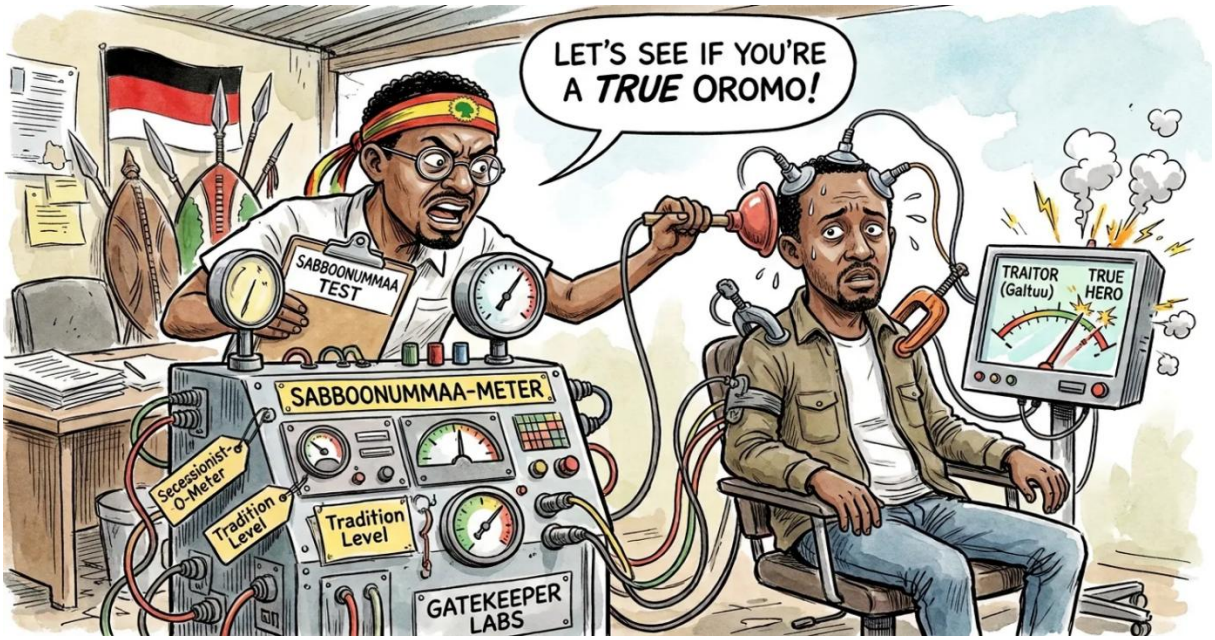
The Paradox of Sabboonummaa: When Identity Becomes a Litmus Test for Oromo Governance



A critical reflection on Oromummaa, sabboonummaa, political pluralism, and democratic emancipation in Ethiopia.

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Abstract

The Oromo political struggle has historically sought to overcome political marginalization, cultural suppression, economic inequality, and the denial of collective self-determination. In this process, concepts such as Oromummaa (Oromo identity, culture, and collective consciousness) and sabboonummaa (Oromo patriotism or national consciousness) have become important sources of political mobilization and collective identity. However, their increasing use as ideological measures of political loyalty raises important questions about internal pluralism, democratic participation, and the future of Oromo unity. In contemporary Oromo politics, disagreements over whether Oromia should become an independent state or remain within a democratized multinational Ethiopia have increasingly been accompanied by attempts to question the Oromo identity and patriotism of political opponents. In particular, portraying Oromo political figures associated with other non-secessionist political organizations as less Oromo, less patriotic, or extensions of historical imperial domination risks transforming legitimate ideological disagreements into identity-based exclusion. This article critically examines the political consequences of using Oromummaa and sabboonummaa as exclusive measures of political legitimacy. Drawing on theories of nationalism, social identity, democratic pluralism, indigenous Oromo political traditions, and Ethiopia's constitutional framework, it argues that Oromo identity

should not be subordinated to the ideological preferences of any single political movement. It further contends that advocates of independence and those seeking democratic transformation of Ethiopia's multinational federation should be able to participate in political debate without questioning one another's cultural identity or patriotism. The article concludes that sustainable Oromo unity requires ideological diversity, mutual political recognition, democratic accountability, and a distinction between shared cultural identity and competing political programs.

Keywords: Oromummaa, sabboonummaa, Oromo nationalism, political pluralism, identity politics, othering, OFC, OLF, OLA, PP, Ethiopian federalism, democratic emancipation.

1. Objectives

At a pivotal moment in Oromo history, a quiet yet profound paradox is unfolding: in our passion to protect ***Oromummaa***, we risk narrowing the very identity meant to unite us all. Across contemporary debates, a concerning habit has emerged where differing visions for our collective future, whether through democratic federalism, civic partnership, or self-determination, are increasingly measured against an unspoken loyalty test rather than debated on their merits. When ***Sabboonummaa*** becomes a lens through which we question one another's authenticity instead of a bridge that honors our shared heritage, we unintentionally turn diversity of thought into distance of heart. Following recently emerging dialogue and narrative of transforming Oromo national struggle for democratic emancipation in Ethiopia, vs the existing narrative of creating independent Oromia, the term "Mootummaa Sabboonummaa Oromoo Ijaaruu" becomes a key point of discussion. This article invites a timely reflection on how we can safeguard *Sabboonummaa* as an inclusive home for every Oromo, ensuring that our political differences become a source of democratic strength rather than quiet division. Therefore, the general objective of this article is to examine how the politicization of Oromummaa and sabboonummaa as exclusive standards of political legitimacy can undermine Oromo unity, democratic participation, and peaceful coexistence within Ethiopia.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Clarify the conceptual distinction between Oromummaa, sabboonummaa, and partisan political ideology.
2. Examine the dangers of delegitimizing Oromo political opponents based on their ideological positions concerning Ethiopia's political future.
3. Challenge the assumption that supporting an independent Oromia is the only legitimate expression of Oromo patriotism.
4. Analyze how identity-based political exclusion undermines coalition-building, collective mobilization, and democratic accountability.
5. Explore the implications of exclusive identity politics for Oromo relations with other nations and nationalities in Ethiopia.
6. Propose an inclusive framework for Oromo political engagement based on pluralism, democratic competition, and mutual recognition.

2. Introduction

The Oromo national struggle emerged from a long history of political marginalization, cultural suppression, economic exploitation, and unequal participation in the political institutions of the Ethiopian state. For generations, Oromo intellectuals, activists, political organizations, and community movements have challenged these conditions and advocated for cultural recognition, political representation, self-government, and collective dignity. The struggle has contributed significantly to the transformation of Ethiopia's political landscape, particularly the recognition of ethnic identity and regional self-administration within the post-1991 federal arrangement.

Within this historical and political context, Oromummaa has become a central concept in Oromo intellectual discourse and national mobilization. It represents more than an ethnic designation; it encompasses shared cultural heritage, language, historical consciousness, collective dignity, and aspirations for political emancipation. Similarly, sabboonummaa has come to represent Oromo national pride, political consciousness, and commitment to advancing Oromo collective interests. These concepts have played important roles in restoring cultural confidence and mobilizing people against historical injustices [1].

Nevertheless, the political significance of these concepts raises an important question*: **When does the promotion of collective identity become an instrument for excluding fellow members of the same community who hold different political aspirations?***

This question has become particularly relevant in contemporary Oromo politics, where political disagreements increasingly concern not only the strategies for achieving Oromo emancipation but also the fundamental question of Ethiopia's future political organization.

Broadly speaking, Oromo political aspirations encompass several perspectives. Some political organizations and activists advocate for an independent Oromia, arguing that genuine self-determination requires political sovereignty outside the Ethiopian state. Others seek to democratize Ethiopia's multinational federation, strengthen constitutional self-government, establish genuine power-sharing, and ensure equality among its constituent nations and nationalities. Still others favor broader civic-national arrangements that transcend ethnic political organization.

These differences are not necessarily evidence of a lack of Oromo consciousness or commitment to Oromo interests. Rather, they reflect competing political interpretations of historical experience, constitutional arrangements, national identity, and the institutional conditions necessary for achieving freedom and equality.

The problem arises when one political perspective claims exclusive ownership of Oromummaa and sabboonummaa and uses these concepts to question the authenticity, patriotism, or political legitimacy of those who disagree. In particular, dismissing Oromo political leaders within the Prosperity Party or other non-secessionist organizations as extensions of imperialism, collaborators, or individuals lacking genuine Oromo patriotism creates an unnecessary division between Oromo citizens. Such rhetoric shifts political debate from evaluating policies, governance, leadership performance, and political programs toward determining who is sufficiently Oromo to participate in defining the future of Oromia.

This article argues that such identity-based delegitimization is politically counterproductive. It weakens internal solidarity, complicates democratic opposition, discourages constructive political engagement, and risks reproducing the very exclusionary political practices that the Oromo national struggle has historically sought to overcome. The central argument is that Oromummaa should remain a shared cultural and historical foundation upon which diverse political visions can compete, rather than becoming an ideological instrument through which one political movement determines the legitimacy of all others.

3. Conceptual Foundations: Oromummaa, Sabboonummaa, and Political Identity

3.1. Understanding Oromummaa beyond partisan politics

Professor Asafa Jalata's scholarship has made significant contributions to the theoretical understanding of Oromummaa. In *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism*, Jalata conceptualizes Oromummaa as a comprehensive framework encompassing Oromo cultural identity, historical consciousness, national solidarity, and political emancipation [1].

His work emphasizes the importance of developing collective consciousness in overcoming historical domination and political fragmentation. From this perspective, Oromummaa is not simply an inherited ethnic identity but also a framework for cultural revival, collective agency, and political empowerment. This contribution is particularly important because the historical marginalization of Oromo language, culture, and political institutions made the restoration of Oromo identity a significant component of the national struggle.

However, recognizing the importance of Oromummaa does not necessarily require accepting one particular political interpretation of what Oromo emancipation must ultimately achieve. There is an important distinction between recognizing Oromo collective identity and prescribing a single political destination for all Oromo people. In this regard giving four to five level for Oromummaa often create critics within Oromo as well as with other nations living in Ethiopia. For example, an Oromo who advocates for an independent Oromia and another Oromo who advocates for a democratic multinational Ethiopia may share the same language, cultural heritage, historical consciousness, and commitment to improving the political and economic conditions of Oromo society. Their disagreement concerns the institutional and political arrangements through which these objectives should be achieved.

Consequently, political disagreement should not automatically be interpreted as cultural alienation or betrayal of Oromo identity. Oromummaa belongs to the Oromo people collectively. No political party, armed movement, intellectual group, or individual leader possesses exclusive authority to define its boundaries.

3.2. Sabboonummaa: From collective consciousness to political gatekeeping

Sabboonummaa is commonly understood in Oromo political discourse as patriotism, national pride, or heightened national consciousness. It encourages individuals to value their cultural heritage, defend collective dignity, and contribute to the advancement of their community.

These are legitimate and important dimensions of collective identity. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between sabboonummaa as an ethical commitment to the welfare and dignity of the Oromo people and sabboonummaa as a political instrument for evaluating the loyalty of individuals according to their support for a particular political agenda. The first interpretation can promote solidarity and collective responsibility. The second can create ideological gatekeeping.

When patriotism is measured exclusively by support for independence, armed resistance, or allegiance to a particular political organization, individuals who advocate different political arrangements can easily be characterized as insufficiently patriotic. This creates a problematic situation in which political loyalty becomes more important than the actual contribution of individuals to Oromo society.

A person who advocates for independence should not automatically be considered more patriotic than someone who works to improve Oromo education, healthcare, economic opportunities, political representation, and constitutional rights within a democratic Ethiopia. Likewise, membership in a governing party does not automatically establish that an individual serves Oromo interests. Political performance, respect for human rights, accountability, and public service must be evaluated independently of ethnic identity. Therefore, sabboonummaa should be assessed through ethical conduct, civic responsibility, and substantive contributions to collective welfare rather than through ideological conformity.

3.3. The importance of distinguishing identity from ideology

Social identity theory, particularly the work of Tajfel and Turner, explains how individuals develop a sense of belonging through group identification and how distinctions between in-groups and out-groups can influence social and political relationships [2]. Although group identification can promote solidarity, it can also produce exclusion when political actors construct rigid boundaries between those considered authentic members and those portrayed as outsiders or traitors. This theoretical insight is relevant to contemporary Oromo politics.

When political actors divide Oromos into categories such as genuine progressive patriots and collaborators, or authentic nationalists and politically assimilated individuals, they transform ideological disagreement into a judgment about personal and collective identity. The danger is that the political community becomes divided not simply by competing ideas but by competing claims about who has the right to belong.

A democratic political culture should instead distinguish three dimensions:

- **Cultural identity:** Shared heritage, language, history, and collective belonging.
- **Political ideology:** Different interpretations of the political, constitutional, and economic arrangements that should govern society.

- **Political performance:** The actual conduct, policies, achievements, and failures of political leaders and organizations.

These dimensions are related, but they are not interchangeable. An individual's political ideology does not automatically invalidate their cultural identity, and cultural identity does not automatically establish the legitimacy of their political conduct.

4. The Politics of Othering in Contemporary Oromo Politics

4.1. The emergence of ideological boundaries within the Oromo political spectrum

The Oromo political landscape has never been ideologically uniform. Its political history encompasses different approaches to national emancipation, state-building, political representation, and the relationship between Oromia and Ethiopia.

The OLF historically articulated the right to Oromo self-determination, including the possibility of independence. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which emerged from the armed wing and subsequent political-military trajectory associated with the OLF, represents an armed struggle for political objectives associated with Oromo liberation.

Other Oromo political organizations, including the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), have emphasized constitutional federalism, democratic governance, political accountability, and the realization of genuine self-rule within Ethiopia. Meanwhile, Oromo politicians and citizens participating in the Prosperity Party (PP) support a different political approach, although their individual motivations and policy positions are not necessarily identical. These political organizations and constituencies do not represent interchangeable political positions. They have different histories, strategies, leadership structures, and visions of Ethiopia's political future. However, their differences should be understood as part of political competition rather than as evidence that some participants are less Oromo.

The fundamental problem with identity-based othering is that it transforms political disagreement into a struggle over cultural authenticity. Instead of asking whether a political organization has an effective strategy, respects human rights, or advances democratic governance, political debate becomes centered on whether its leaders possess sufficient Oromummaa or sabboonummaa. This is a dangerous transformation because it makes constructive disagreement increasingly difficult.

4.2. Delegitimizing Oromo leaders within the Prosperity Party

One particularly important dimension of this debate concerns the political legitimacy of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other Oromo political figures associated with the Prosperity Party. Some critics portray these leaders as extensions of historical imperial structures and question their Oromo patriotism because they do not advocate for an independent Oromia. There is, of course, nothing wrong with criticizing the policies of the Prosperity Party, questioning the performance of its leadership, or examining whether its governance practices genuinely advance Oromo interests.

Indeed, political accountability requires rigorous criticism of every government, irrespective of the ethnic background of its leaders. However, there is a fundamental difference between criticizing a government for its political actions and dismissing the cultural identity or patriotism of its leaders.

The fact that a political leader supports a united Ethiopia or rejects secession does not automatically make that individual less Oromo. Similarly, the fact that a political leader is Oromo does not automatically make their government democratic, accountable, or beneficial to Oromo society.

These distinctions are essential.

The Prosperity Party's political performance should be evaluated through evidence concerning governance, constitutional rights, political participation, economic development, public security, and the treatment of civilians. Its leaders should neither receive automatic legitimacy because of their Oromo identity nor lose their Oromo identity because of their political affiliation. The same principle applies to opposition organizations. The OLF, OLA, OFC, and other political groups should be evaluated according to their political programs, democratic commitments, leadership accountability, and actual conduct. Political legitimacy must be earned through political performance, not established or withdrawn through identity-based declarations.

4.3. The false dichotomy between independence and betrayal

One of the most problematic consequences of ideological gatekeeping is the construction of a false political dichotomy: either support an independent Oromia or be considered insufficiently Oromo. This assumption overlooks the diversity of political aspirations among Oromo citizens. There are Oromos who believe that independence is the most appropriate means of achieving national self-determination. Others believe that Ethiopia can be transformed into a genuinely democratic multinational federation in which Oromia enjoys meaningful self-government, constitutional protection, and equitable participation in federal institutions.

There are also Oromos who support a more civic-oriented Ethiopian political arrangement. These positions may be incompatible in their ultimate constitutional objectives, but their proponents can still share fundamental concerns about justice, dignity, political freedom, economic development, and human rights.

It is important to recognize that advocating for independence is a legitimate political position. However, advocating for constitutional democratization within Ethiopia is equally a legitimate political position. *Neither position should be treated as proof of superior Oromo identity*. Furthermore, the Ethiopian Constitution explicitly recognizes the right of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination, including secession under Article 39. It establishes a constitutional procedure through which this right may be exercised [3].

International human rights instruments also recognize the right of peoples to self-determination, including Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [4]. These provisions establish important principles concerning political choice and self-determination. They

do not, however, establish that every Oromo must support independence or that those who advocate a different constitutional arrangement are betraying their community.

Ultimately, the political future of Oromia should be determined through legitimate, peaceful, and democratic processes that allow the Oromo people to express their preferences freely, with due regard to applicable constitutional and legal procedures. "***No political organization should presume that its own position automatically represents the collective will of all Oromos***".

5. How Sabboonummaa-Based Delegitimization Undermines Oromo Unity

5.1. Fragmentation of collective political identity

A political community can accommodate substantial ideological disagreement while maintaining a shared sense of identity and collective belonging. However, when political actors begin questioning the identity and patriotism of their opponents, the foundations of that collective belonging become vulnerable.

The division between genuine Oromos and allegedly less patriotic Oromos creates unnecessary social boundaries within a population that already has diverse regional, religious, cultural, and political experiences. For example, an Oromo Muslim from Hararghe, an Oromo Orthodox Christian from Shewa, an Oromo Protestant from Wollega, and an Oromo traditional believer from another part of Oromia may have different political preferences and historical experiences. Nevertheless, these differences do not diminish their shared Oromo identity.



The same principle applies to political differences. An Oromo who supports the OLF's independence agenda should not be denied their political convictions. Equally, an Oromo who supports the Prosperity Party, OFC, or another organization should not be denied their Oromo

identity simply because of that affiliation. The collective identity of the Oromo people is much broader than the political preferences of individual organizations.

5.2. Weakening coalition-building and collective mobilization

Political movements require the ability to build coalitions across different ideological and social constituencies. Even organizations pursuing similar political objectives often need to cooperate with groups that differ in leadership, strategy, or institutional priorities. Identity-based delegitimization makes such cooperation difficult because it introduces questions of political purity and personal loyalty into relationships that should be governed by mutual interests and negotiated objectives. This problem becomes especially significant when opposition groups seek to mobilize citizens against the governing party.

For instance, an attempt to mobilize Oromo citizens against the Prosperity Party while simultaneously questioning the Oromo identity and patriotism of its leaders can alienate a substantial segment of the Oromo population. The party includes Oromo politicians, civil servants, security personnel, community leaders, and ordinary citizens with different political motivations. Some may support the party because they believe in its political program; others may participate because they consider it the most practical available avenue for political representation. Others may disagree with particular government policies while continuing to support the broader constitutional framework.

If opposition mobilization treats all these constituencies as politically illegitimate or culturally compromised, it risks turning a potentially broad political movement into a narrow ideological campaign. In this situation, the opposition may unintentionally alienate the very people whose participation would be necessary for achieving meaningful political change. Therefore, delegitimizing the Oromo identity of Prosperity Party leaders and supporters is not an effective substitute for building a persuasive alternative political program. "***A political movement cannot sustainably unite a population by first telling a substantial portion of that population that its members are insufficiently Oromo to belong to the political community".***

5.3. Weakening democratic accountability

Another consequence of identity-based politics is the displacement of substantive political debate. In a healthy democratic environment, political parties compete over governance, economic development, education, healthcare, public security, corruption, constitutional rights, and institutional performance.

Citizens should be free to ask whether their political representatives are fulfilling their responsibilities and whether alternative organizations offer better solutions. However, when political disagreements are interpreted as evidence of insufficient sabboonummaa, criticism becomes personalized and identity-based. This creates an environment in which political actors may defend their positions by appealing to national loyalty rather than responding to substantive questions.

The problem is not limited to opposition movements. Governing parties can also exploit ethnic identity or national representation to discourage criticism and protect political elites from accountability. Consequently, neither the ruling party nor the opposition should be allowed to use Oromummaa as a shield against legitimate political scrutiny. An Oromo leader should be accountable because of their public responsibilities, not protected because of their ethnicity or condemned because of their political affiliation.

5.4. Reproducing the exclusionary political practices the struggle opposes

The Oromo national struggle has historically challenged political exclusion, unequal citizenship, authoritarian governance, and the denial of collective rights. It would therefore be contradictory if the pursuit of political emancipation reproduced exclusionary practices within Oromo society itself.

When political actors claim exclusive authority to define genuine Oromo patriotism, they risk establishing another form of ideological hierarchy in which citizens are classified according to their political conformity. This is particularly problematic because democratic emancipation should expand political participation rather than restrict it. I write detailed critics on Who Has the Right to Define the Goals and Future of the Oromo Liberation Struggle? For further read.

The freedom to disagree with political leaders, question national strategies, and advocate alternative constitutional arrangements is an essential component of political freedom. A movement that demands political freedom from the state must also recognize political freedom within its own constituency.

6. The Contradiction Between Exclusive Political Identity and Oromo Democratic Traditions

Oromo indigenous political traditions provide an additional perspective through which the problem of identity-based exclusion can be examined. The Gadaa system is widely recognized as an indigenous Oromo system of governance involving generational leadership, defined political responsibilities, deliberation, and mechanisms of accountability. Asmarom Legesse's *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System* provides an important scholarly examination of these institutions [5].

Although contemporary political movements should not romanticize historical institutions or assume that traditional systems can be transferred directly into modern state governance, Gadaa offers important principles for thinking about political authority. These include:

- Collective deliberation rather than exclusive political authority.
- Accountability of leaders rather than unconditional loyalty.
- Defined responsibilities and limitations on leadership.
- The importance of consensus-building and social responsibility.
- Respect for established rules governing collective political decisions.

Similarly, the Oromo concepts of safuu and moggaasaa provide useful ethical and social perspectives. Safuu emphasizes moral order and appropriate relationships, while moggaasaa historically represents mechanisms of social incorporation and belonging. These concepts should not be simplistically equated with contemporary liberal democracy. Nevertheless, they provide an important foundation for reflecting on whether political practices are consistent with the values of mutual respect, inclusion, and collective responsibility.

If Oromummaa is understood as encompassing the ethical and cultural heritage of the Oromo people, its political application should not contradict the inclusive and deliberative values associated with these traditions. It is difficult to reconcile the promotion of democratic emancipation with practices that question the cultural legitimacy of fellow Oromos merely because they support different political arrangements. The credibility of Oromo political emancipation therefore depends not only on what political movements demand from the Ethiopian state but also on how they treat political differences within Oromo society.

7. Implications for the Coexistence of Nations and Nationalities in Ethiopia

The implications of identity-based political exclusion extend beyond Oromo society. Ethiopia is a multinational state whose constitutional framework recognizes the rights of different nations, nationalities, and peoples. Its political stability depends substantially on the ability of these communities to negotiate their differences through legitimate institutions, constitutional arrangements, and peaceful political processes. In this context, the relationship between Oromummaa and Ethiopian political identity requires careful consideration.

Oromo cultural revival and political empowerment do not inherently contradict peaceful coexistence with other Ethiopian communities. Equally, support for a democratic Ethiopian federation does not necessarily require the abandonment of Oromo identity. The two can coexist when political arrangements recognize cultural diversity, constitutional equality, and meaningful self-government.

However, when Oromo identity is framed as an exclusive political project that determines who has legitimate authority over state institutions, other communities may interpret it as a competing project of ethnic domination. This can reinforce defensive nationalism and deepen intercommunal suspicion. The same problem occurs when political actors equate Ethiopian national identity with the suppression of Oromo identity. Such an approach undermines the possibility of constructing a genuinely inclusive political community.

The challenge, therefore, is to develop a political framework in which Oromo identity and other collective identities are respected without transforming them into instruments of domination or exclusion.

The broader objective should be a democratic political order in which citizens can maintain their cultural identities while participating equally in shared institutions. This is particularly important for Oromia itself, where people belonging to different ethnic communities also live, work, and

participate in social and economic life. A sustainable political future must protect the rights of Oromo people while respecting the constitutional and human rights of all communities living within the region.

8. Why Sabboonummaa-Based Delegitimization Is Politically Counterproductive

The OLF and OLA, like other political organizations, have the right to advocate for their preferred political objectives, including an independent Oromia. They also have the right to criticize the Prosperity Party, challenge government policies, and mobilize public support for their political programs. However, their ability to achieve political objectives depends substantially on their capacity to persuade people who may not initially share their ideological positions.

There is a significant difference between persuading Oromos that independence is the most appropriate political solution and declaring that Oromos who disagree are insufficiently patriotic. The former is political advocacy; the latter is identity-based exclusion. This distinction has practical consequences.

- First, questioning the Oromummaa of non-secessionist Oromos discourages political dialogue and makes cooperation across ideological boundaries more difficult.
- Second, it risks alienating moderate and federalist constituencies that may share concerns about governance, political repression, human rights, and constitutional violations but do not support independence.
- Third, it creates an unnecessary contradiction between the stated objective of national emancipation and the practice of restricting the political legitimacy of fellow Oromos.
- Fourth, it can weaken the credibility of opposition movements among citizens who expect political organizations to demonstrate democratic values, tolerance, and respect for political diversity.

The same concern applies to the slogan sometimes advanced in Oromo political discourse: ***Sabboonummaan Oromoo Mootummaa Ijaaruu Qaba***, roughly, "Oromo patriotism should build an Oromo government." The expression can be understood as an aspiration for Oromo political empowerment and self-government. However, it raises important questions when used to imply that only one particular conception of an Oromo-led political order represents genuine patriotism.

What does an Oromo government mean in a multinational federal state? Does it refer to an accountable government that protects Oromo rights and exercises constitutional self-government, or does it imply an ethnically exclusive political authority? How should the rights and political participation of non-Oromo communities living in Oromia be protected? Can Oromo political leaders who advocate for a democratic Ethiopian federation also contribute to Oromo political empowerment?

These questions require substantive political answers rather than accusations about who possesses sufficient sabboonummaa. If the ultimate objective is an independent Oromia, its advocates should explain how that state would guarantee democracy, constitutional rights, minority protections,

political pluralism, and accountability. If the objective is a democratic multinational Ethiopia, its advocates should explain how the existing federation can be transformed to guarantee genuine equality and self-government. Both projects must be evaluated on the merits of their political institutions and practical commitments.

An independence movement cannot establish its democratic credentials simply by invoking national patriotism. Equally, a government cannot establish its democratic legitimacy simply by claiming to represent Oromo interests. The quality of a political project must be judged by the institutions it proposes, the rights it protects, and the accountability it accepts.

9. Toward an Inclusive Understanding of Oromummaa and Political Pluralism

The solution is not to abandon Oromummaa or sabboonummaa as important elements of Oromo collective identity. Rather, it is to distinguish their unifying cultural and ethical significance from their potentially divisive use as partisan political instruments. An inclusive understanding of Oromummaa should accommodate the following principles.

First, cultural identity should be independent of partisan affiliation. Every Oromo should enjoy equal recognition as a member of the Oromo community, irrespective of political party, religious affiliation, regional origin, or constitutional preference.

Second, political disagreement should be treated as legitimate democratic competition. Advocating for independence, multinational federalism, or a civic Ethiopian state should be evaluated through political arguments rather than through accusations of cultural betrayal.

Third, political patriotism should be demonstrated through public responsibility. Respect for human rights, protection of civilians, opposition to corruption, promotion of education, economic development, and defense of constitutional rights are meaningful indicators of political commitment to the welfare of society.

Fourth, no political organization should claim exclusive ownership of Oromo national interests. The OLF, OLA, OFC, Prosperity Party, and other political organizations should compete through their ideas, policies, and democratic credentials.

Fifth, Oromo political emancipation should be compatible with peaceful coexistence. The promotion of Oromo rights should not require denying the identities, constitutional rights, or political aspirations of other communities.

Ultimately, the strength of Oromummaa should be measured not by how effectively it excludes political opponents but by how successfully it creates solidarity across differences.

10. Conclusion

The politicization of Oromummaa and sabboonummaa as exclusive standards of political loyalty represents a significant challenge to Oromo unity and democratic emancipation. Although these concepts have historically contributed to cultural revival, collective consciousness, and resistance to political marginalization, their use as instruments for delegitimizing political opponents risks transforming a shared identity into a mechanism of internal exclusion.

The Oromo people have diverse political aspirations. Some advocate for independence, while others seek to democratize Ethiopia's multinational federation or pursue alternative arrangements for achieving political equality and collective dignity. These disagreements are legitimate dimensions of political pluralism and should not become grounds for questioning the Oromo identity or patriotism of fellow citizens.

In particular, dismissing Oromo leaders within the Prosperity Party as extensions of historical imperialism and consequently denying their Oromummaa does not provide a constructive foundation for political opposition. It risks alienating citizens who might otherwise participate in broader democratic movements and makes collective political mobilization more difficult. Political opposition should instead focus on governance failures, human rights violations, institutional weaknesses, corruption, and the absence of genuine democratic accountability.

The broader contradiction is that a political struggle claiming to seek freedom and emancipation cannot sustainably achieve these objectives through practices that restrict political freedom and belonging within its own community. Democracy requires the freedom to disagree, the right to organize, and the ability to advocate competing political visions without being subjected to identity-based exclusion.

Oromummaa should therefore be understood as a shared cultural and historical inheritance rather than the exclusive ideological property of any political movement. Sabboonummaa should reflect an ethical commitment to the welfare, dignity, freedom, and prosperity of the Oromo people rather than serve as a partisan measurement of political conformity.

The future of Oromia belongs to the Oromo people collectively. It should be determined through democratic participation, free political choice, and legitimate constitutional processes, not through the exclusive claims of political organizations or armed movements.

"The Oromo national struggle will become stronger not when all Oromos are forced to think alike, but when they can disagree politically without questioning one another's identity, dignity, and right to belong".

11. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Separate Oromummaa from partisan ideology.** Oromo political organizations, intellectuals, activists, and community leaders should recognize that no political party or armed movement has exclusive authority to define Oromo identity, patriotism, or collective interests.

2. **Promote ideological pluralism within Oromo politics.** Political organizations advocating for independence, democratic multinational federalism, or alternative constitutional arrangements should recognize one another's right to participate in political debate without identity-based delegitimization.

3. **Replace identity-based accusations with evidence-based political criticism.** Political leaders should be evaluated according to their governance records, respect for human rights, political accountability, and contributions to public welfare rather than their political affiliations or positions on secession.

4. **Encourage democratic dialogue among Oromo political organizations.** The OLF, OFC, Prosperity Party, other Oromo political groups, intellectuals, and civil society organizations should establish spaces for constructive dialogue on shared interests, constitutional questions, and the future of Oromia.

5. **Recognize the diversity of Oromo political aspirations.** Advocates of independence should be able to present their political vision freely, while those supporting democratization of Ethiopia's multinational federation should enjoy equal political legitimacy.

6. **Strengthen inclusive political institutions.** Oromo political actors should promote institutions that guarantee freedom of expression, political participation, minority rights, civilian protection, and accountability, both within Oromia and at the federal level.

7. **Reinterpret sabboonummaa through ethical and civic responsibility.** Oromo patriotism should be reflected in practical contributions to education, economic development, social justice, human rights, peace, and the protection of collective dignity rather than political conformity.

8. **Promote peaceful coexistence within Ethiopia.** Oromo political empowerment should be pursued alongside constitutional equality and respect for the rights and political aspirations of other nations and nationalities.

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