



---

*Full Length Research Paper*

**Historical Narratives from Colonial and Independence to Unison and Pluralist:  
The Oromo Politics since the 1970s**

**Dechasa Abebe (PhD)\***

Associate Professor, Socio-economic History  
Addis Ababa University College of Social Sciences  
Center for African and Oriental Studies  
Email: [dechasa.abebe@aau.edu.et](mailto:dechasa.abebe@aau.edu.et)  
Submission Date: June 28, 2022  
Acceptance Date: December 20, 2022

---

“The battle over the past is not about the past as such. It is not even about the present. It is about the future.”<sup>a</sup>

**Abstract**

*Historical narratives of the Oromoo politics passed through several challenges without much modification from the 1970s to 2010s. However, it began to be changed fundamentally since the middle of the 2010s because of the dramatic shift of the Oromoo political goals. This article is an attempt to discuss the dynamics of these historical narratives along with the dramatic shift of the Oromoo political goals. For the purpose of this discussion, document analysis historical method has been employed by consulting and critically reviewing divergent categories of documents. Then, it is found out that the Oromoo historical narratives have apparently changed from colonial thesis targeted “Gadaa Oromia” (“Independent Republic of Oromia”) to unison and pluralist thesis targeting “Greater Oromia” (“Cushitic Ethiopia”) in place of the “Semitic Ethiopia” with the socio-cultural, political and economic dominance of “Oromumma” in which the overall rights of the minorities are respected.*

**Key Terms:** *Oromoo Politics, Historical Narratives, “Gadaa Oromia”, “Greater Oromia”, “Cushitic Ethiopia”*

---

---

<sup>a</sup>Awol Allo, How a major anti-colonial Victory divided Ethiopia, March 1, 2019,  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/3/1/how-a-major-anti-colonial-victory-divided-ethiopia>

---

\* Corresponding author.

## Seeneffama Seenaa Koloniifi Bilisummaa irraa gara Tokkummaafi Hedduminaatti: Siyaasa Oromoo 1970-oota irraa Eegalee

### Axareeraa

*Baroota 1970-ootaa hanga baroota 2010tti seenessi seenaalee siyaasa Oromoo bu'aa ba'ii hedduu keessa yoo darbellee jijjiirama bayyee hinagarsiisiine. Sababa jijjiirama kaayyoo siyaasaa Oromootiin walakkaa bara 2010mootaa kaasee garuu siyaasni Oromoo jijjiirama cimaa agarsiisee jira. Waraqaan qorannoo kuni jijjiirama kayyoo siyaasaa Oromoo irratti hundaa'uun jijjiirama seenessa seenaa siyaasa Oromoo xinxaluu irratti xiyyeeffata. Xinxalli kuni kan geggeffame, ragaalee gabaasileefii barruulee addaa addaa keessaa waltiqabaman irratti dha. Xinxalli ragaalee akkasii irratti hundaa'uun geggeffame akka mul'isutti, seeneffamin seenaa siyaasa Oromoo xinyaada " Birmadummaa Oromiyaa" irraa gara " Gudditti Oromiyaa"tii kan jijjiirame fakkaata. Akkuma kanaan, seenessi siyaasa Oromoo kan yeroo ammaa Ol-aantummaan Oromiyaaafi Oromummaa dhimmota hawasummaa, aadaa, siyaasaafi dinagdeen keessaati mul'atu "Kushitic Ethiopia" mirkannessuu irratti kan fuullefatee fakkaata.*

**Jechoota Ijoo:** *Siyaasa Oromoo, seenessama seenaa, Gadaa Oromiyaa, Oromiyaa Guddittii, Kush Itopia*

### Background of the Study

It is known to the students of social sciences in general and that of history in particular that the term history stands for two parallel concepts. The first is the happening or incidents and the second is the narratives or telling about the happenings or reconstruction, representation of some section of the past. The subject of discussion in this paper is the second concept of history, the narrative or reconstruction. Historical narratives are telling story about the happenings or incidents depending on evidences pertaining to the incidents in a relatively coherent ways. They are attempts to tell or present a historical incident or fact the way one understood or perceived it. Historians underscore that "narratives are meaning production in history". Historical incidents or happenings could not give ample meanings without narratives (Jorn Rusen, 1987: 87-97).

It is on this aspect of history that differences are observed among writers on the same incident. There are two components of the narratives; the skill (art) and intentions (purposes) on which those differences are observed (Kenneth Molbjerg Jorgensen, 2006). Different writers or story tellers narrate one historical incident in different ways for numerous reasons. It is not very common to have differences on telling factual information regarding one historical incident. For instance, almost all historians, whether amateur or professional, did not have differences on presenting the factual information about the battle of Adwa; the date, the confronted states and the place of their confrontations, the vanquished and victorious states and the like. The differences, whether significant or minor, are observed on their narrations of, for instance, the how and why aspect of the battle or the long and short term outcomes of the victory.

Positivist historians claim that history should be written or presented with absolute neutrality or zero bias (Christopher Parker, 1983). However, absolute neutrality or zero bias is very difficult if not impossible to be achieved in the social sciences and humanities. It is said that one's bias begins from the selection or choice of a topic for research or discussion itself. Moreover, the art of narration differentiate one narrative from the other narrative on the same historical incident. So, the science claim of history might be doubtful, although, the students of history confidently assert that "history is both an art and a science". Only the methodology of

studies or researches makes history a science. The rigorous methods and techniques (methodology) a researcher depends on to gather, triangulate, check validities or make internal and external criticism on the validity of evidences are scientific and that makes history a science and the method itself is named as scientific method (M.I. Molteno, 2007). In all these aspects, historians could avoid or made maximum effort to minimize their bias. Thus, the critical areas where historians could not avoid their biases hundred percent are the historical writings or narratives where the evidences are coherently put together and given meanings. Here biases are inevitable for different reasons. What matters is the extent to which efforts are made to minimize them particularly by following the scientific methods strictly while doing the research.

Thus, why the differences are observed in the narratives? It is because of their biases that emanated from their purposes of writing. For instance, why states or governments, groups, individuals invest their time, resources, skill, knowledge etc. to study or write history? Writing or studying history or teaching-learning history is said to be for gaining or transmission of knowledge. For that matter, what is the purpose of gaining or transmission of that knowledge is the next question needs that to be answered. The important reason for a state, nations and other groups to study history is beyond that (Kenneth Molbjerg Jorgensen, 2006). So, their purposes particularly that of political elites is related to political power, of course under different inter-woven naming, like “identity making”, “nation building”, “state formation and transformation” and the like.

Having this in mind, we can make sense from the assertion that “historical narratives are more than a chronological series of events”. They “manifest a trend of some kind, or are colligated under a set of determinative values or goals.” (C. Behan McCullagh, 1987). Even if, professionals, more of positivist historians in history classroom or lecture room are telling their students that teaching, learning, studying or writing history to justify the prevailing political, socio-cultural or economic system is unacceptable, the purpose of including history in the national curriculum as a subject of study for most government revolves around that. For instance, it is to mobilize the young generation for the government’s political purpose. Thus, we can say that the major objective of history curriculum for most governments is to mobilize the masses, in whatever aspect it is, for political power purposes. The narratives may illustrate a theory of historical change; economic or political processes and the like but the ultimate goal is still political power and justification of that intention. That is why it is said, “Narratives may have a meaning as a whole over and above the meaning of its parts” (C. Behan McCullough, 1987). This whole meaning is to serve the repeatedly mentioned political purpose. It is because of the differences in the political purposes that we are witnessing debates and disputes on the historical narratives about the political history of Ethiopia. Initially, the subject was introduced to serve the purpose of the Ethiopian government as a monarchy. When the monarchical system began to be challenged, the same was true to its official historical narratives. All the political parties that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to build historical narratives that serve their political intention. They build different narratives from the same historical incidents. But, almost all of the actors could not or did not question most of the historical facts or incidents pertaining to time and place. We could not see much differences on the what, where and when aspects of a given incident. The common bone of contentions are the why, how, to what extent etc. aspects of an issue. For instance, a series of military campaigns of Ethiopian Emperors Tewodros II (1855-1868), Yohannis IV (1872-1889), Menilek II (1889-1913) were not nullified (BahruZewde, 2000).

Coming directly to the Oromoo issue, the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church produced documents that made the Oromoo alien to Ethiopia and only entered into the country in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They considered the Oromoo as invaders of the land which was not theirs (Taye Gebre Mariam, 1914 EC). However, after a time, that notion of invaders was changed in to a notion of migrants, probably because that assertion could indicate the strength and power of the Oromoo socio-cultural and political system that enabled them to invade or defeat the other claimants (Getachew Haile, 2002). In fact, it is well known that the significant part of the Oromoo historical experiences were intentionally avoided or overlooked in the historical discussions of Ethiopia.

Generally, their history had not been considered as part of the “main-stream” socio-cultural and political as well as economic history of the country for long. Only the 16<sup>th</sup> century was taken as a land mark in the course of Ethiopian history. The official historical literature even did not tell us the where about and entire history of the people before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After a while, such official history began to address the Oromoo history considering the Bale highlands as the “original home land” of the people (Mohammed Hassen, 1994).

The introduction of modern education system and the inclusion of history as part of the Ethiopian school curriculum exposed a number of Oromoo students to such historical narratives and dynamics. Then, they began to challenge and accuse those exclusive narratives. They went to the extent of asserting that it was intentionally done to distance the Oromoo from the socio-cultural belongingness, economic privileges and political power of the country. These schooled and grown up Oromoo elites underlined that, the narratives were there to make the Oromoo the political minorities as well as marginal in the “main-stream” state sponsored socio-cultural system in contrast to the Oromoo’s demographic majority. In the same token, they claimed that the Oromoo were denied the economic and other related provisions by the government to citizens. It was after all these assertions that they came up with a series of their own historical narratives as a reaction to the official historical narratives of the Ethiopian government one after the other (Bonnie K. Holcomb & Sisai Ibssa, 1990).

So, the major objective of the present discussion is to deal with the dynamics of these Oromoo historical narratives and political intentions from one extreme to the other in the course of half a century, from the early 1970s to the late 2010s. The earlier one was the independence (separatist) narrative assuming the place of Oromoo in the wider Ethiopian history as colonial, and the latter is pluralist narrative considering the demographic majority of the Oromoo as spring board to the aspired political, socio-cultural and economic majority. Here, [cultural] pluralism is a bit different from multi-culturalism which was advocated by the TPLF at least in theory. In pluralism there is a prevalence of dominant group and the survival of minorities on condition that their rights are respected. Whereas, multi-culturalism is an avoidance of that domination and an aspiration to put all on equal grounds from the cultural point of view; no notion of main-stream culture in this case (Jane Barnes Mack, 1994: 63-72). As to them, that main-stream culture, Ethiopiannes (“*Ethiopiawinet*”) aspired to be prevailed in the present narrative is the Cushitic (“*Oromummaa*”) instead of Semitic (“*Amharanet*”).

Accordingly, the specific objectives of this paper are:

1. To analyze the dynamics of Oromoo historical narratives by the Oromoo elites to justify their political motives since the early 1970s;
2. To explain the major historical incidents that were taken as inputs for series of divergent and convergent narratives;
3. To compare and contrast the global texts that have been served as guidelines for the colonial and independence narratives, with local contexts that were overlooked either intentionally or innocently;
4. To discuss the current paradoxical historical narratives regarding the place of the Oromoo people pertaining to the survival of Ethiopia as an independent state unlike the rest of Africa.

For the present purpose, divergent historical documents were gone through. Books authored by both “professional” and “amateur” historians, academic journal articles and book chapters by social scientists from different disciplines and professions, magazines and newspapers of several categories, opinions from different web-sites and media outlets, art products like paintings and songs were consulted, reviewed, analyzed and presented in different sections of this paper either directly or indirectly.

## The Genesis of Colonial and Independence Historical Narratives in the Oromoo Politics

The Oromoo history in the modern school curriculum of the country has been taught as part and parcel of Ethiopian history. The curriculum asserted that the Oromoo people had been participating in the political, social and economic affairs of the country at least since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Bahru Zewde, 2000; H.G Marcus, 2002). However, some historical sources that had their roots in the foreign interest or touch tend to discuss the Oromoo history as part of the colonial historical experiences. Mainly, the emerging schooled Oromoo and non-Oromoo elites, who had exposure to those foreign documents, were active in promoting these colonial narratives. Moreover, Oromoo students who were taught or trained by instructors who had the above mentioned colonial orientation, or taught by foreigners who had none or less academic mission but employed as school teachers or university lecturers became the proponents of the same school of thought. Similarly, missionaries and their Oromoo disciples were also active in promoting this narrative (Asafa Jalata, 1996: 95-123).

Coming to the early contact between those foreigners and the Oromoo, the earliest Oromoo studies were begun in Europe interacting with Oromoo slaves in the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea or in the Middle East. The French and German scholars can be taken as pioneers in this aspect (R. Pankhurst, 1976:171-206). They were studying about the Oromoo not only from those ransomed Oromoo slave boys and girls but also by traveling deep into the Oromoo inhabited territories of Ethiopia. In fact, they had problems from the Ethiopian emperors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in their move deep in to the Oromoo inhabited territories. Emperor Tewodros II and Emperor Yohannis IV can be taken as ideal examples for their attempt to hinder those missionary activities. Of course, Emperor Tewodros II and regional governors (*Rases* and *Dejazmaches*) had European travellers and missionaries with them as advisors or educators (Stanislaw Chojnacki, 1961: 71-89). Those European travellers and missionaries, who were interested to study about the Oromoo, were using the Latin script to write the Oromoo language just like the other Europeans did in the rest parts of Africa (Pankhurst, 1976: 171-206). Of course, all of the African languages including the Oromoo language did not have their own script except Arabic in some coastal regions of the continent and the Ge'ez (*fidel*) script in the case of Ethiopia.

Of the Europeans who managed to enter into the interior part of the Ethiopian territory and were interested to do their similar business with the Oromoo, the Germans were relatively active. They are well remembered because of their introduction of two long lasting models of nation building after their own experience. These were the unification and foundation of an "independent Oromoo republic", and the anti- Abyssinians equivalent to anti-Semitism mind-set and rhetoric (Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC). They introduced the idea of unified sovereign Oromoo republic "Ormania" later renamed "Oromia" accepting Protestant Christianity as their religion using Latin script for their education purposes. The pioneer in this case was Krapf from Germany (Austrian) who coined even the term "Ormania" the predecessor of the present official name "Oromia" to mean Oromoo country as spring board for the latter which was coined by the founders of Oromoo Liberation Front (OLF) in the early 1970s (C.W Isenberg & J. L Krapf, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842). But, most of them were chased away from the country after their attempt to write Ethiopian languages in Latin script was known to the Ethiopian rulers. Till then, they were making continuous effort to get permission to get in to the Ethiopian territory. After their persistent effort to get into the interior part of the country mainly to the Oromoo area, some of these missionaries got admission from Menilek since the 1870s with a precondition of dropping Latin script and using Ge'ez script for their writing. The missionaries accepted the precondition and began to use the Ge'ez script for political reasons, i.e. to be in good relations with Menilek. This was said to be because the king was not in a position to manage two scripts in one state. Thus, it seems that, it was because of this reason that the early Afan Oromoo scriptures in Ethiopia including the translated Bible available in the country were written in Ge'ez script (Pankhurst, 1976: 171-206).

The politics of Latin script was brought again into existence after a century in the 1970s not directly by the Europeans rather by the Oromoo elites who were the graduate of their missionary schools. Moreover, the then Oromoo political movements were also based on “anti-Abyssinian’ legacies” school of taught. Most probably, it was this “anti-Abyssinian” political agenda that took them to re-introduce the missionary’s Latin script under the pretext of pedagogical and linguistic reasons in place of the local Ge’ez script for writing purpose (Mekuria Bulcha, 1995: 36-59). Along with this, the idea of one nation distinct from “Abyssinia” was inculcated in the minds of the young Oromoo generation. It was done with the savor of anti-Semitism (“anti-Abyssinianism”) after the model of Germany’s (anti- Jew) movements (Joseph Ketema, 2013). The first generation of western Oromoo Protestant Christians (mainly priests and their children) who were graduates of missionary schools came to the politics of Ethiopia with these thoughts of distinctiveness and “anti-Abyssinianism”. Moreover, the attitude of Oromoo elites of the time was characterized by the political affiliation to the Europeans than to the Ethiopian (Ezekiel Gebissa, 2002: 75-96). These ideas of distinctiveness and affiliation to the European can be seen from the interest of the western Oromoo to be part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) and to be left as independent state after the possible withdrawal of the British forces from the region. Thus, the period of Italian occupation itself was one critical landmark in the promotion of these notions of distinctiveness and independence from the “Abyssinian colonization” even to the extent of considering the Italians as the liberators (Ezekiel Gebissa, 2002: 75-96).

The other landmark in the agenda of distinctiveness and domination by the others, which had contributed to the genesis and spread of the colonial narrative, was the publication of a political article entitled “On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia”<sup>b</sup> by Walleign Mekonnen on Nov. 17, 1969 as a by-product of his exposure to socialist political literature. His exposure to the socialist ideology through the literature and personal contact with individuals who were proponents of the idea (like university students from Eritrea) pushed him to popularize this ethno-nationalist agenda at the expense of Ethio-nationalist agenda<sup>c</sup>. The Oromoo students were among the students who bought his idea of national domination and took the publication of the article from a non-Oromoo student as a blessing disguise that their status among the Amhara students was recognized<sup>d</sup>. This article began to be taken as blueprint by the ethno-nationalist students and their future political organizations. Scholars who are the proponents of the ethno-nationalist political agenda are still strongly defending the content of this article. The works of Mekuria Bulcha and Asafa Jalata are ideal examples. In fact, Negaso Gidada commented that the article of Walleign was to bring solution to the real and perceived problems of “ethnic based oppressions and exploitations” within the realm of Ethiopia. Negasso explained that Walleign’s intention was to see the equality of all nations and nationalities. According to Negasso, even, the understanding of the term “liberation” was not to mean independence, rather equality or freedom from inequality. So, as to him, Walleign’s intention was to liberate the different nations and nationalities from those multi-faceted impositions and to establish “democratic Ethiopia by means of democratic revolution” (Negasso, 1912 EC).

One more landmark in this genesis and spread of colonial and independence historical narratives in the Oromoo politics was the Ethiopian Student Movement. As briefly indicated above, concepts which were adopted from global trends of the time without analyzing the contexts, were influencing the students’ movement. Some of the rhetoric taken from the global trends and rehearsed by the students were; anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, anti-Zionism, anti- apartheid, anti-racism, anti-feudalism, self-determination,

---

<sup>b</sup>Walleign Mekonnen, “On The Questions of Nationalities in Ethiopia”, Nov. 17, 1969, Arts IV, HSIU, @<https://www.marxists.org>

<sup>c</sup>Yared Tibebe, “ ‘On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia’ - A Historical Review of Walleign Mekonnen’s Article Half a Century Later”, November 17, 2019, @ <https://www.satenaw.com>

<sup>d</sup>Mekuria Bulcha, “ Walleign Mekonnen, the Question of Nationalities and Ethiopia’s Persistent Crisis”, June 9, 2018, Oromia Today, Independent Voice of Oromia, @ <https://oromia.today>

human and democratic rights, etc. It seems that the students adopted these concepts without clearly understanding the local contexts. For instance, of the above concepts, none of them might correctly explain the Oromoo issue in Ethiopia. Unlike what Lencho Leta did after three decades, the students could not be in a position to understand and give the right analysis regarding the real as well as the perceived Oromoo problems (Leenco Lata, 2004, 2012). Moreover, the then Oromoo students were exposed to external geopolitics of the time that affected Ethiopia negatively in one form or the other. However, the Oromoo students took that effect as helping factor for their political movements. For instance, they had significant contact with the Eritrean movements which had its root/base in the Middle East politics and the Bale Rebellion which had its root/base in the Somali irredentism. Consequently, the contact between the students from Eritrea and students from different Afan Oromoo speaking provinces brought the idea of liberation even independence to the latter (Negaso, 2012 EC: 45-46).

The infiltration of the idea of independence among the members of Self Help Association, Mecha-Tulama seems the direct result of this contact. The students from different Afan Oromoo speaking provinces of the country were attending the weekly meetings of the Association in its office at Gulalle in the middle of the 1960s. Some of the students who were attending the meeting of Mecha-Tulama and became the founding members of the future OLF by then were Baro Tumsa, Ibsa Gutema, Abera Wakjira, Bekele Wolde, Addisu Tolosa, Boru Tedecha, Tsegaye Nemera, Yohannis (Dima) Negewo, Megersa Bari, Negaso Gidada, Tilahun Gamta, Guta Sarnesa, etc. At this early stage of their attendance of the meeting, the issue of “independent republic of Oromia” was never raised in the speech of the members or their rules and regulations. “Self-help” for development and equality through constructing infrastructures (roads and bridges), schools, churches/mosques, etc. was the major objective of Mecha-Tulama Self Help Association (Daniel Tefera, 2003 EC).

The emergence of political parties as the outcome of the student movements mentioned above had also highly influenced the Oromoo politics. Some of the parties were said to be Socialist Oriented explicitly and ethnic implicitly and the others were ethnic explicitly and socialist implicitly (Lencho, 2004). Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) commonly known as (MEISON) were more of the former type and the Tigrian People Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromoo Liberation Front (OLF) were more of the latter type. However, none of them could assume the political power they were strongly aspiring for in the 1960s or the 1970s. The first two were totally removed from the Ethiopian political scene almost for good after their urban massacre against one another and the massacre inflicted against them by the military government and their flight to exile, the bush or surrender to the military government. However, the latter two who had explicit ethnic political program retreated from the urban political scene and found themselves in the bush as guerrilla fighters propagating their political agenda for the next two decades (Mengistu Haile Mariam, 2011).

### **The Foundation of the OLF and Its Colonial and Independence Historical Narratives**

It was after the Mecha- Tulama Self Help Associations was banned by the Imperial government in 1967 that the Oromoo students began political movements by organizing groups like “Oromia” and “Bakalcha”, and similar self-help associations like “Dhedhesa Development Association” as well as a bulletin which was named as “The Oromoo Voice against Tyranny.” In those movements, they went even to the extent of misinterpreting or misunderstanding the speech of General Tadesse Birru on the usual meetings of Mecha-Tulama while he was describing peasant condition in the Afan Oromoo speaking Ethiopian provinces. They assumed or understood as if it was prevailing only in those provinces of the country. In fact, these early movements of the Oromoo students were claiming that they intended to establish “Democratic Ethiopia” (Negaso, 2012 EC: 51; Asafa Jalata, 1993: 381-402; Tesfaye Gebre-ab, 2008:313-327).

These Oromoo students' political movements along with the Bale Rebellion resulted in the emergence of Oromoo political organizations. The emerging Oromoo political organizations had two broad wings from the very beginning; the "Islam oriented" eastern wing and the "Christian oriented" central-western wing. The eastern wing had a sort of association with the newly independent Somalia in one form or another. The central-western wing was aiming, although very loose, relations with the Sudan via the Beni Shangul area (Fikre Silassie Wogderes, 2006 EC). Of all these Oromoo groupings, the OLF became very popular and seem as an umbrella for them. When it faced challenges from the *Derg* during its early days, those members in the eastern wing were trying to move to Somalia and the members in the central-western wing were trying to hide themselves in the other apparently legal Oromoo affiliated political organizations, MEISON and Ethiopian Oppressed People's Struggle (EOPS) commonly by its Amharic abbreviation as ICHAT. Even, they began to work with the *Derg* under the pretext of taming the military or said to be giving critical support until 1977 (Negaso, 2012 EC).

The eastern wing which emerged from the Bale Rebellion was led by Wako Gutu and was believed to be supported by Somalia. Gradually, from this wing, there founded a Somali affiliated organization by the name Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF) in 1976. Here also happened the deviation of certain members from this group considering themselves as Ethiopians than Somali and founded an organization by the name Ethiopian National Revolutionary Liberation Front under the leadership of Hassen Bune and his group opened its office in Yemen. However, it was closed after a positive diplomatic relations between the *Derg* and the Yemeni government. The Somali Abbo Liberation Front survived to 1991 under the same name and renamed itself Oromoo Abbo Liberation Front in 1991, this group even participated in the July Conference of Addis Ababa in 1991. In fact, the majority of the members of the eastern wing (Islamic Oriented) were the Oromoo from Borana, Guji, Bale, Arsi and Harar. They considered the other groups ("proper OLF") as Christian organization. Even, the western-central wing also faced implicit cleavages within itself by labelling the members of western group as Protestants and children of the missionaries on the one hand and labelling the central/Shewan as Gobanas, after the Shawan Gobana Dachi. As a result, these members of the Oromoo Organization could not develop cohesiveness and confidence among themselves and that was said to be one of the big challenges of the Oromoo politics (Negaso, 2012 EC; Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC).

There is no clarity on the early history of the OLF probably because of the pressure it faced from the consecutive Ethiopian governments that forced it to do every activity secretly. That also made very difficult to access documents about the party even its political programs. Such conditions led to the absence of clear knowledge about the party which in turn resulted in the mystification of the OLF. The OLF was said to be officially founded in the summer of 1973 in Addis Ababa. The story about its foundation goes on as, a higher body that sponsored establishment of Oromoo Liberation Front (OLF) known as Central Coordinating Body came into being in Addis Ababa on 1 July, 1973. Brigadier General Tadesse Birru who was in exile at Galamso was appointed as the chairman of the central coordinating body. Other founding members like Baro Tumsa and Magarsa Bari said to be played a key role in the day-to-day functioning of the coordinating body. Then, in June 1976 the Central Coordinating Body called for Addis Ababa Congress that inaugurated and officially adopted the name OLF, which had already been proposed and was so far in use. Some ex-members said that the meeting was concluded by revisiting and revising the political program of the party. As to the program of 1973, the OLF had planned to struggle for "equality of nations and nationalities" within the realm of Ethiopia. But, that of 1976 was designed targeting the "independent republic of Oromia" (Negaso, 2013 EC). So, it can be understood that the body which was led by Tadesse Biru did not target the foundation of the "Independent Republic of Oromia. It is very difficult to believe that Tadesse was working for the foundation of the Republic of Oromia rather he was aspiring for equality of nations and nationalities within Ethiopia. In this meeting of 1976, a member by the name Jara Abba Gada, from the eastern groups was invited and attended. Incidentally, this participant was elected as the chairman of the OLF (commander of OLA as to



others, since the chairman was Mageresa) probably to bridge the gap of regionalism and religiosity aiming Somalia as possible base for the party. While he was serving as a chair, there happen conflict between the *Derg* and the Oromoo groups within it (MEISON and ICHAT) in 1977. Then, some of the members, including BaroTumsa went to Hararghe to join the Jarra Abba Gada group. After a year (1978) BaroTumsa, Badho Dechasa and others were assassinated by their own comrades, OLF members<sup>e</sup>. In fact, some members of the OLF do not accept the above explanation. Rather, they claim that, Jara served as Oromoo Liberation Army (OLA) commander, not as chairman. It was Megersa Bari, who served as OLF Chairman from the beginning up to the massacre by Somali bandits at Shinnigga on April 15, 1980. Then, the rest members including Lencho (Yohannis) Lata exiled themselves to Sudan via Djibouti. The main reason for the assassination was the absence of confidence among the Muslim eastern wing on the Christian group of the OLF although Jara denied that. After a time, the Jarra group joined another organization by the name “Islamic Front for Oromoo Liberation” leaving the OLF. The Oromoo political organizations could not maintain unity among themselves. Even, the most popular EPRP itself tried to attract Oromoo members by organizing an Oromoo wing, named Oromoo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) within itself, the predecessor of the TPLF’s OPDO (Asafa Jalata, 1993: 381-403; Negaso, 2012 EC; Daniel Tefera, 2003 EC).

Regardless of what has been mentioned above, the first chairman of the OLF for the first two years was said to be Megersa Bari as to Negaso but Dima(Yohannis) Negewo as to Merera. The founding members, Megersa Bari and Abboma Mitiku were assassinated in the eastern corner of Ethiopia while they were leaving for Somalia. In fact, they had already been forced to abandon the capital for Hararghe in 1977 as they decided to resort completely to armed struggle. They went from their bases in Hararghe to Somalia in 1980. They left for Somalia although both of them were from the Christian member of the Oromoo society, probably because Megersa was from the Arsi-Bale area and well aware of the directions and locations of the eastern area than the western. But, Abboma was born in Addis Ababa whose parents were from the Western Oromoo<sup>f</sup> area. He was once the Secretary of University Students’ Association. Moreover, he travelled abroad several times to found an Oromoo organization before his final unfortunate travel to Somalia. Once, he was in Yemen and founded an organization by the name “Organization for the Oromoo People’s Struggle” (Merera, 2005 EC; Negaso, 2012 EC).

The political program of the OLF was popularized among the Oromoo including those in Europe. For instance, in 1976, Kulani Gudina, the daughter of GudinaTumsa, the known Protestant pastor and brother of BaroTumsa disseminated the program among the Oromoo students in Europe mainly among those in Germany because of the presence of large number of Oromoo student community in Germany<sup>g</sup>. Missionary affiliation can be taken as the contributing factor for that (Negaso, 2012 EC).

The armed struggle of the OLF was started in the Charchar Mountains of Hararghe probably aiming access to foreign territory on the eastern border of Ethiopia. Its first bullet was said to be fired by Elemo Kiltu. However, the OLF was not supported as such by Somalia being considered as obstacle to the motto of “Greater Somalia”. Similarly, the OLF managed to open office in Khartoum but could not get reliable access to the Oromoo inhabited regions of western Ethiopia, since southern Sudan was the base of SPLA a good ally of the *Derg* (Negaso, 2012 EC; Merera, 2005 EC; Teferi, 2018). So, one can say that the OLF attached itself strongly to the goal of “Independent Republic of Oromia” without analyzing these challenging real situations on the ground.

---

<sup>e</sup> Of course, the present author came across information that justified the incident as “There are strong evidences that indicate Badho killed Baro and then killed himself or killed by Baro’s bodyguard as they disagreed on struggle strategy, i.e, Baro supported to work from within the *Derg* while Badho refused to accept that”.

<sup>f</sup> Some sources indicate that his parents were from Ambo area but other source says he was from Wallagga, in the vicinity of Gimbi.

<sup>g</sup>Dimetros Birku, “Ethiopia: Does Germany has special interest in Oromo Politics?”, November 15, 2014, @ <https://borkena.com>

As mentioned above, it seems that it took them about two to three decades to understand that, at least, at the level of the core founding members (Leenco, 2004, 2012; Joseph, 2013 EC; Teferi, 2018). Moreover, some members of the party said that as this eastern front was threatened constantly by hostility from Somali government, OLF began to consider the need to open new bases. In fact, guerrilla leaders, whose spokesman was Sheik Jaarraa Abbaa Gadaa, proposed to continue the activity in Hararghe, while OLF's Central Committee stood in favour of launching an extensive guerrilla campaigns from different Oromoo localities. Although Committee's proposal was agreed upon, Jaarraa, who threatened the Committee by building his personal influence to the extent of dispatching his own diplomatic missions to Arab countries without their knowledge, was finally purged from OLF in 1978. He later on established links with Hargeessa-based Sheik Bilisaa's already founded Oromoo Islamic Liberation Front as mentioned above.

Unlike the OLF's demand for independence from the "colonial occupation of Abyssinia", the political goal of its contemporary and analogous party, the TPLF tended to be pragmatic. Except in its nomenclature, it had almost similar program with EPRP, MEISON and even with the Derg itself. All of them were looking for the political power at the center, Ethiopian government. Moreover, they did not accept the colonial narrative of the OLF, although the TPLF apparently support that of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF's) colonial narrative (Merera, 2007). In fact, most members of the EPRP blamed the TPLF for its support of the EPLF's "colonial question". All of them except the OLF took the southern campaign of Menilek beginning from the 1870s to about 1900, as "feudal territorial expansion to collect taxes and tributes". But, the OLF deviated from that and considered the expansion as "colonial occupation." They had also differences with the OLF on the possible way-out from these perceived and real problems. All of them were targeting "equality of nations and nationalities" whereas the OLF was targeting the creation of the "Independent Republic of Oromia". Generally, the fundamental differences between these two analogous parties, the OLF and the TPLF can be understood as follows. In contrast to the highly cohesive historical narratives of the TPLF politics aiming for central political power than secession, the OLF, including most of the Oromoo elites and scholars were busy advocating for secession under a victim mind-set instead of targeting the big political power at the center of this huge state. Such political orientations seem to be totally absent among the Oromoo elites and scholars to the turn of the century. This political agendum of the OLF partially helped the TPLF later on to forge the OPDO in 1989/90 which was serving as an instrument to distance the OLF from the core of political activities within the realm of Ethiopia. Of course, it is said that the TPLF did this after a meeting with OLF in 1987/8 to discuss on some critical issues like those mentioned above but end up in failure. Since then, the OLF could not be as successful as the TPLF because of several reasons. One of them was absence of access to foreign territory or liberated domain of armed struggle<sup>h</sup> for it was confined to the eastern corners of Oromia (Negaso, 2012 EC; Teferi Bezuayehu, 2018).

Secondly, Somalia did not want to see the united Oromoo which could be obstacle to its irredentist political agenda, although it allowed the OLF to open an office in Moqadishu in 1980 to be closed after a while. Moreover, the absence of unity among the Oromoo elites and members as well as related political organizations and associations because of religion and region differences had its contribution for the retardation of the Oromoo struggle for political power at home or targeted "Independent Republic of Oromia". To worsen the matter, this difference was highly aggravated by the intervention of Somalia under the cover of Islam but to Somalize the eastern Muslim Oromoo of Ethiopia. Consequently, the assassination of influential founding members like BaroTumsa, Badho Dechasa and others in 1978 because of the differences and absence

---

<sup>h</sup> In fact, members and advocates of the OLF claim that in 1990, OLF guerrilla struggle began to demonstrate its capacity to ward off the numerically strong and highly armed Derg forces. For example, Derg's 131<sup>st</sup> Brigade is reported to have been dismantled by Oromo Liberation Army in a battle that liberated Asosaa.

of confidences among themselves also contributed for the drawbacks. In contrast to these, most of the OSA publications put much blame on Somalia for the failure of OLF (Negaso, 2012 EC; Teferi Bezuayehu, 2018).

To add one more hindering factor, the OLF had no strong moral and material support from the international community because of this political agendum that could not fit into their interest. The political agendum of the Oromoo for an “Independent Republic of Oromia” was not up to their interest. It can be said that the pragmatic TPLF was in a position to exploit this international interest and safely led to the center of political power. Particularly, the United States of America had contacts with both the leaders of the OLF and the TPLF but they could not develop interest in the political agenda of “Republic of Oromia”. They did not believe that the emergence of new “Independent Republic of Oromia” in the Horn of Africa could solve the prevailing regional problems (Negaso, 2012 EC). Probably, after understanding that, one of the founding members of the OLF, Lencho Leta at least at individual level dropped the idea of “Republic of Oromia” and came up with the idea of the Horn of Africa as Common Home Land. Hence, he wrote a book on the issue probably to develop the awareness of his fellow comrades in particular and the Oromoo elites in general (Leenco, 2004, 2012; Teferi Bizuayehu, 2018).

However, some of his comrades like Yohannis Benti (Galasa Dilbo), Abba Chala Lata (Lencho’s brother), Firew (Dawod) Ibsa said to be not confident with the idea and did not accept it. But, they were pretending as if they accepted the idea simply to buy time and suitable conditions. It is said that they had another plan at the back of their mind, i.e, they behaved like that until the OLF army could over-flood the whole of Oromia and they could be able to occupy the regional political power. Then, they hoped that they could be in apposition to declare an “Independent Republic of Oromoo” (Negaso, 2012 EC). In contrast to this, as indicated frequently, the TPLF was exploiting the smallness and relative homogeneity of Tgrians for its political agenda. The common rhetoric regarding the political history of post-1889 Tigray particularly on how the successors of Yohannis IV lost the power because of absence of unity among themselves was highly promoted by Tgrian intellectuals (Gebre Kidan, 2010).

Very lately, some of the members of the OLF supported Lencho’s idea and withdrew from the party and managed to found a new party called Oromoo Democratic Front (ODF) in March 2013. Of course, we do not have clear information about the where about of this party after Lencho claimed that he “retired himself” from formal political activities. Of course, the OLF revised its political program once again in 2004 and dropped the political agenda of unconditional “Independent Republic of Oromia” replacing it with “self-determination”. So, the OLF had designed about three consecutive political programs one after the other in the course of its history; the 1974, the 1976, and the 2004. Of these programs, the second that was serving for about 28 years (1976-2004) officially targeted and advocated for an “Independent Republic of Oromia”. The third (the 2004) tried to analyse the local contexts and put aside the idea of the “Independent Republic of Oromia” and came up with a blurred political agenda “self-determination” (Negaso, 2012 EC ; Leenco, 2004; Tefri Bizuayehu, 2018).

Thus, the documents we have at our disposal regarding the Oromoo politics since the 1970s are characterized by mystification of the history of the OLF. The Oromoo politics in the OLF mind-set since 1976 was totally said to be colonial historical narrative dependent and targeted to be independent from “Abyssinian black colonialism” as did the rest of Africa from the European colonialism (Geda Melba, 1985 EC). From the very beginning, the teaching and preaching of the missionaries among the western Oromoo was characterized by underlining the rhetoric of exclusion of the Oromoo from the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) political and socio-cultural as well as economic privileges. To them, the government of the then Ethiopia did that because of the fact that it considered the “Oromoo as alien to the country”. So, the Oromoo that had exposure to missionaries (mainly German) came up with literature, books and journal articles as well as newspapers and magazines with

their contents that could be identified as “anti-Semitism” from cultural point of view and colonial thesis from the political point of view (Joseph Ketema, 2018; Assafa Jalata, 1993, 2003: 61-111).

They identified the Oromoo case in Ethiopia as “black colonialism”. And they put “Independent Republic of Oromia” as a way forward, i. e, the need for independence from that black colonialism (“Abyssinian colonialism”). That motto was strongly advocated as the only way out for about three decade<sup>i</sup>. The term Oromia was articulated as “the country of Oromoo people” in the book authored by Geda Melba (Geda Melba, 1985). The Oromoo diaspora in Europe and America who were there under the pretext of “political problems they had been facing in their homeland” were the ardent proponents of the notion. The foundation of Oromoo Studies Association (OSA) in America in 1992 with its publications of journal articles as “*Journal of Oromoo Studies*” and books mainly not in Afaan Oromoo but in English were highly advocating for the same political goal. Many of the contributors and the main actors were scholars who had initial touch with the missionaries’ education from western Ethiopia (Oromia) and the Oromoo Muslims from the eastern part of Ethiopia (Oromia) who had initial information about or direct exposure to OLF’s armed struggle in Hararghe. These Oromoo groups were very active in publishing journal articles and books for the Oromoo diaspora and the international community including the academia although the non-Oromoo local and international Ethiopian academia rejected their publications as destructive. Addis Ababa University seems the pioneer at institutional level although individual professors and researchers from the university had strong attachment to it and published articles on its journal (JOS).

The big loophole to those colonial historical narratives of the Oromoo politics had been the role of the Oromoo people in the victory of Adwa. The above mentioned publications of OSA characterized the place of the Oromoo at the battle and achieved victory as colonial factor. They labelled the main actors in the battle as colonial agents (askaris and slaves) comparing them with the Africans from different regions of the continent who fought for Europeans during the colonial occupation or during their great wars, WWI and II. They added that the victory of Adwa made Menilek more powerful and encouraged him to “forge Ethiopia as the prison house of nations and nationalities.”<sup>j</sup>

As a consequence, the OLF perspective of Oromoo historical narratives (colonial narrative) had been widely spread and accepted among the young post-1991 generation of the Oromoo, not from the formal school curriculum. But, through the informal channel of the OLF that can be taken as the “major success” of the party. Moreover, using the Afaan Oromoo as a language of school instruction and office works, administrative region bearing the name of the Oromoo (Oromia) with partial autonomy, as well as promotion of Oromoo culture and language, having both printed and electronic media were some of the successes of the OLF. Unfortunate to the party, the main actor in implementing these in the rank and file of Ethiopian government did not or could not bear the name of the OLF as their political party, rather, the Oromoo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO). Contrary to these successes, the “Independent Republic of Oromia” was not achieved, can be identified as the lost agenda of the OLF. Although several factors have been mentioned for that loss, it was mainly because of the fact that its ideology or party program was apparently based on less factual and less contextual discourses (Leenco Lata, 2004, 2012; Teferi Bizuahehu, 2018; Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC).

The Oromoo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), which was understood as mediocre partner of the TPLF was advocating ambiguous historical narratives in its party politics. The majority of its members were in the mind-set of the OLF politics and accept its historical narratives. Their historical narratives can be identified

---

<sup>i</sup>Teferi Mergo, “Ethiopia’s Problems Stem From Internal Colonialism!”, July 22, 2021, @ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/22>

<sup>j</sup>Mekuria Bulcha, “Adwa and Abyssinia’s Participation in the Scramble for Africa: Does that have relevance to the on-going Oromo protests?” @ <http://finfinnetribune.com/gadaa/category/article/mekria-bulcha>

as “indoor” and “outdoor”; exploitative- oppressive and equality of nations and nationality historical narrative in the outdoor politics and colonial and independence historical narratives in the indoor politics. In fact, both of the OLF and OPDO equally took the assertion that the “Oromoo were Political Minorities” in the history of the country. It was probably because of these dual layer (outdoor and indoor) historical narratives that a number of Oromoo scholars, artists, party members even cadres moved from one party to the other overnight depending on the suitable situations they were in. Those in abroad who were affiliated to the OLF came back home and began to work with the OPDO and some left OPDO and moved to Europe or America and began to work with the OLF. It was partly because of the prevailing of such dual mind-set in the Oromoo politics and partly to get asylum in Europe or America since the OLF members were said to be under pressure and imprisonment by the TPLF/EPRDF government of Ethiopia. The same was also true in the case of Oromoo journalism and media outlets. A number of Oromoo journalists migrated to Europe and America promoting the OLF and got asylum there even employment in the media established for that purpose. Parallel to this, some of them returned back home and began to work with the OPDO without much challenge as long as they could be programmed with the other software (Teferi Bizuayehu, 2018; Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC).

### **The Great Departure: Glow of Unison and Pluralist Historical Narratives**

The decade 2010s can be taken as the period of departure in the Oromoo historical narratives because of the dramatic shift in the goals and rhetoric of Oromoo politics. The narrative was a shift from considering the Oromoo in the history and politics of Ethiopia as peripheral or marginal to central, victim mind-set to victorious, main actor and claimant. Some authors even tried to show up their “Oromoonnes” being writing their names adding grandfathers on the books, journal and magazine articles they authored about Oromoo in case theirs and their fathers’ names are with Amharic meaning (Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC; Teferi Bizuayehu, 2018). Politically, the elites began targeting to “own not only the regional state of Oromia but also the federal state of Ethiopia”<sup>k</sup>. The initiation of a core group by the name “Team Lemma” can be mentioned as the embryo of this political motive. It is very difficult to indicate a single possible factor that led the Oromoo politics to that dramatic shift accompanied by historical narratives to the same direction. However, it is possible to say that the factors are more of internal than external to the country from the geographical point of view. Particularly, the ideological change among the Oromoo politicians in the country than abroad along with the Oromoo youth in the government systems, universities, colleges and secondary schools seems to have significantly contributed for the dramatic shift (Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC). Thus, the failure of the OLF in several aspects to deliver its promises resulted in the overshadowing of its main political rhetoric<sup>l</sup> and the coming of the internal Oromoo organization having “Team Lemma” as its core with a new political vision. The group began spreading their idea and mobilizing the youth through a series of calls by the media outlet called Oromoo Media Network (OMN) (Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC).

Although they had been popularized the political movement initially by media outlet based itself abroad (OMN), such political movement strengthened itself much more by the coming of the local one, Oromoo broadcasting network (OBN) in the same orientation. It seems that the Oromoo politics of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century tried to correct or take lessons from the decisive faults committed by the OLF for long since its foundation, i.e. not to leave the political epicentre for the demographically minority groups. The Oromoo group mainly, the “OPDO” with its core figures “Team Lemma” and their fellow youth did not need to leave that epicentre unlike what the OLF did in the mid-1990s (Teferi Bizuayehu, 2018). Along with this, they also

---

<sup>k</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “The Oromo can own Ethiopia and Ethiopiawinet in our Terms!”, November 27, 2016, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com/2016/11/27/>

<sup>l</sup>Jawar Siraj Mohammed, “Failure to Deliver: The Journey of the Oromo Liberation Front in the Last Two Decades”, Stanford University, July 27, 2009, @<https://www.opride.com> › 2009/07/29

dropped the major historical narrative which was promoting the victim and peripheral mind-set that was targeting an “Independent Republic of Oromia”. That “paradigm shift” was apparently astonished as well as alarmed other political parties and peoples of the country (Joseph Ketema, 2013 EC). They got significant popular support even from non-Oromoo groups strongly affiliated to the center political rhetoric. Of course, it is difficult to say that the other ethnic groups or peoples of Ethiopia fully understood the moves and motives of these Oromoo elites and their political parties.<sup>m</sup>

So, it can be characterized as the episode of transforming the Oromoo politics from periphery oriented to center oriented, from Oromia targeted to Ethiopia targeted. The historical role of the Oromoo in the making and defending of Ethiopia as a sovereign state began to be given attention in the historical narratives of the Oromoo elites. Individual actors who were active in the making of modern Ethiopia in collaboration with the elites from the other ethnic groups who were previously labelled as traitors began to be recognized as heroes of the Oromoo (Tabor Wami, 2013 EC). In fact, there are still remaining confusions on this matter. A number of individuals who collaborated with the historical enemy of Ethiopia against the sovereignty of the country are still taken as heroes among the majority of the Oromoo youth because of the absence of any official attempt from the government to challenge or correct that notion. How General Wako Gutu including some of his fellows and *Abune* Petrosor Garasu Dhuki are identified together as the same heroes of the Oromoo (Mengistu Haile Mariam, 2011). Moreover, the political rhetoric, the hegemony of the Oromoo even to the extent of supremacy of the Oromoo just like that of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, began to be advocated among the new Oromoo political elites implicitly. The central theme of the historical narratives has been towards the justification of the Oromoo’s implicit aspiration of becoming regional power in political, social and economic affairs. As to the advocacy, the socio-cultural pigment of this country should look like that of the Oromoo since they are demographically an absolute majority. Several Oromoo writers began to advocate that if Ethiopia is said to be “the land of the people with black face”, who were these people with the mentioned phenotype in this part of Africa more than the Oromoo. This historical phrase became the nucleus of their argument to justify the above mentioned motive (Tabor Wami, 2013 EC; Tesfaye Gebreab, 2008: 313-328). So, they argued that the Oromoo were and are more Ethiopians than anyone else in that perspective. The same is true to that of the term Cush. If Ethiopia is said to be the land of Cush people, “who were these people inhabiting the region with a demographic majority than the Oromoo?” Such assertion began to be the new rhetoric advocated by the Oromoo media outlets including the OBN. Then, historical narratives suit to these political motives were persistently brought to the forefront. One of those historical narratives was the role of the Oromoo in the making and defending of Ethiopian state (Tabor Wami, 2013 EC). The making had been a long process taking place as assimilation for centuries to the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In fact, the balance of power was taken from the Oromoo and gone to the Amhara by this time and the process of Amharization began to replace Oromization. So, the country began to be given the Amhara pigment in all aspect at the expense of the Oromoo (Oromoo Culture and Tourism, 2004). In one way or the other, the making was followed by defending of that sovereign state, Ethiopia, from foreign aggression. Adawa was one of the incidents at which the Oromoo played critical role to defend the sovereignty of Ethiopia (Paulos Milkias, 2007). Thus, the Adwa issue including the celebration of the anniversaries faced transformation by the 2010s. That transformation was the narratives from exclusive patriotism to inclusive patriotism; even sometimes by taking the position of “main-actor”, denying the role of the imperial leadership. Such incident took place after 2018, when they began mentioning the role of the Oromoo people for the victory from a different perspective. They elaborated that Oromoo played a pioneering role in different aspects for the victory like, commanding the army, dominating

---

<sup>m</sup>Tsegaye Ararssa, “Opinion – The Lemma Megerssa Moment and the Oromo Dilemma: Between resistance and governing” in *Addis Standard*, Addis Ababa, January, 10/2018@<https://addisstandard.com>

the cavalry, providing resources either willingly or forcefully to purchase weapons and being recruited as member of the army in several modalities as to the custom of the day etc. The best example is Hachalu's effort to portray, the role of Oromoo cavalry at the battle of Adwa, in the Capital of the country denying the leadership role of the then Emperor Menilek II and avoiding the square after the name of the emperor where the anniversaries accustomed to be celebrated every year since its 7<sup>th</sup> year anniversary (Kena Deme, 2021).

The other "paradigm shift" was that the change in the Oromoo politics from targeting "Gadaa Oromia" ("Independent Republic of Oromia") to targeting "Great Oromia" ("New Ethiopia") even to "Greater Oromia" (the Horn of Africa) then to "Greatest Oromia" (Africa) being the owner of the seat of continental organization, the African Union (AU) also changed the historical narratives toward that direction. For instance, a series of opinion posts on a website by the name "Fayyis Oromia" are advocating this political target supported by historical narratives suit to that with a new passion.<sup>8</sup> Since the OLF narratives targeting "Gadaa Oromia" for half a century, could not be realistic and still does not look that it will be realistic, the Oromoo elites came up with the option of "Great Oromia" or "Cushitic Ethiopia" (Leenco, 2004). The new or Cushitic Ethiopia option is bringing the narratives from demographic majority to the real majority (socio-cultural, political and economic). Ethiopia needs to have more Oromoo pigment (Great Oromia) than what it had been before. Even to the extent of back to Oromoo's position of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the region. The then Oromoo Democratic Party (ODP), the transformed OPDO and the present Prosperity Party (PP) members Oromoo politicians mentioned the notion in an official conference on which Shimelis Abdissa himself presented a paper that articulated the idea. They all, the party leaders, cadres and members were clearly advocating for such mission and all were in the same mood. Thus, to fulfill this Oromoo intention, it was essential to use the Cushitic historical narrative as an instrument in place of the Gadaa historical narrative. So to say, the true Ethiopia is Cushitic not Semitic as historical evidences clearly depicted. All nations in Ethiopia including the "Habeshas" were from the Cushitic backgrounds. Thus, they underlined that being Cush means being Ethiopia in the true sense of the concept<sup>9</sup>. To materialize this political agenda, they were advised by some scholars that the Oromoo have to learn "drinking vodka from water bottle." The central meaning of this saying is that the only difference between the Oromoo politicians and the "Habesha politicians" is that most Oromoo politicians "use only vodka bottle to drink their vodka" and always say "spade is spade". So to say, they have been talking about the Oromoo directly, whereas politicians from the "Habesha" ethnic groups used "water bottle to drink their vodka", i. e; they used the name Ethiopia to promote the interests of their respective ethnic groups indirectly. They play the same game of ethnicity by using a different method in comparison to the direct struggle of the Oromoo nationalist for Oromoo issue. That is why one of the advocates of the idea underlined as "such Oromoo nationalists should learn the *Habesha* way of doing business, having Oromoo interest at heart"<sup>10</sup>.

One of the mechanisms to implement this is strengthening the "Oro-Amhara" cooperative thesis instead of falling in the trap of colonial thesis propagated by the OLF for several decades and now promoted by the TPLF on Oromoo forums for their own purpose. An opinion post on Fayyis Oromia website mentioned the intention of the TPLF for advocating the colonial thesis as;

The Oromoo could kill together the ambition and intention of the TPLF and its cadres, who do try to fool Oromoo people by crying about unconditional independent Oromia in Oromoo forums, and at the same time try to cheat the Amhara people by singing about unconditional unitary Ethiopia in Amhara

<sup>8</sup>Fayyis Oromia, "Oromo's Colonial Narrative to Liberate Gadaa Oromia and Cushitic Narrative to Lead Great Oromia", May 16, 2019, @ <http://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Fayyis Oromia, "Transformation of Ethiopia: From Hitherto Great Amharia to Henceforth Great Oromia!" March 19, 2017, @<http://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

forums, but their purpose was to polarize the two camps in order to hinder the needed all inclusive alliance which would emerge against their regime in Addis Ababa palace. They did and will do everything under the sun to hinder the formation of inclusive alliance. So, the Oromoo should not fall in to their traps<sup>q</sup>.

Despite the deception, the Oromoo achieved liberated Gadaa Oromia not “Independent Republic of Oromia”, using the colonial narratives, but they need now the Cushitic narrative or the pluralist narratives in its leadership of the country. Thus, having this Cushitic narrative or pluralist narrative as an instrument, it is possible to promote “*Oromumma* as thesis, *Amharanet* as anti-thesis and *Ethiopiyyuma* as synthesis.” This motto is simply to mean “*Oromumma*” was the original identity of the major nations(both the *Habeshanized* and the non-*Habeshanized*) within the realm of present day Ethiopian territorial extent. Moreover, they underlined as, “that is why *Oromumma* can be called the synthesis as far as the identity of Ethiopian people is concerned”<sup>r</sup>. Taking the history of “*Oromumma*” far back to the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century, they articulated that how the long process of multi-faceted interactions with the state sponsored Amharic speaking Christian kingdom’s ruling class declined this “*Oromumma*” at least to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “*Amharanet*” grew as anti-thesis at the cost of “*Oromumma*”. So, “*Oromumma*” was losing ground and “*Amharanet*” was growing under the cover of “*Ethiopiawinet*”. Of course, this process seem declined during the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries over-flooded by “*Oromumma*”. Again the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century can be taken as another turning point in the exceeding of “*Amharanet*” overrunning “*Oromumma*”. In fact, for the gradual deterioration of “*Oromumma*” the spread of Islam in some Afan Oromoo speaking regions of Ethiopia had its own contribution (Zelalem Kumilachew, 1996 EC). That is why “*Ethiopiawinet*” is considered equivalent to “*Amharanet*”. They complain that Amhara elites and *Amharaized* others are trying to keep this status quo under the pretext of Ethiopian unity. So, they justified that this content of “*Ethiopiawinet*” as only “*Amharanet*” should be changed. To realize this claim historical narratives have to be put in place to support the agenda. That can be followed by the second i.e, “Afaan Oromoo must be the primary working language of the country” probably not only because of its demographic majority but also it significantly contributed to the socio-cultural, economic and political majority of the Oromoo. Of course, it should be done under the rhetoric of “Ethiopia with Multicolour, Multilanguage and Multicultural *Ethiopiyyumma* (*Ethiopiawinet*)”. That can be slowly but surely realized using a number of inputs. So, the public should be told that the targeted *Ethiopiyyumma* “will be the true synthesis from *Oromumma* and *Amharanet* as well as other national identities”<sup>s</sup>. In fact, that of other mainly Cushitic groups is already characterized as *Oromumma*.

Consequently, it is expected that “*Oromumma*” is in the core of Ethiopian identity from this point of view. So, as to this historical narrative, Ethiopia must be made free from all characters of *Habesha* and be re-filled with the elements of Cush. One of these elements is expected to be *Waaqeffanna*, the monotheistic religion of the Cushitic peoples. By implication that means *Waaqeffannaaw* as the earliest “true religion of Ethiopia” (Diribee Demisee, 2015). Of course, the narrative extended that “as Jerusalem is the holy city of major religions, so is Finfinnee- the right home of *Waaqeffanna*, Christianity and Islam” probably to be realistic in their political target. The political and socio-cultural aspiration is “cleaning the name Ethiopia from this Abyssinian ideology, and decorate it with the Oromoo nationalism”<sup>t</sup>. Generally, as it has been mentioned above, all the

<sup>q</sup> Ibid.

<sup>r</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Oromummaa was Thesis, Amharanet being Anti-Thesis and Ethiopiyyumma/Ethiopiawinet is Synthesis” June 8, 2020, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

<sup>s</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Oromummaa was Thesis, Amharanet being Anti-Thesis and Ethiopiyyumma/Ethiopiawinet is Synthesis” June 8, 2020, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

<sup>t</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Oromummaa was Thesis, Amharanet being Anti-Thesis and Ethiopiyyumma/Ethiopiawinet is Synthesis” June 8, 2020, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>



narratives were to fit into the present agenda “the Oromoo can own Ethiopia and Ethiopians in their own terms.” They rationalize that, it is time for all the Oromoo republicans (those struggle for Oromia republic) to act in unison and control the palace and put Addis Ababa under Oromia and promote Afaan Oromoo to the primary working language. Such Ethiopia is definitely de’facto Great Oromia<sup>u</sup>.

The other aspect of *Oromumma* or pluralism in the context of the present discussion is narrated under the notion of pan-Africanism by passing the narrative of Semitic Ethiopia to build the Horn of Africa as Common Home Land. Probably that is why Lencho Leta himself authored a book entitled “The Horn as Common Home Land” (Leenco, 2004). They are claiming that “fostering United States in the Horn of Africa (USHA) is in best interest of Oromoo”<sup>v</sup>. This aspiration of the Oromoo elites to foster a move towards a sort of confederation in the form of United States in the Horn of Africa is considered by some scholars as a smart move. As far as this aspiration is concerned, consolidating their political power in Addis Ababa, liberating Oromia from any domination and democratizing Ethiopia, they hope that they can push for integration of the Horn (Greater Oromia) and federation of Africa (Greatest Oromia) all using Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) as their capital and epicentre of the entire African politics. They argued that any country, region, or continent having Addis Ababa as the center can be under “ripple influence of Oromoo politics”. So, they asserted that how lucky the Oromoo are to be in this position if they are smart enough to exploit these geographical and demographic advantages. To materialize that at different levels (country, region, continent), they suggested that “all Oromoo forces must have a consensus”. If the Oromoo could forge such unity of purpose, they asserted, they can overcome any challenge in the region that hinder them from being influential. The influence is going to be multi-dimensional, to say both culturally, economically, and politically at the mentioned different levels; Addis Ababa (Finfinnee), Gadaa Oromia (Oromia proper), Great Oromia (Ethiopia), Greater Oromia (the Horn of Africa), Greatest Oromia (Africa) and the like<sup>w</sup>.

However, although the political elites and their few mastermind scholars are advocating such ambitious political agenda supported with fascinating historical narratives, the significant number of the Oromoo, particularly the youth and the other under forty (40) do not seem liberated from the victim mind-set imposed on them by the long-time taking independence political rhetoric accompanied by colonial historical narrative of the OLF. They could not be in a victorious mind-set and understand the notion of “building Ethiopia in their own image.”

## Conclusion

The common knowledge that claims history needs to be written without political purpose does not seem real in the historiography of modern world. Similarly, political histories had been written continuously for future political purposes in Ethiopia either directly or indirectly. If that was not the case, professionals could have studied and written history without any challenge from any political body in the way that professionals from hard sciences are doing research and writing their findings without or much less challenges. Oromoo history has been the point of controversies in many aspects because of the fact that the political and socio-cultural statuses of the people could not be determined in such a way that all agreed upon. So, the same has been on their history. The change or intention to change the political and socio-cultural statuses of the people led, even forced, them to change their historical narratives so that they could be major inputs to justify the change or

---

<sup>u</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Ripple Influence of Oromo Politics from its Center (Finfinnee) towards the Globe!”, June 12, 2019, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

<sup>v</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Fostering United States in the Horn of Africa (USHA) is in the best interest of Oromia!”, February 10, 2019, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

<sup>w</sup>Fayyis Oromia, “Oromo’s Best Formula: Own Gadaa Democratic Ethiopia and Use Panafrican Utopia!”, February 8, 2019, @ <https://fayyisoromia.wordpress.com>

realize the intention. Thus, it seems that, the Oromoo is now intending to be the political and socio-cultural dominant majority of Ethiopian society. Hence, the pluralist historical narratives, contrary to colonial narratives of the OLF or the multi-cultural narratives of the TPLF, as a major input to materialize the intended pluralism.

## References

- Asafa Jalata . (1993). "Ethiopia and Ethnic Politics: the Case of Oromo Nationalism" in *Dialectical Anthropology*. Vol. 18, No. 3/4 (December 1993), pp. 381-402, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29790544>
- Asafa Jalata. (1991). "Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements in the Global Context: Social Justice" in *Race, Security & Social Movements*. Vol. 30, No. 1 (91), pp. 67-111, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768167>
- Asafa Jalata. (1996). "The Struggle for Knowledge: the case of Emergent Oromo Studies" in *African Studies Review* Vol. 39, No. 2 (Sep. 1996), PP. 95-123, Cambridge University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/525437>
- Bahru Zewde. (2000). *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn*. Addis Ababa University: Department of History.
- Chojnaki, Stanislaw. (1961). "Some Notes on Early Travellers in Ethiopia" in *University College Review*. Vol.1. No. 1 (spring, 1961), pp. 71-89, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41965672>
- Daniel Tefera. (2003 EC). *Dandi: Ye Negaso Meniged*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.
- Diribee Demisee. (2015). *Ye Oromo Ye Maninet Tarik*. Finfinne.
- Ezekiel Gebissa. (2002). "The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire, and Oromo Nationalism: The Significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936" in *Northeast African Studies*, 2002, New Series, Vol. 9, No.3, Special Issue: *The Oromo in Ethiopian Studies: Confronting Challenges to Politically Engaged Scholarship* (2002), pp. 75-96, Michigan State University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41931281>
- Fikre SilassieWogderes. (2006 EC). *Ignana Abiyotu*. Addis Ababa: Tsehay Publisher.
- Gebre Kidan Desta. (2010 EC). *Atse Yohannisina Atse Menilek be Itiyopiya Tarik Menetsir*. Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Press.
- Geda Melba. (1985 EC). *Oromia (Ye Oromo Hizib Tarik)*. Addis Ababa.
- Getachew Haile (2002 EC). *Ye Abba Bahiri Dirsetoch :Oromowochin kemimelektu leloch sendoch gar*. Minnesota: Avon.
- Holcomb, Bonnie K. and Sisai Ibssa. (1990). *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa*. Trenton, New Jersey: Red Sea Press.
- Isenberg, Charles William and Krapf. (1839, 1840, 1841, & 1842). *Detailing Their Proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa, and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia, in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jorgensen, K.M. (2006). *Writing History and Relations of Power*. Institute for Uddannelse, Laeringog Filosofi, Aalborg Universitet, Danish Center for Philosophy and Science Studies.
- Joseph Ketema. (2013 EC). *Iji Yebezabet Ye Oromo Poletikaina Itiyopiyawinet: ke Biete Mengisiti ske Biete Kihinet Yenegesu Hasetochna Yetdbesebsu Iwentoch*. Addis Ababa: Klar Printing Press.

- Kena Deme Jebessa. (2021). "The Role of Oromo Nation on Aduwa Victory: A Discourse Analysis of Artist Hachalu Hundessa's Song" in *Gadda Journal, A Bilingual Journal of the Institute of Oromo Studies*. Special Issue, April 2021, <http://journals.ju.edu.et>
- Leenco Lata. (2004). *The Horn of Africa as Common Homeland: The State and Self-Determination in the Era of Heightened Globalization*. Ontario, Canada: Laurier University Press.
- LeencoLata. (2012). *Peacekeeping as State-Building: Current Challenges for the Horn of Africa*. Ewing Township, USA: The Red Sea Press.
- Mack, Jane Barnes. (1994). "Cultural pluralism and Multi-culturalism: E Pluribus Unum or Ex Uno Plura?" in *Histosubashi Journal of Social Studies*. Vol. 26, No. 2(December, 1994), pp. 63-72, Histotusbashi University, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43294357>
- Marcus, H.G. (1994). *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCullagh, C. Behan. (1987). "The Truth of Historical Narratives" in *History and Theory*. Vol. 26.No.4 (December, 1987), pp. 30-46, Wesleyan University, <https://www.jstor.or/stable/2505043>
- Mekuria Bulcha. (1995). "Onesimos Nasib's Pioneering Contribution to Oromo Writing" in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*.Vol. 4. No. 1 (1995), University of Uppsala, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu>
- Mengistu Haile Mariam. (2011). *Tiglachin: Ye Itiyopiya Hizib Abiyotawi ye Tigil Tarik*. Addis Ababa: Tsehay Publisher.
- Merera Gudina. (2005 EC). *Ye Itiyopiya, Polotika Misqilqil Guzona Yehiyiwotie Tizitawoch: keItiyopiya Temariwoch Niqinaqieiske Ihadieq*. Addis Ababa: Graphic Printers.
- Merera Gudina. (2007). "Party Politics, political polarization and the Future of Ethiopian Democracy" in *International Conference on African Development*, Archives paper 108, Western Michigan University, <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/africancenter-icad-archive/108>
- Mohammed Hassen. (1994). *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History*. Cambridg: Cambridge University Press.
- Molteno, M.I. (2007). "History Science or Art?" in *Kleio*. Vol.4. No.2, PP. 33-45, Taylor& Francis online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00232087285310091>
- Negaso Gidada. (1912 EC). *Tarik Agerina Hige Mengist: Yemechereshaw Ye Negaso Mastawesha*. Addis Ababa: Abrhot le Itiyopiya publisher.
- Pankhurst, R. (1976). "The Beginning of Oromo Studies in Europe" in *Africa: Rivisita trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'istitutoitaliano per l' Africa e l' oriente*. Anno 31, No.2 (GIUGNO 1976), pp. 171-206, IstitutoItaliano per l' Africa e l' Oriente, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40758604>
- Parker, Christopher.(1983). "English Historians and the Opposition to Positivism" in *History and Theory*. Vol. 22, No. 2 (May, 1983), pp. 120-145, Wesleyan University, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2504931>
- Paulos Milkias& GetachewMetaferia.(2007). *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. New York, **Algora Publishing**.
- Rusen, Jorn. (1987). "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason" in *History and Theory*. Vol.26, No.4 (December, 1987), pp.87-97, Wesleyan University, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2505/047>
- Tabor Wami.(2013 EC). *Ye Oromo Maninetna Tariku*. Addis Ababa: Rohobot Printing.
- Taye Gebre Mariam. (1914 EC). *Ye Itiyopiya HizibTarik*.Asmera: Misangsuedewa Press.
- Teferi Bizuayehu. (2018). *Ye Oro-Amara wog: Bebirihaan Cherer Wesit Mayet Mechal*.

Addis Ababa.

Tesfaye Gebre-ab. (2008). *Ye Gazetegnaw Mastawesha*. Pretoria, South Africa: Sunnyside Publishers.

Zelalem Kumilachew. (1996 EC). *Ye Itiyopiawinetina Ye Amaranet Masayawoch Hibir (Yezemenawi Hager Ginbata Hidet Dilina Fetena)*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing.