *Madda Walaabuu*. God told Horo to go to the mountain and river to pray to and to make a sacrifice for him. He promised him that he will hear his prayer, receive his sacrifice, bless him with children and material wealth, deliver him from calamity and protect his family, his people and the land from the enemy.

Another informant added that the Oromo prophet Mako Billi reminded the Macca Oromo when they crossed Gibe river that Orom-biyyaa (Oromia) was the land that *Waaqa* gave to Ilma Orma (the Oromo) when he (God) made a covenant with Orma, the Father of Oromo people (Inf4). In addition, the prophet Mako Billi, as Lambert points out, declared the law of God to the people during that time so that they would put their trust in him and protect the land which *Waaqayyo* gave them together with all that was created in it (Lambert, 1989).

According to Oromo cosmological philosophy, human beings are part of cosmological order. The Oromo believe that the land on which they reside was their origin. Oromo elders transmit oral tradition to their children that their grand-grandfathers were buried where they lived on the land, and their spirits are still living there (Inf5). They often bless Children with these spirits saying *ayyaani abbaa kee, kana kaakilii kee, kan abaabilii kee siif ha tolu* (let the spirit of your father, spirit of your grandfather and spirit of great grandfather bless you or make you prosper or fortune). That means land as a sacred object carries the living and the spirit of the dead person and mystically connects them to each other. *Lafa* or land which they refer to as a 'mother earth' or *dachee haadha margoo* meaning "mother earth" is symbolized as a loving and patient mother. They call it as *dandeesuu* (carrier) or *baattuu* (patient) who has endless love for them during their lifetime on earth and after they die, for their body and spirit. One of the informants articulates human beings' relationship with land saying, "They have a connection with land when they are alive as well as after they die" (Inf4). Oromo believes that humans' relationship with the land begins in a womb and continues to tomb. They believe that they connected to their land when Horo, the first man was created. Consequently, Oromo and Oromia can't be separated.

**Political Dimension: Territorial, country:** The physical portraits of Oromia indicate not only social, economic, but also its political relationship of the land with the people. In its political dimension, "land is a domain between the boundaries that separate countries" (Habel, 1995: 1). In Oromo tradition, although land or farmland can be assigned for individuals, the same land can be used by extended family, lineages, community and clan. They have rights to access the land for various purposes and different times based on mutual understandings, but they never sell the land. The right of land ownership transmits from generation to generation through oral history for centuries. Nevertheless, now, land ownership can be formally documented but never sold. Jalata (2002) uncovers that ownership, control, distribution, and access to land in Oromia has been dramatically changing since the 1890s to present. Oromo land has been used by Ethiopian regimes to aggravate systematic colonization, to empower the colonial settlers, and to erode Oromo culture and make the indigenous people poor and powerless. Wake (2018a) uncovers the so-called 'Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan' which triggered the popular slogan during the Oromo's protest *Lafti keenya lafee kenya* (our land is our bone) is spectacular example of colonial agenda to destroy Oromo identity and to ensure economic and political empowerment of the colonial elites at the expense of Oromo peasants around Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). This plan revealed that the TPLF-led Ethiopian government had ultimate jurisdiction over Oromo land and made thousands of Oromo farmers landless and exposed them to the thrilling poverty. Bulcha (2011) uncovers the government's economic and political structures built on the

acquisition of Oromo land which led to the expropriation of land. Likewise, Jalata states that collaborators who supported the dominant political elites and policymakers also benefited from generous land grants from which thousands of Oromo farmers were evicted without reasonable compensation. Many Oromo became a refugee in their own country because their land is taken away from them by the corrupt officials who appropriate the land (Jalata, 2002).

Land as Oromia, a country of the Oromo nation, in this context, is a physical entity, a significant symbol with complex meanings. A newborn Oromo baby, each family members, relatives, lineage, and clans form the Oromo nation. Similarly, dirt, rocks, sand, arid desert, rivers, jungle, mountain, the topsoil of earth, farmland, sacred sites/places, plain, trees, animals form Oromia. Oromia is a ground for Oromo being. Politically, the physical reality I call land, and I would argue for correspond the territory called Oromia. This idea or image of Oromia is linked to the culture, social, political, economic, and religious contexts and interest of the Oromo nation.

**Religious Dimension: Spiritual:** In Oromo cosmology, *Uumaa* or *Waaqa* (God) is considered as a creator of all things such human beings and nature as. *Waaqais* a giver of natural law to keep the balance between human beings and nature. The *ayyanaa* (spirit) and *safuu* (moral code) have an essential roles to keep this balance. "*Ayyanaa* is what systematizes the Oromo religious and philosophical thought and oral tradition" (Baxter et al., 1996: 93). The traditional Oromo society call *Uumaa* or *Waaqayyoo* as *dur-turoo*, meaning everlasting God (Wake, 2016b). They believe that God has given them the land, and they have the responsibly to defend this land from enemy (Bokkuu, 2011, Gadaa, 1999).

In Oromo religious philosophy, land is regarded as a sacred and spiritual resource. The notion of *lafa* (land) is fully embodied in the very spirituality of the people. Land is an essential factor in the construction of a religious organization of religious life and religious identity (Inf2). The Oromo practice their religion on the land. There are certain spiritual and emotional values (Inf5), and socially integrated factors, which commerce at its best takes to cognizance between man and land (Inf3). For them, land is more than an object of discussion related to political, social and economic power, it is entirely people's relationships with all humanity and God (Inf4). Land is a means of cultural preservation through which they present to all human community and intimately tied to their ritual practices and religious belief (Inf1). For instance, followers of *Waaqeffannaa* or OTR perform traditional sacrifices, rituals related to prayer for rain, peace and prosperity, and their thanksgiving has historically been connected to land. According to Inf4 and Inf1, in Oromo culture and traditional religion, land is the rendezvous of their liturgical rhythms of song and dance in celebration of life.

Control of land in Oromia linked to complex interplay of not only economic and political power but also religious ideologies Jalata (1993) states, control of land in Oromia linked to complex interplay of not only economic and political power but also religious ideologies. He argues that, for example, the coming of foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity to Oromo people further complicated complex framework of land value. Land is more than an object of discussion that the policymakers formulate or theorize and tell the people what to do with it. It involves a philosophy of how the people

themselves relate themselves to it. It is this, such as, their philosophical understanding of their land as their bone that needs to direct these foreign religions' and government's relation to the people.

Land or place is important in religion. Land provides places for religious practices to use them as a sacred site. Mbiti (1991) argues Sacred places carry individuals, group and nation histories. Magesa explains this idea in different ways. According to him, land accommodates ground for rituals for making the transition of mystical communication between the living and the dead, material and the immaterial (Magesa, 1997). In Oromo Indigenous Religion, *ardaa jilaa* (sacred sites) is a special place on the land. *Ardaa jilaa* is not only a place where people get spiritual services from *qaalluu* and *Abba Gadaa* who pray for them for prosperity, peace and good rain, but also it is a place for negotiators to get solution for their political, social and economic affairs. There are thousands of *ardaa jilaa* in Oromo land. According to Gujji zone and Tourism Bureau, there are about three hundred seventy (370) *ardaa jilaa* in Gujji zone of Oromia regional state alone (Gebeno, 2017).

In Oromo ecological philosophy, land is interconnected to forest or tree, and the tree is the link between earth and sky. Land is the abode of a tree and the latter is the fence and mystical communication web of the former. This link often symbolizes the relationship between the living, people and the spiritual world of the ancestors. As Arnoud and Fademan (1998, 23) states, there are important ceremonies and rituals that the Oromo practice which draws on tree symbols often serve to connect people with their cultural heritage and ancestors. The Oromo plant tree on the grave of their loved one, family members (Inf4). The graveyard has a significant place in Oromo culture, and planting a tree on the grave to recognize the grave-site is important (Inf1). However, this practice is almost disappearing in the western part of Oromia, Wallagaa where Evangelical Christianity dominates. The Oromo believe that the spirits the ancestors live in the land while tree rejuvenates these spirits and memories of the living regarding the ancestors (Inf1).

Traditionally, there are particular trees planted on graves for males and females. Trees such as *Qilxuu* (*FicusVesta*), *Danbiii/Dambii* (*Ficus thonningii*) and *Odaa* (*Ficus genephalocarpa*) planted on male grave. *Harbuu* (*Ficussur*), *Dambii* (*Ficus thoniingii*) and *Adaamii* (*Croton Macrostachys*) are some of the trees planted on females' grave. These trees and cemetery give an emotional and psychological feeling and values to their ancestors (Gebeno, 2017: 74-75). Wake (20015) asserts that *Odaa* is the most symbolic tree in Oromo culture and traditional religion. It is a symbol of the notions of democracy, peace, and justice that they inherited from their ancestors. It is a tree of God and symbol that connects the people to the *ayyaana*, the spirit of God. It has a symbolic function in Oromo Traditional Religion (hereafter-OTR). *Orda* tree a symbol of peace among humanity, between human beings and the universe and between the *Waaqa Uumaa*, the Creator and humanity. Similarly, Bokkuu states that according to Oromo's eco-theology, animals, rivers, some trees, and mountains have the spirits (Bokkuu, 2011). As the Oromo people do, other African people such as Shona of Zimbabwe, Akan of Ghana, and Igbo of Nigeria also believe that trees, animals, water or rivers and mountains have the spirits (Kalu, 2002; Oladipo, 2010; Van der Walt, 2003; Mbiti, 1991). In

Oromo mythology, symbolizing land/earth as a divine being who can be asked for help is significant in fertility rituals. For instance, in Arsi Oromo, the couples who need a child appeal to *saddeetaan hanfalaa* or *saddetoo* (committee of senior mothers) to arrange *atete* (prayer for fertility) for rituals so that they (couples) will satiate children. As Hussein (204: 112) states, prayer for fertility in Arsi Oromo is the following. The Senior Mothers The Celebrant (child-seeking woman with other attendants)

*Lafa tana nu dhaga'!* (O listen this earth!) *Dhagayi*(Listen!)

*Waaqa tana nu dhagayi!* (O listen God!) *Dhagayi* (Listen!)

*Malka tana nu dhagayi!* (O listen this ford!) *Dhagayi*(Listen!)

*Waaqa dachii fi samii uumte nu dhagayi!* *Dhagayi*(Listen!)

(O listen God who created the Earth and the Sky!)

*Waggaa dhufu ilma ardaa dhaalu haa battuu!* *Ee, haa battuu*

(Yes, may she bear!) (May she, next year, bear a baby son who inherits the homestead!)

*Toni toltuu!* (This is well!) *Toltuu* (Well!)

The above prayer reveals that the land/earth does not only provide *ardaa jilaa*, but also the land itself can be prayed to fertility. However, it is essential to note that this does not mean or imply that the Oromo worship land. Concerning this, Wake (2018a) and Bokku (2011) argue that this does not mean that the Oromo worship land, for it is blasphemy to worship other thing or gods, but only *Waaqa* (God alone). If so, what is the contextual interpretation of this prayer? The mystical, spiritual communication in this ritual is to comfort the couples that nature is not against them, and God bless them with children, to provide psychological therapy and emotional satisfaction, and to let the woman who is seeking a child know that the community shares her grievance. The pray to land shows the secure spiritual and cosmological connection between the family and the mother earth hitherto believing that God has the power to make a barren woman a mother just like He made the land the mother of all human beings and all that He created.

**Sociological Dimension:** To the traditional Oromo society, land is considered not only as an economic and spiritual asset but also as a social resource. "Land is a place for humans to build their shelters and cities" (Habel, 1995: 1). That means it is regarded as a cultural and ontological resource. Land remains an essential factor in the construction of the organizations of spiritual life, and production and reproduction of culture. These organization of religious life and culture create social identity. The sociological link across generations is defined by the complement of land resources which families, relatives, lineages and communities share and control. It is this philosophical and contextual understandings that led millions of Oromo to react and protest against the Ethiopian government land policy that undermined the people's prescriptions for change and ignored to internalize the people's quality of life and way of life, as stated elsewhere in this article. If their ancestral land is taken away from them, not only their culture and identity will be exposed for destruction but also their way of life, social capital, and quality of life will be impeded because denial of ancestral land endangers their communal life, happiness, standard of health, comfort as individuals, and group.

Customarily, in rural areas, the Oromo people live as family or relatives or clans cloth to each other. They developed their social webs of communal identity from family to ethnic group and local to national as a nation. Their social capital and group identity often attached to the places where they live. However,

this doesn't mean that they have connectivity to other Oromo clans who live in different places. As (Eide, 1996) states, although they have different dialects and live in widely stretched areas, the Oromo people can easily recognize each other wherever they meet and can communicate and socialize.

In Oromo cosmology, there is an inclination that Oromo has dynamic interaction with the land but not in the same way they do with fellow human beings. There common expression *mana garaa fi lafa manatu nama dhiba* (it is difficult or challenging to get a faithful friend for a person and suitable place for homestead). This expression refers to having a good family. This, in turn, tells us that the people have an in-depth understanding of and concern for the importance of having faithful friends for social capital to get *qe'ee aarii* (good homestead) with good living environment and respected family. During the protest against the 'Master Plan', the Oromo from all walks of life used the idea of this expression at the national level in a broad sense paraphrasing it into *qe'ee kenyaa irratti duuna* (we will die on our homestead or on our land). This has a collective political expression in which the people share their grievances of political and economic exclusion in Ethiopian politics. This expression reveals that there mysterious relationship between the Oromo and their land, homestead. It also shows that dispossession of once homestead by oppressor is like annexing the whole land, and such injustice should be stopped! The Oromo have strong values attached to the land to the extent of a scarifying self.

**Anthropological Dimension:** In Oromo culture, land is understood and symbolized as *anthrops* (a Latin word for humans) a person who has accommodative behavior of material and spiritual beings (Kraeling, 2008)). Land is the abode of an integral autonomous-political entity of Oromo family, siblings, lineage, kinship, clans, ancestors, associations, institutions, nation, and territorial sovereignty. One of my informants articulated that land is a ground where human beings preserve their material culture, symbols, icons, and relics. Land connects us (the Oromo) to our ancestors and God (Inf1). What does this mean? In the Oromo worldview, *lafa*-land is sacred because it is an ancestral land which bears the remains of ancestors, *Qaaluu*, Abba Gadaa, heroes and heroines, and elders, and it supports those who are alive. Land is the abode of the dead. *Ekeraa*, the spirit of the deceased person, lives on the land, particularly around families, relatives of the deceased person (Wake 2018) or around the place where the dead person is buried. In this regard, land connects the living and the dead (Mbiti 1979). It connects the material world with the mystical world. The counting of the family members always includes those who are in the abode of the dead.

The Oromo have respect for those who are in the underworld, whose remain are in a grave and *ekeeraa* (spirits) are around. The Oromo personalize *lafaa* (land) and often say *lafa hin reebin* (do not beat land, ground) when a person repeatedly hits or beats the ground. That means the Oromo depict land as a person. When a person beat or dig the ground without purpose, the Oromo say, *lafa hin madeessin*, meaning 'Do not wound the land'. They depict the land as a person in pain. The land is not a passive object; nevertheless, it is an active partner living in a close relationship with the people who dwell on this soil. There is a similar mythology the Biblical ideology of land in Jewish tradition. For instance, in the prophetic ideology of Jeremiah describes land as a person. Land is personified and

described as a person who suffered from evils and pollution by anthropogenic (Habel, 1995: 152). In this sense, anthropological understanding of land, according to Oromo worldview enforces their ecological philosophy.

The Oromo describe land as a person with the female gender. As Wake states, *hadha lafaa* (the mother of the earth), mainly, is the earth deity who is understood as a mother. It is plausible to note that the mother of the earth is different from the mother earth. The first one is the mother of the second one. The mother earth is sacred and the mother of the earth is a deity. People should negotiate with this deity to get permission to plow the sacred or to cut some trees, mainly, to cut trees from the top of the mountains. This negotiation takes place in the form of rituals (Wake, 2018b). This doesn't mean that the Oromo worship the mother earth but they interact with the nature or universe in a mystical way when they do pray to *Waaqa/Waaqayyoo*. God is Creator and provider of all things. According to Ta'a, the Oromo personify *lafa* (earth). He said that they have the following poem about the mother earth clearly in which they show respect for and feeling about the mother earth (Ta'a, 1996: 204).

*Dachee nagaan Oltee?* The earth, have you spent the day in peace?

*Dachee nagana bultee?* The earth, have you spent the night in peace?

*Ya gudditii dhugaa* The big full of truth (or with truth).

*Jaartii garaa Margaa* An 'old woman' whose belly is full of grass (vegetation)

*Irrii kee midhaanii* Upon you there is food.

*Jalikee Bishanii* Under you there is water.

*Sirra horree yaafnaa* We graze our herds on you.

*Sirra qotnee nyaannaa* We farm on you and eat.

*Jiraa keenya hinbaataa* Your carry our living.

*Du'aa keenya hin yaataa* You swallow/eat our dead.

*Dachee yaa dinqiituu* The earth full of wonders

*Yoo soreessa nyaattee isashitto qabuu* If you swallow/eat the rich, who has perfume

*Hiyeesa hinjibbituu isa citto qabu* You do not hate/neglect the poor who has measles

The Oromo personifies land when they want to prevent property crime and ensure that land and a person who is using the land are protected (Baxter, Hultin and Ta'a, 1996). Their Land has "eyes and ears and could act upon men who usurped the rights of the rightful owners even after the latter had died or moved elsewhere" (Hutin, 1987: 7). They believe that their forefathers have cared for the land for thousands of generations, and they wisely cultivated the land for future generations (Kelbessa, 2011). The laws which protect trees and land from internal damage and from external enemies have been enshrined in the *Gadaa* system for many centuries (Inf2). If an enemy comes to annex the land (it also refers to country or state in this context), the owner of the land has a moral responsibility to protect his land and to restore peace (Wake, 2016a). Moreover, Oromo ecological philosophy claims that there is a connection between the people and the environment. Thus, this indigenous ecological knowledge incorporates environmental or ecological and spiritual concerns that are vital in the framework of justice, conscience, and ethics.

The Oromo consider earth as a mother who carries the burden of her children. Earth is a caring mother who bears everything that the Lord's nature (*Waaqayyoo*) has put on it and in it for

them. They swear by the name of earth. Because they believe that land is sacred. When they swear, they say *dhugaa Waaqa*, *dhugaa lafaa* meaning 'I swear to earth, I swear to God'. They believe that there are some sacred sites that the Gujji Oromo refers as *ardaa jilaa* meaning sacred sites/places. The Wollaga Oromo consider land as *itillee Waaqa* meaning mat of God. *Itillee* is a flat-sheet like material made of skin or hide by the people who have a special gift and the experience to make it. They are called *faaqii*. The *faaqii* are a very brilliant and creative group in Oromo society. *Itillee* is used as a mat. The Wallagga Oromo consider some places, such as the tops of mountains as *ardaa jilaa*. So, nature or trees on these sacred sites should not be touched or abused because it is a social norm. Cutting down trees within sacred sites is not allowed.

It is also forbidden to establish settlements on these sites. However, the priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) deliberately destroyed nature on many mountains tops in Oromia and established their Churches. This was against the will of Oromo; it violated their norm, their way of life. It was against *namummaa*, attitudes of Oromo mind. "The Oromo people are ordered to build churches at favorable sites chosen by the Abyssinians" (Hirphoo, 2007: 81). According to Bokkuu, the EOC has done this against the oppressed people for twofold purposes: to destroy the civilization, religion, and faith of the people and to intensify the political subjugation of the colonized people (Bokkuu, 2011). The EOC acquired vast tracts of Oromo land, and this adds a complex dimension to the land question in Oromia. Many Ethiopian Orthodox Churches were built on important sites such as mountains where Oromo had been using them as *ardaa jilaa* (sacred sites). In Jewish land ideology, particularly as the book of Jeremiah indicates, land suffers great anguish when people do injustice to the land and its inhabitants.

**Economic Dimension:** The Oromo people use their land from time immemorial to promote human development and economic growth and earn their living out plowing and cultivating the land as farmers. They use their land to produce food and other different assets. Thus, the significance of land and its resources to economic development and social welfare is indisputable. Agriculture is the main economic activity of the majority of Oromo. As other African societies do, many Oromo farmers use their family members to work on the farmland and produce both cash and food crops. Fekri (2002) states that in many African societies, the idea of the use of family labor has tended to strengthen some of the traditional agnatic system, male line.

Similarly, (Inf3) in Oromo culture, male or husband holds more responsibility to work on the farmland to provide cash and food crops for his family. In this sense, land is considered as a vehicle of all resources that ensures the economic sustainability of the family and their co-existence as households. Land is the economy and life because it produces food and water which gives life. It is a source of shelter and food.

In traditional Oromo society, a person can have his own piece of land to cultivate it to increase his income. This is done not at the cost of others but at the consensus of the community in which the person lives. Even though the land is assumed as the person's property, his family members and relatives can use or access the land by mutual understanding. Every able-bodied have a moral obligation to share the cash and food crops with

those who are in need. The orphan, the old and anybody in the village who need help has the right to use the product of the land in a way that the system of social welfare is established in the people's culture (Wake, 2016b). This reveals that although it is traditionally believed that resources belong to the community, opportunities are also given to individuals to own resources to promote economic development and innovation.

During liberation movement in many African countries, land economy and identity were among the significant issues at stake (Nkosi, 1998), the issues of land ownership and its cementing economic, social, political, spiritual, cultural ties are indisputable. Control over land and the policy that governs political economic resources are the central feature of struggle for social transformation.

*Lafaa fi lafee irra jiraanna* (we live on our land and bones or our life depends upon land and bone) is an important expression the Oromo use to express the values of land. The informants have made an in-depth explanation of why Oromo relates land to human physiological structure and why land is their priority concern. "If we do not have bone, our body structure would have a different shape from what we now know, maybe ugly" (Inf3). Another informant added saying "Our body is a combination of bone and flesh, as we understand now, every part or organ in our body are attached to these two fundamental parts of our body: flesh and bone" (Inf5).

Land is as important as their bone for their existence. "As our bone holds together our flesh which consists of a lot of things that we need to exist in our current physiological structure, land is the source and means of living for us, without our land we can't feed our family, even we have no ground where we can stand and pray to God" (Inf4). Land is chained to their income and socio-psychological imagination and "understanding of mystical world such religious worldview" (Inf2). Inf1 argued that "Our economic activities are entirely attached to land. If we do not have bone, we can't move and do something. Similarly, if we do not have land, we have no means of existence, economy, and we can't go forward as individuals, as a group, and as a nation." Land and bones are essentials elements in Oromo ecological philosophy. As Kelbessa (2011) states, Oromo have *Seera Waaqa* (divine law) and *seera lafaa* (earthly law) or *seera namaa* (human law) to administer not only their economic, social and cultural activities but also their and political affair in a way that it nurtures their friendships with their natural environment. In Oromo worldview, human law should be subject to divine/religious law. Wake (2016a) points out that violating the divine laws brings divine punishment and exclusion in the society on the offender while infringing human law brings exclusion from social capital and corporeal/ material punishment on the lawbreaker.

**Cultural Dimension: Nationalism, Identity:** In Oromo philosophy, land is a social symbol with a range of meanings. The Oromo people practice their culture on their land. That means land is utilized as cultural preservation. The Oromo have an awareness of their cultural identity. Their national identity awareness flourished their collective identity, *Oromummaa* and discouraged *Ethiopianism* which established Amhara culture at the expense of Oromo culture (Jalata, 2002).

They also understand that their culture has a connection with the environment or universe.

The Oromo often say *hin ajjeefamne* (we are killed) when one of their community members is killed in their struggle for land ownership. The axiom, of *hin ajjeefamne* articulates twofold ideas. First, it expresses the oneness or unity or collective identity of the people. Second, it expresses an in-depth grievance of the people. For instance, since the protest against the 'Addis Ababa Master Plan' was erupted which resulted in the killings of thousands of Oromo people that the TPLF-led Ethiopian government started to kill the Oromo say *mana keenya dhufanii nu ajjeesan; lafa keenyaa irratti nu ajjeesan* (they came to our home and killed us; they killed us in our own land). This expression has two aspects. First, the first part of the sentence refers to the atrocity of the government and lawlessness of its army who went to many villages in Oromia and entered into individuals' homes and killed many people. Second, the second part of the sentence refers land not merely as earth or ground but as a country. In the latter case, it tells us that identity has a visible connection to land in which they express their "Weness" meaning oneness or togetherness, shared identity. If a person kills another person, his family or clan or the community in which he lives say, *maqaatu nu bade lafa irratti* (our reputation has been damaged on earth). The whole community take responsibility for the wrong deed of an offender and negotiate on peacemaking and mutual understanding (Wake, 2016a). They connect their social values and reputation to the land. Land is domicile or abode of their reputation and social status.

In the Oromo spiritual understanding of land as the earth, land sustains and nurtures culture, philosophy and belief system. Land carries culture, religion and context. Worldview or philosophy of society has cultural ingredients experienced and practiced on the land (physical entity) in which that society lives. Rajkumar (2012: 91) states that indigenous theology emanates from cultural values, religious customs and experience of the indigenous people in a land. He argues that "indigenous theology seeks liberation from the perspective of 'land' because it is the land that sustains and nourishes people, and gives them an identity" (Rajkumar, 2012: 91). Liberation without land is not liberation. Land is the foundation of the history of the people in which their past history is indemnity constructed, and their identity, culture and existence as a nation is perceptible. In Oromo theology of land, *ayyaanaa* has a significant role in cultural practice. *Ayyaanaa* is "the unique juxtaposition of the religious-philosophical tradition, ethnicity and identity which make up the essential dimensions of Oromo culture" (Baxter et al., 1996: 93). *Ayyanaa* shapes their socio-communal life and spiritual life, at least for followers of *Waaqeffaanaa*.

Oromo's language is mutually connected to their land. Language is a unique human relationship to the universe, human or social attitudes, values, beliefs and fundamental concepts of what is the truth (Wake, 2016a). The Oromo speak their language so fervently, and value their language as an integral part of their identity (Bulcha, 2005). Their language is a vehicle for the expression of worldview: beliefs, attitudes, values, culture, perception of truth, and self-identification. It is the essence for their individual, as well as collective identity. This thought light on the idea of the people's inalienable identification of language with their land, Oromia in general and with Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) in particular, and ultimate

sacrifice thousands of Oromo paid to abort the TPLF sponsored systematic cultural genocide by the name of "Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan." When people are dispossessed their ancestral land (on which they live and speak their language with the stakeholders and their land is restricted and given an alien or outlandish name that transports alien culture and ideology), undoubtedly the people dispossessed their language, cultural heritage, identity, religion, social life and friendship with a particular place they lived. Once they lose their language, people lose the courage to honor their native tongues, they lose the sheer and emotion of their linguistic and cultural heritage and become subject to dominant culture and language (Wake, 2016). Land in relation to language is not only physical territory but also mental territory and knowledge production. Language, in this regard, has a deeper meaning in a sense that it calls for a set of cultural references, school system, sociopolitical and social structures, nationalism and literature.

The Oromo refer their land as *biyyaa abbaa keenyaa* or *biyya abbaa* (Our fathers land). When they say this, they refer to their ancestors. They inherited the land from their ancestors. The bodies of their ancestors were buried in their land; the sacred land (Kalu, 2010). It is viewed as a nationalist notion in a sense that it reminiscently ignites the emotions Oromo as individuals, family, clans and nation and link and tie them to their *Oromummaa* (Oromo national identity). In this sense, the essence of *biyya abbaa keenyaa* is not only to mean the country of origin but also *gootummaa* (patriotism) to defend the land from the enemy. Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark), Germany, the Netherlands, and many countries call their countries as the fatherland. Somalians also call their country as *dhulkaabba* (land of the father).

**Ecological Dimension: Eco-friend:** In Oromo environmental philosophy, people believe that land is part of their existence. Their whole aspects of life are connected to land. Land is where plants grow, afield of farming. In Oromo ecological understanding, the notion of land covers land use patterns which include the interaction of human activities and the natural environment. In the Oromo worldview, "the natural environment is part of their existence and chained to entire aspects of their life" (Getahun, 2016: 3). They give emphases on and care for the environment as the important companion of their life. Through long experience, they developed indigenous knowledge, ecological ethics and rule of relationships to nature and all natural resources. For instance, there are rules that govern people not to cut tree without reasons. If they cut tree which are not allowed to cut ignorantly, there are rules that they should follow to plant new trees. There are rules that govern people not to cut some trees at particular places. For example, it is not allowed cut any tree on the top of the mountains.

In Oromo eco-theology, *lafa*- land and *muka*-tree are interrelated. Cutting down a tree without purpose in general and when there is no rain that helps the recovery of the tree, in particular, is like taking off clothes from a person to humiliate him or her. It degrades the mother earth. The mother earth will be disappointed. Trees cover the earth just as we cover ourselves with beautiful clothes and they make the land beautiful and attractive. Tree gives life and shelter for wild animals and humanity. So, cutting down a tree without reason is abusing land and the tree itself. Therefore, in Oromo culture, it is forbidden to cut a tree without purpose. "If a person cuts

down a tree, he should replant double” (Inf2). There are exceptions to this, where some kind of trees can be cut down, and there are also specific places where it is not allowed to cut down any tree at any time. For instance, the Oromo believe that the mother earth has a mother. This mother of the earth lives on the top of the mountains. Since she exists on the top of all mountains, she protects all the trees on the top of mountains. If someone cuts down trees on the top of the mountains, she will be disappointed and will curse the person who cuts those trees. She can punish a person with sicknesses such as a leprosy (Inf1). This mythology is important in indigenous knowledge of forestry to prevent erosion, for one cannot easily destroy trees covered areas. The mother of the earth has a divine power which is given to her by the *Durturoo* (everlasting God) to protect trees. A person who goes to the forest to cut the tree has a divine obligation to make certain rituals and to do prayer to God to make peace with the mother of the earth and to be in peace with *Uuma*, meaning the Creator (Inf2). Another informant added that even one should ask a permission of the mother of the earth through certain rituals when he goes to the forest to hunt wild animals (Inf4).

In the Oromo ecological philosophy, land is considered as a gift of *Umaa* or *Waaqayyo*, meaning God who created and owns everything). “Even though we have our territory, we believe that the earth has no end. It has no end and it symbolizes the reign of our Father, *Waaqayyo*” (Inf3). In this sense, the land is related to religion and faith, and even though it does not speak as we do, land communicates with us. “We have the right to cultivate the land, reap the bounty of the land. However, we cannot dig the land without purpose because land cries to God to accuse us of our cruelty” (Inf4). Land is a sacred nature. So, if a person abuses it, he or she cannot swear an oath by the name of land. In this sense, land is related to their religion and faith. The people’s rituals, belief, traditional values, prayer, and different ceremonies are connected to their land, country. They often say *biyya kenyaa nagaa godhi* (peace to our country), *mana nagaa godhi* (peace to our people), *uumama nagaa godhi* (peace to nature), *kan horre nagaa godhi* (peace to our properties) when they do pray (Etefa, 2012: 63).

In their Gada system, the Oromo developed a frame of political ecology where the power system shapes the socio-environmental system and policy. This political ecology is very sophisticated and relates human beings and nature to each other. Misuse of nature is considered as a violation of *safuu* (moral code in Oromo culture (Kelbessa, 2011). The environment has a harmonious relationship with an individual, communal or public bodies and land. They have interconnected sacred bonds.

The Oromo give special protection for certain trees such as trees that grow on the top of the mountains and Oda tree. It is immoral to cut any tree on top of the mountains. Wake (2018b) states that the elders often tell children not to cut tree on the top of the mountains because *hati lafaa tulluu irra jiraati; yoo naming tulluu irraa muka mure namati artee lamixii dhaan nama rukutii* (the mother of earth lives on top of the mountains; she will get angry at a person who cuts tree from the top of mountains and punishes them with leprosy). They also give special protection for *Oda* (sycamore tree) because they believe that this tree is a symbol of peace, unity, prosperity, happiness, order, justice and life. They also give special protection for *Oda* (sycamore tree) because they believe that this tree is a symbol of peace, unity, prosperity,

happiness, order, justice and life. *Odaan muka Waaqati* (Oda is a tree of God).

Oromo are eco-friendly. They adore the greenness of the land and planting tree. They like wet areas such as waterside and use green things such as grass when they bless, pray and mediate reconciliation (Wake, 2015; Bokku, 2011). Their indigenous philosophy of humanity (*namummaa*) urges that human beings should be ‘environmentalists’. *Namummaa* discourages seeing nature as survival of the fittest and empowers us to practice friendship with the environment as spiritual work (Wake, 2018b).

Oromo call land as *Hadha Margoo* meaning ‘mother earth’ which has mythical meanings and implications. This notion has deep ecological meanings inculcated in Oromo culture. For instance, *hadha* is Oromo word for mother and *margoo* which means fertile). *Margoo* is derived from *magariisa* (green) to express *magaruu/magariisa ta’uu* (to become green or to grow). Hence, *hadha margoo* is considered as life-giver while *margoo* (green) represents life, renewal, nature, healing, stability, energy, fertility, friendship, happiness, the continuation of life, and hope. The informants have clear understandings of this. They argued that land is perceived as a mother not from a gender point of view but the serving viewpoint. In Oromo culture, mother or woman is seen as a web of continuation of life (Inf1 and Inf3). That means that there is no way for a new baby to come into this world if there is no woman. In other words, according to Oromo traditional understanding, if there is no woman, there is no futurity.

**Psychological Dimension: Place/land Attachment:** Place attachment has vital role in well-being of a given society, indigenous people. Cultural values, cultural heritage, societal capital, ecological philosophy, political and economic philosophy and management, and spiritual experience of indigenous people have a strong relationship with a place (Greer, 2010). Place attachment deals with a cognitive bond that an individual or group develops towards places. Place acquires important personal meaning. Land or place attachment has religious and cultural significance; it is a mixture of both (Inf5 and Inf1). What does this mean? As individuals have meaningful attachment for personal reasons and experiences such as the memorable events that took place at particular place and time, the Oromo as a nation have meaningful attachment to their land. Place, in this context, land (Oromia) is a vehicle of for collective reasons and experiences such as collective suffering from colonial rule, memorable battle to protect the territory of the fatherland, national victory, national and independent day, thanksgiving day. These memories do not only attach the people to legacy of their national hero, flag, name of the country, territory, national anthem, names of river, mountains and animals, symbolic tree, culture, tradition, building, martyr, name of street, institution and organizations, song, events, artist, poet, orator, and names of battle where the nation encountered its enemy, but these memories also give the people psychological attachment to the land, country.

Emotional attachment has a psychological dimension in which people express and experience their attachments and accessories through behavior, cognition and affection. People hold twofold feelings towards the place or land to which they are attached. Most of the time they hold positive feelings and manifest their attachments through pride, love, honor,

happiness, and contentment. As Inf3 states, Oromo hold ambivalent feelings toward the land when the land represents painful memories. For instance, the owners of the land is denied ownership of their land, which is unjustly owned by others, by the powerful.

Oromo connection to land is cognitive (Inf4). This cognitive connection includes beliefs, memories, and awareness that make a land meaningful. The answers of the informants show that in the process of such psychological attachment to land, people develop a mental representation of that land. This mental attachment encompasses a mental map and route information of the land's arrangement and other knowledge about the history of the land and specific products that the land provides. In addition to the mental representation of symbolic aspects and structures of the land, psychological attachment to land involves memories of the land, its inhabitant, the events that have occurred, a myth about the land.

Land attachment is indeed, expressed through particular behaviors. The Oromo express this behavior, particularly in a religious context. They often go to specific sites or places in the country, Oromia where they feel that there is a divine presence. They have special memories of such places/sites to enjoy spiritual blessings, communal life and create a collective identity (Kelbessa, 2011). For instance, Ardaa Jilaa, Hora Finfinnee, Hora Ar-Sadee, Odaa Nabee, Odaa Bulluq, Odaa Bultum, Odaa Bisil, *Irreessaa* (thanksgiving) and the like. They give not only spiritual meanings, but also national feelings and sovereignty. The Oromo Christians go to Church and Oromo Muslims go to Mosque. *Waaqeffataa* Oromo have Thanksgiving Day and other essential religious rituals and festivals at particular sacred places. Religious pilgrimage to a sacred place to meet *Abba Muudaa* to receive blessings of spiritual authority to serve the community as councilors, mediators, judges on social, economic, and family issues. It is common for the local community leaders and the *qaalluu to visit Abba Muudaa*. *Abba Muudaa prays for the entire nation*. He is the spiritual father of the nation; he is the head of all *qalluus* in Oromo land (Bokku, 2011 and Wake, 2015). Such a particular place of worship site or sacred places in the land gives memories of commonality, unity and shared identity to the people. However, *Irreechaa* is not more only religious gathering; it became the Oromo national Thanksgiving Day for all Oromo including Christians and Muslim.

Through their attachment memories to the land, people establish institutions by the name of a particular hero or leader or place; give names to streets and buildings. This kind of naming helps them to revive the original meanings or concepts the things hold. *Galma Abba Gada* in Adama city in Oromia, Oromo Cultural Center in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), and the schools called after the names of Oromo heroes such as General Waaqoo Guutu and General Taddassaa Birruu are few among many examples that the ODP/the former OPDO has established. History is in the making. Putting the names of these individuals on schools, hospitals, universities, and institutions constructs the memories and chain it to the current situation, and creates vision and knowledge for the future.

People are often concerned about *qe'ee* (homestead). In Oromo culture, *qe'ee* is normally inherited by the children from their parents. The popular slogan used millions of Oromo in protest against the "Addis Ababa Integrated master Plan" was *qe'ee keenya irratti duuna* (we will die on our homestead or on our

land or will fight for our rights to get access to our land). This psychological attachment reinforces historical, sociopolitical, and religious attachments to the land. A person's attachment or devotion to his particular *qe'ee* or his farmland enhances his national land attachment. One of my informant said, *Lafa keenya irratti lollaa, qe'ee keenyaa irratti duuna* meaning, *we will fight for our land and die in our homestead*. As we have seen in the conceptual framework of the article, the Biblical land ideology tells us that the Jewish, psychologically, have never been detached from the promise land, Canaan. The Oromo are also attached to their *qe'ee*, land, country. As we have seen in the conceptual framework of the article, the Biblical land ideology tells us that the Jewish, psychologically, have never been detached from the promise land, Canaan. The Oromo are also attached to their *qe'ee*, land, country.

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A close look at rituals in OTR shows that there is a psychological dimension of land, which in turn has cosmological facet. Some ritual practices and prayers are made for the protection of animals and plants. For instance, different rituals take place under Odaa tree riverbank, on top of the mountains. There are particular types of animals used to do sacrifice during the rituals and prayers. There are collective ritual and individual rituals. Individuals can also do ritual and prayer for their plants and crops in their farmland. In this ritual processes, comes memories of ancestors. That means ancestors (who have died) are living in an invisible world in the form of *ekera* (spirit) are connected to the living (those who are practicing ritual), plants, land, and trees through the rituals performed by the living. This tells us that, according to Oromo religious philosophy, there is a connection between the dead and the living. The living and the dead share a sort of divine instruction with each other in the sense that what was happening there during their lifetime on earth is happening now. Mbiti (1991) asserts that in Shona (Bantu-speaking) of Zimbabwe, people do rituals for plants and animals. They also believe that through rituals, a person participates in co-creating with God. In both Oromo and Shona traditions, the concepts of divine connection between the living and the dead correlate with Hermestic philosophy 'as above so below'.

Fox (2011) states that the myth about this concept shows that it was first written on Tablet by a divine person or unknown and given Abraham and his wife, Sara around 5000 BC. The idea of as above so below, as many Western scholars argued, was translated in Latin by Hermes Trismegistus, who first laid out it on Emerald Tablet. 'As above' refers to [the] sky, which denotes whether heaven nor hell. 'So below' refers to earth, which indicates our present view of the environment and things. This philosophy aimed to explain what is taking place above is what is taking place on earth and vice versa. What was happening somewhere is what is happening there and vice versa. What happens at one level of reality is what happens on every other level (Fox, 2011). For Oromo and Shona, what happened in rituals to plants and prayers to God for rain, cattle, for prosperity by their ancestors during their lifetime is what

they are doing now. Philosophically, the ancestors intermediate between the divine, environment, and the living. The living is intermediating for environment or nature and the future generation. This indigenous philosophy established a fertile ground for Christianity to flourish in Africa. Traditional African society believes in ancestors, and it was not difficult for African to accept Jesus as their ancestor (Mbiti, 1991). Jesus is a mediator between God and humanity. From Christians' perspectives, Mbiti asserts.

Oromo say *biyya abba* (fatherland) or *biyya abbaa koo* (my fatherland) when they express ownership of their land as a country. The concept of *biyya abba* (fatherland) has a psychological impact on the Oromo people wherever they live. Most Diaspora Oromo in Europe, America, Canada, Australia, and Africa in other countries say *Yaa Waaqayyoo biyya abbaa keenyaatti nagaan nu gashi* (O God, help us to go back to our country in peace) when they come together for *ayyana irreechaa/irressa* (*Irressa* festival) every year. The notion of *biyya abba* can cross boundaries with its bearers, human beings, cannot be detached. Psychologically, the notion of *biyya abbaa* (father land) chains people to their homes where they were born, homestead, villages, river, field, plains, mountains, and myth, poems, songs, proverbs, expressions, *geerarsa* (lamentation), *arda jilaa* and trees such as Oda which is the symbol of peace, order, and unity. These cultural apparatuses kindle the sentiment and emotion of belongingness and membership of the Diaspora Oromo to their land, Oromia. However, when they express their love and respect for their land, they symbolize their country as a mother. They often say Oromia *harmee koo/too* (my mother Oromia). They relate the land to their biological mother to express mutual care and interaction they have with their land, and describe unstoppable closeness and respect and love they have to their country.

**Emancipation Dimension: Liberation/Deliverance:** In Oromo culture, the land has religious, sacred, cultural, economic as well as political features, which is liberation. As mentioned elsewhere in this article, land is *hadha margoo* (life provider), life or the mother earth. Accordingly, land is an integral part of the whole constellation of life, which cannot be separated into dichotomized compartments in the Oromo ethical view of life. The Oromo understand land not only as sacred or life but also as a mother who has a womb. When they express their epistemological view of the land and claim their attachment to the land, the Oromo say *handhuura keenyaattu itti owaalame, akakkilii, abaabilii kenenyatu itti owwalame*, meaning, we have buried our umbilical cords, we have buried our forefathers in the land. In so doing, they express their firm conviction that they have an unrestricted attachment with their land. When they are alive, they live on their land, and they are dead, they are buried in their soil; they live in their land. In their indigenous philosophy, the Oromo believe that the land is not only a gift from *Uuma* (the Creator), but also they received it from their ancestors. Therefore, they claim that they are stewards *Waaqa's* (God's) resources. They don't believe that they are free as long as others have control over their land. Land is a transgenerational asset.

Oromo understand land to be a God-given source of life. Land is a source of a tool of life; it is an intrinsic part of life itself. For Oromo land has moral significance central to their understanding of life that values the integrity, freedom from any form of repression, and harmony of cosmos, creation. The people believe that land for them is *nahalah* (a sacred gift from

God.) Therefore, injustice such as misuse of land, denying the poor and marginalized access to the land is unacceptable and should be fought against (Inf 4).

In Oromia, land dispossession has been the central political-economic issues of colonialism and modern capitalism. Oromo land, which is a factor of production and site of identity and belonging, was greedily controlled by those who have no rightful ownership, the colonial settlers (Jalata, 1998). Emancipation aspect of Oromo philosophy and theology of land empower the people to reclaim spaces and territories which formed the basis of identity and livelihoods by drawing on histories and memories of past and present. In other words, the emancipatory agenda of Oromo philosophical theology in the contemporary Oromo brings the past into the present and drives them to the future.

Oromo emancipatory theological understanding of land has links to the notion of *dhugaa*, meaning justice. Human liberation is chained to the economic, political, and social justice for all who live in the country. It is this fundamental philosophical understanding of humanity that helped the people to develop their relational philosophy, *namummaa*. In this philosophically reflective and theological understandings of freedom of humanity, anybody who lives in Oromo home, village and country (Oromia) has the rights to enjoy peace, freedom, happiness, and share resources according to the *safuu* (moral) principle enshrined in the Oromo *Gadaa* system. In *Namummaa* philosophy, you do for others what you need them to do for you (Wake, 2018b). The Jewish ecological viewpoint shares some similarities with the Oromo eco-theology. For instance, the book of Amos chapters seven, eight and nine elucidate that there are strong correlations between the concepts of justice, liberation, land, the people of Israel and their land, and the rest of the world (Longman III and Dillard, 1994: 373-384). Particularly, Amos chapter 9: 9, 11, 15 points out that the idea of land in Jewish tradition is multidimensional. It embraces social, religious, cultural, political, development and nationalism. Likewise, as the research shows, Oromo eco-theology-theology of land has wide-ranging dimensions. It touches all aspects of life.

The Oromo expression *lafi keenya lafee keenyaa* became a meta-concept in the people's discourse of national self-determination. In March 2019, it ignited one of Oromo's historical and legitimate question regarding their rightful ownership over Finfinnee. In this regard, it reconnected the current Oromo status in Finfinnee and their inquiries to their colonial memories when Finfinnee was controlled by Abyssinian colonial power and became the central power for colonial settlers. As Bulcha (2011) states, for centuries, particularly after 16<sup>th</sup> to 1890<sup>th</sup>, Finfinnee was the center of Oromo politics and religion. *Gadaa* argues that Finfinnee was the significant political, economic and religious site of the Oromo nation controlled by Abyssinian colonial settlers. Today Finfinnee is dominated by colonial culture, language, identity and cultural and religious artifacts (Bokkuu, 20012; Jalata, 1998). That means Finfinnee is still the city of victory and domination of the colonial settlers, but the place of national humiliation for the indigenous people.

The concept of *lafi keenya lafee keenyaa* concerning Oromo's question to land ownership as the whole and Finfinnee, in particular, is a testing conduit for the Oromo people whether or not they are emancipated. This expression became a needle's

hole through which the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)-the former Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Addis Ababa City Administration could pass to answer Oromo's question for rightful ownership of their land. The current political tension sends out a message something like the ODP, EPRDF and the Addis Ababa City Administration will be *mened*, *tekeled* and *parsined* as the Belshazzar of Babylonian. The words *mened*, *tekeled* and *parsined* are Aramaic words derived by the author and they stand for numbered, weighted and broken, respectively. Belshazzar, the king of Babylonian was *mened*, *tekeled*, and *parsined* by God. In the book of Daniel 5: 25, Daniel told Belshazzar that God has evaluated the work of the king, numbered his era of reign and found him too light, he warned that Belshazzar's time is up and his kinship has no influence anymore.

On 5 March 2019, the Addis Ababa city deputy major, Eng. Taken Uma Banti planned lottery for thousands of people to be held to distribute the condominium house which was built at Koyyee Facee, Tulluu Dimtuu, and Galaan by evicting the Oromo farmers. On 7 March 2019, over a dozen of town across Oromia: Adama, Ambo, Awaday, Bale, and Jimma, thousands of Oromo protesters took the street to express their frustration that this action is a systematic implementation of the "Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan" This plan was a malicious project organized by Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and some OPDO/ODP officials to eradicate Oromo culture, religion and identity. It was planned to aggravate political, social and economic exclusion of the indigenous (Wake, 2018). As a victim of this brutalizing and dehumanizing system of the Ethiopian government, the people have made strong resistance to stop such a systematic land grabbing and cultural eradication. For instance, the protesters in March 2019 again used the expression *lafti keenya lafee keenya* (Our land is our bones). They have been doing in previous years' of protest and enthusiastically chanted Finfinnee belongs to the Oromo people and the capital city of Oromia. This indicates that the era of the Ethiopian Empire is being *mened*, *tekeled* and *parsined*, and proved so light by the Oromo people. ODP/OPDO is being *mened*, *tekeled* and *parsined* by Oromo people if it attempts to implement the "Master Plan" directly or indirectly and fail to bring Finfinnee under full control of Oromia regional state. The 7 March 2019 protests in Oromia passed powerful message to the ODP, EPRDF, Addis Ababa City Administration and those who unlawfully controlled Oromo land that there could be no military might that could avert Oromo's demand of absolute abandon to the 'Master Plan' and recognition and respect for their rightful ownership over Finfinnee, the capital city of Oromia.

Finfinnee was/is the place where the people's religious, sociopolitical, and economic centers were dismantled and replaced colonial culture and political system which are still dominating Oromo's culture and economy in the city (Jalata, 2002; Bokkuu, 2011; Bulcha 2011). In the current Oromo political discourse, Finfinnee, as vital part of their land, is a uniting symbol, and the city of economic, political, social, and diplomatic power that the people want to liberate from the hands of those who have no rightful ownership over Finfinnee.

The Jew-Palestinian annexation of land in the Old Testament and Euro-African colonial agenda dominated the African notion of land (Dickason, 2009), in Ethio-Oromia land relationship, the assimilationist policies of successive

Ethiopian rulers aimed at dispossessing the Oromo their land and to have power over them. Their land policies have never been friendly to the holistic and religious perspective of land in Oromo worldview (Kelbessa, 2011). The colonial land policies had immense negative impact on the protection and preservation of the indigenous people's cultural values, heritage, religious traditions and sacred sites, and national identity. It violates the spirituality of land/earth in Oromo eco-theology. In Oromo eco-theology, earth/land is our mother who deserves respect from us. There are reciprocal respect and mutual support between humans and land. Through centuries of experiences of living on earth, using the land, examining how land reacts when humans maltreat it, the Oromo developed a philosophy that humans are not the king of creation. Still we are part of the nature for the whole earth is one cell. They advanced this holistic philosophy through learning from humans' predicaments that humans often feel that they are above all creation. They believe that such ecological ignorance deceives humans to misuse their uniqueness-human rationality to conquer, sack, abuse, and sell land and ill-treat it. All earth produces and contains not only as simply for their use but also for adventure. Ecological unawareness introduces chaos into ecological order. It bounces rivers, burns forests, injures climate, and destroys human and animal species. To stop this not happen, Bokkuu (2011); Kelbessa (2011); Wake (2018b) state that the Oromo people enshrined environmental laws in their Gadaa system (indigenous democratic governance system) before centuries.

## Conclusion

This article opened the door between Oromo philosophical and theological understandings of land and examines how the land lays at the heart of the economic, social, and political life of the Oromo people. It also articulated that all philosophical and theological dimensions of land discussed in this study are interconnected. The study uncovered that the primary and secondary data regarding land in Oromo culture reinforce each other and utilized to theorize the people's theological and philosophical notions of land. Land is highly valued. Land as a living ground to grow plants and produce food where people access their natural resources and practice other land-based fundamental activities for food security, employment, incomes, and livelihoods.

The study showed that land continues to have major ontological, cosmological, epistemological, ecological, historical, and spiritual significance for the people. Control of land in Oromia has been linked to the interplay of indigenous cultural identity devastation and social, economic, and political power by Ethiopian regimes. It is because of this colonial legacy that Oromo land in general and Finfinnee, in particular, became a pillar of the liberation movement in the people's struggle for national self-determination. Oromo land, as physical reality or as a domain between boundaries that separate countries, that are, Oromia in the sense of territory for managing and mapping have a significant symbol with the range meanings link political and economic power, cultural identity, liberation, sovereignty, national identity, and nationalism. The chains of individuals in a family, households, lineages, relatives, and clans to Tulama and Macca form Oromo as a nation. Agglomeration of sands, rocks, pieces of farmlands, topsoil, mountains, rivers, countryside, cities, trees, animals, symbols, icons, beliefs, and Oromo construct the form of and substantiate the territory of Oromia. *Lafi keenya lafee*

*keenya* (our land is our bones) and *lafaa fi lafee irra jiraatu* (life is possible on land and bone) as meta-concepts are meant Oromo and Oromia. They cannot be detached. They involve a philosophy of how Oromo relate to land, which is their spiritual and political assets. The subject of land has remained at heart Oromo- Ethiopian Empire relations. The reoccurrence of this expression in the Oromo protest elucidates that this meta-concept will remain the Oromo's daily national greetings until the people's national humiliation over Finfinnee will be changed to a glory of the nation.

The oral literature and primary data collected and analyzed in this work reinforce each other. Although their culture (way of lives) has been ill-treated by the external forces for more than a century and their indigenous knowledge was subject for destruction so that it would not be pass from generations to generations, there is visible continuity between the Oromo's understandings of land in pre-colonial Oromia and postcolonial Oromia. Their understandings of land build up for thousands of years. Land issue is interconnected with their whole aspects of life. The study outlined, framed, and discussed the conceptual frameworks of Oromo's philosophy and theology of land, and recommends further study on the topic.

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