

In Defense of Bilisummaa

When our struggle for liberty and independence is challenged it is the duty of nationalists to go out and defend it from hovering catastrophe. It will be a mistake to distract the struggle from its rightful course for sake of millions of youth whose dreams have been the liberation of Oromiyaa since they started to dream. Pioneers of the struggle are duty bound to keep them informed about OLF, its mission, the achievements, failures and distortions of struggle. Rather than panicking with present world events, better to examine problems that came dragging from the past. Problems that caused activists leave their homes initially are still there with greater force. The solution is not quitting what you have and retrying what has already failed but to hold fast on what you had and assert your identity. To present list of names of organizations with Oromo names as alternatives can seem comparing apple to orange. Our youth are getting imprisoned and killed for being Oromians not Ethiopians. Because our heroes and heroines rejected the others ways and stood on their own Oromo got world wide recognition. The struggle for liberation is not a hodge-podge brew; but sifted product, for which one made a decision to fall and rise with. It is the rejection of alien manipulation and taking responsibility for ones destiny in ones own hands.

King Minilik got green light from Emperor Yohannis to invade countries to his south. Minilik accomplished his mission and called himself “King of Ethiopia and Gaallaa Countries” after he became Emperor replacing Yohannis. Tigreans took that as humiliation by the Amaara. The efforts they made to reclaim their throne succeeded only after a century. Since the fall of Zaagu’ee dynasty Habashaa power had been changing hands violently and never peacefully. This culture did not allow even those like Darg and Wayyaanee to democratize how ever hard they had tried to simulate. Oromo got negative response whenever they demanded to be left alone. That was why they organized themselves separately and shook old Nafxanyaa from its root. Now in cahoots with nationals that conveniently forget their past it is burgeoning to thrive.

Revenge for crown of Yohannis and denial of their share in southern resource over and above oppressing them put cousins at odds and led to the birth of Tigray liberation fronts. Tigray grumbled against a partner that denied it due respect and decided to be independent. That was how the second Wayyaanee rebelled and liberated Tigray. But finding the throne robbed from Yohannis idle it changed its mind, grubbed it and ruled over the empire with vengeance.

It seems Wayyaanee had learned from experience that it will be impossible to rule in peace with out responding to national question. That was why it included article 39, the right of nations to national self determination in its constitution. That undermined long standing Habashaa slogan “Absoluteness of Ethiopian unity!” or “One Ethiopia or death”. No Habashaa political organization would leave Oromiya to its own destiny. They were even able to put spell on Oromo organizations in “opposition” to reject this fundamental right of a people and join them.

The Habashaa are not willing to give up the colonies for they are their lifeline. Among them Wayyaanee has organized a rear to fallback to exit the empire when the need

arises. It has sharpened teeth and nails to plunder the empire as long as it stays in power. It understands its days are short. Once kicked out, to return by the gun or democracy would be like a lost dream. Even their commons will not be comfortable with Habashaa minus Oromiyaa. For this reason they will not stop putting the oppressed in front of them and rescue the empire from falling. Organization called Madrak is one of those rescue teams.

Most Habashaa in the mother country had no knowledge of the atrocities committed in their name by their rulers to the peoples to their south. Except for being pumped up with empty propaganda about their superiority most rarely shared from the plunder. It is only the present government that has used the plunder to develop its country, Tigray. In the past twenty years it has provided Tigray with numbers of factories, and educational institutions, electric dams, water resources, and several other infrastructures it had never had. In addition to these individuals in power are amassing wealth plundered from the south just like their Nafxanyaa predecessors. For this reason all Habashaa forces would lose the life of comfort unless they keep the empire intact.

With the empire's demise all countries will return to their owners. To willingly accept democracy could mean passing death sentence on oneself; it is only human for the Nafxanyaa to refuse. An empire cannot be democratized for it is built on inequality of nations. So far organized Ethiopian elites are not in the mood to revise it. For this reason it is a priority for nations imprisoned under the empire to determine their destiny. That is why they should ally only with those of similar destiny, not to help back to power those whom the struggle of the oppressed had already broken their back bone. Neither democratized Ethiopia nor independent Republic of Oromiyaa will be realized unless the empire is dismantled.

The colonizer had divided Oromiya into several parts called Xaqelayi Gizaat (Governorate General). At the end of Hayila Sillasee's rule some elites started to suggest changing the name Xaqelayi Gizaat to Astadaadar (Administration) to avoid its colonial implication. Darg accepted the suggestion and Astadaadar replaced Xaqelayi Gizaat since then. Like it is said "Changing the container will not change whey into curd". Changing the name did not bring about change in political, economic and social relations between the colonizer and the colonized...

The division to which Oromiyaa was subjected might have undue pressure on their common identity. But Oromo activists arrived in the nick of time and rescued what ever remained before it was erased. Since 1991 Oromo are enriching their common heritage within a common boundary thanks to the revolutionary heroes and heroines that gave the ultimate sacrifice to make that possible. There is no short cut to gain what is remaining or to guard what was achieved. It will require more sacrifice from Oromo generations.

During their separate existence Oromo had been experiencing similar life of destitution, humiliation, lack of opportunity and desire for freedom. They had no cause to have ill feelings towards each other on national level for they had been kept strictly apart. Clashes between nomads over water had not exceeded intervention of the elderly. That

was why the struggle that started on its name was based on “one country, one nation, one destiny” not to strengthen Xaqlayi Gizat or empire. When tribes came together for the first time in 1991 the way they expressed their longing for each other and the compassionate greetings were prove for that. That was why those that did not support independence hide their opinion then.

All facts confirm that there was nothing that put the unity of Oromo to question. Oromo struggle did not go down to Xaqlayi Gizaat level so far. Those who tried did not succeed. There is no visible advantage for Oromo in dividing Oromiyaa. Oromo liberation fighters from all regions had spilt their blood not only in their birth places but in every part of Oromiya. The worst enemies of Oromummaa are pseudo Oromian politicians with in organizations. Based on their selfish motives they have tried to rally supporters by disseminating false information with in Oromo community to divide it in region and religion. The evil deeds will certainly boomerang to its origin but it may take some time to heal the scar it left.

The condition in which Oromo struggle finds its self today seems that of the 70s. During that period a segment of Oromo activists had left the line of OLF in the name of “class struggle” and joined Habashaa organization that claimed to be communists. All those best minds were wasted to strengthen the empire. Irreplaceable lives were massacred not to be of use to their nation. Objective of all colonial governments since the first colonizer was to deny the colonies leadership. Whether one runs towards them or away from them they never give up ambushing them. Other segment joined OLF, organized to dismantle the empire and free Oromiyaa from underneath it. Though the empire took all of them as enemies they had spent their time harassing each other forgetting the Oromo saying “Eat with the alien but swallow turning to your kin.”

Since then groups that oppose the basic points of the program had sprouted in OLF. They had never come to the open in a comradely spirit to all inclusive Congress and present their opinion for amendment of the constitution. As one of the leaders stated since the idea of democratizing Ethiopia is a minority opinion it had no chance of seeing day light. This does not justify avoiding legal procedure and creating commotion in the organization by clandestine activities. That opinion started to see day light unconstitutionally. To defend the constitution is the duty and right of members. No one can be above the law. That schism had significant influence on lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. Finally the organization broke up. Failing to identify what led to the break up it became impossible to mend it. These democratizers of Ethiopia had carried out deliberations in several places and tried many ways to accomplish their mission. They had also intended to spread their tentacles inside the country.

Now a group has appeared in a new form and tactics to democratize Ethiopia. Even if they are not supported by majority Oromo youth at this time they believe to match them with other supports. This is good news for persons who are craving to go back under the cover of OLF and exploit Oromiyaa with aliens whose language and culture they favor. For this reason it will not be hard to imagine the cacophony by small but too vocal groups when the question of independence arises. There is a saying “The gluttonous

said, let all say what they like as long as my stomach is filled up”. Oromo do not hinder persons from expressing their opinion. They will listen and give answers to the wise and the naïve alike. It has no place for fear and threat.

Splitting based on outlook did not start with OLF. Instances are Eritrean, Tigray, Southern Sudan, Somalia, Palestinian movements to mention only few. The Palestinian groups formed the PLO to keep them together even if each had different outlook from the other, but believed the liberation of Palestine as their goal. Split in OLF is also not for the first time.

Oromo character is different from all others. As long as they behave within traditional ethical standard and observe safuu, to organize separately according to own outlook is not a problem. Their target must be one that has occupied their fatherland not their compatriots. There could be agents with special mission to sabotage the liberation of Oromiyaa. But assuming that there are others who from their heart took democratizing Ethiopia as a solution, it may be possible to bring them together with those that stand for independence in some sort of understanding. Until then it will be to advantage of all if they could create a pact on a common policy that reflects Oromummaa in their relation with third parties.

There are those who say why should any one criticize when some come out to accomplish by changing tactics what OLF failed to deliver all those years? Are they the losers or other born again that want to divert the course of national struggle? OLF stuck because of those who are now behind the present split. There is an Oromo saying “I cannot find my lost ox because the one who slew and ate it was helping me in tracking”. In addition to that the colonial background, lack of commitment for bilisummaa, lack of militancy among higher cadres, early assassination of leaders and lack of reliable outlet has contributed to the sluggishness. Despite that for a group that has risen from a society where majority was politically not conscious, to accomplish so much was never rivaled in the colonial history of its nation.

OLF was not well prepared to exploit Oromoo resources or to stop others not to use it against them. Overhauling the organization and its methods of operation were also overdue. So many factors especially inability to stop infiltrations and external pressures did not allow internal dynamics to develop and bring about change. The solution is to review the causes for sluggishness and correct them, not to cut and run in a different direction. Changing the kaayyoo only damages national psyche and undermine achievements so far registered. There was nothing wrong with Kaayyoo of Bilisummaa. Had the organization operated in full capacity with determination and commitment things could have been different. Struggle may need negotiation and negotiation compromise but it should not be at the expense of fundamentals of your principles. Faltering in principle and inconsistency in approach are signs of opportunism. Opportunism is a blind behavior that does not consider consequences but temporary seeming gain for the actor.

OLF was born to liberate Oromiyaa from shackles of colonialism. Many heroic lives were lost to fulfill that mission for the nation’s pride. Individuals may change their course but

OLF belongs to the martyrs and so will continue to live on their line or die so that the nation will have a name to refer to. All Oromo organizations exist because of OLF's survival with its kaayyoo. The seeming weaknesses of today cannot make one forget the achievements registered with blood and sweat of martyrs. For those who were party to the heroic deeds and are still alive, to be humiliated by those who were not with them is safuu. We today walk with our heads up as proud Oromo because of the risks those who marched under OLF took for liberation of their country. We the living have the duty to continue from where they left be it rain or draught.

There are some who say given "one man one vote" Oromo has advantage with democracy. But even if democracy is "one man one vote" political competition is by election based on party platform not nationality. Electoral constituency will also be limited by size of population in which Oromo may not be the majority. The internal displacement of Oromo created by governments most likely is preparations towards that end. For this reason for the Oromoo rights to be respected the big size of population is not strong assurance. What matters is the control mechanism. Remedy for Oromo is realization of their national rights in all aspects.

Those that struggle for independence of Oromiya believe that Wayyaanee if not harsher is no less cruel than its predecessors. They also believe that the enemy of Oromo is the colonial system of Ethiopian empire not Wayyaanee alone. To challenge it you should first be a formidable organization with trusted leaders that have clear vision of national goal. Then only can you talk about tactics, negotiations and alliances. For now the choice is clear either struggle to liberate Oromiyaa or to democratize Ethiopia. Campaigns that focus only against Wayyaanee to replace rulers for the empire bypassing liberation of Oromiyaa do not reflect the goal of OLF.

Oromiyaa had to determine her destiny with a referendum conducted under condition where there is no fear or threat. Those that stand for independence will encourage people to vote for independence. If Oromo choose to live with other nations they will respect their choice without reservation. Alliance with non Oromo has first to be subject to referendum otherwise it could be taken as betrayal of the peoples cause. Until the Oromo make a choice of their heart the struggle will continue by all means with zeal and commitment.

Whether Oromo lives independently or with its neighbors the final decision rest with them. All activists claim that they support Oromo right to national self determination. If so care must be taken so that relations with third parties may not jeopardize that opportunity. If that can be agreed there is no reason for truly independent Oromo organizations not to gather under one shade. That was what was envisaged when forming ULFO (Union of Liberation Forces of Oromiyaa). It could not break through probably for being untimely introduced. Still those who can become partners in struggle can draw a minimum program that includes all points they can agree on. To unite is not difficult for true nationalists that have one set goal.

Finally, all new and remnants of old Nafxanyaa consider Oromiyaa as their private property. Wayyaanee government is good example to demonstrate that empires cannot get democratized. Oromo activists have to come out with a strong organization and

committed and determined leadership if the size of their population is to matter. If such big and conscious population like the Oromo is behind an organization no force could stand against it. A well organized body with strong rear will be respected and trusted to be a partner in peace and reconciliation. To handle oneself with safuu patience and tolerance is Oromo tradition. OLF is a national icon synonymous with independence not to be high jacked, borrowed or lent for other purposes. As long as there is one person that upholds OLF's line of struggle no one has the right to modify and use its name. It is patriotic to come out and defend the struggle for bilisummaa from the vultures hovering over it at this time of confusion. It is the way to kaayyoo not the kaayyoo that can be negotiable. Before kaayyoo bilisummaa is derailed all nationalists must stand guard and raise high its banner so that it visibly flies in the national air, heart and mind.

The struggle for bilisummaa shall continue until victory!

Honor and glory for the fallen heroines and heroes; liberty equality and freedom for the living and nagaa and araaraa for the Ayyaanaa of our fore parents!

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May 2011

Ibsaa Guutama is a member of the generation that drew the first Political program of the OLF.