

## History and the Current Situation Speak for Oromo Independence A Response to Jijjiirama and the Drum-Beaters of the Anti-Oromia Camp

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The cultural, linguistic and political contours of a modern Oromo nation have taken concrete shapes including an Oromo state in the form of the Oromia regional state with a specific territory and officially demarcated geographically territory. For more than two decades the Oromo have been conducting their educational, administrative and judicial affairs in their own language. This was unthinkable just two decades ago. The contributions made by Oromo studies during the last thirty years have enabled the Oromo people to find pride in their own history and culture. In spite of all these achievements, the Oromo are still under an intolerable alien rule with the obvious implication that independence is the best option for consolidating what the Oromo have so far achieved and will achieve in the future. It is for this reason that the Oromo people are conducting both political and armed struggle. Regrettably, however, there are obstructionist forces which are poised not only to foil the struggle but also reverse and/or jeopardize the fruits of our people's bitter struggle and ultimate sacrifices.

This article is a commentary on the much publicized claims of the Jijjiirama faction stating that "the question of Oromo independence is dropped by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)" and that such a question "was not part of the OLF political program" in the first place (ESAT January 1, 2012). The statements made by the group have stirred up strong feelings among both the anti- and pro-OLF groups and individuals.

Many observers in the "Ethiopian unity" or anti-OLF (anti-Oromia) camp have called the position taken by General Kamal's group a heroic action in the service of their mother country. One of them has, in fact, argued in the Ethiopian Review (ER) that "There is nothing that the tiny minority of the old faction or anyone can do to change this reality." By the "tiny minority" he means those Oromos who wrote the OLF political program, struggled for decades, and put in place the contours of the emerging Oromo nation and state which I have described above. Showering laudatory phrases on Jijjiirama another thrilled Ethiopian called the move of the faction the "return of the prodigal son" from a political "wilderness" after forty years. It is also stated that all Ethiopians owe Brigadier General Kamal Galchu "a debt of gratitude for his farsighted leadership" (ER January 8, 2012). A reporter in Finfinne Times (January 8, 2012) thanked him for putting back on track the Oromo movement that has been derailed by "confused and timid" OLF leaders for years. The euphoria, even if ephemeral as indicated by other observers, is understandable. The position taken by General Kamal Galchu has given the Amhara elite a hope of recapturing the political power they lost to their Tigrayan cousins twenty years ago. However, the decision of the Jijjiirama is not only deemed treacherous, but is also doomed to fail. Many Oromos accuse its leaders for being enemy agents who joined the OLF to "destroy" it and not to liberate our people in the first place.

In my opinion, condemning the stand taken by General Kamal Galchu's group is not enough in itself. We must tell the members of the faction to stop the treason they are committing before it is too late, use the situation created as an opportunity to consolidate the national struggle for independence, and also inform all the drum-beaters who are supporting the concessions made by the Jijjiirama faction that the noises they are making cannot persuade the Oromo people to support General Kamal Galchu's politics of "New Federal Republic of Ethiopia" which, in fact, already exists under the current dictatorial regime

**The Right to Live under Laws of Our own Making**

As stated by the American social philosopher and Harvard Professor, Martha Nussbaum, national sovereignty is about a people's right to "their autonomy, their right to give themselves laws of their own making." National sovereignty is a right for which tens of thousands of Oromos have sacrificed their lives during the last forty years. As the authors of the "Oromo Voice against Tyranny" wrote in 1971 "For an Oromo worthy of the name, there is one and only one way to dignity, security, liberty and freedom. That single sure way is to hold a common front against his oppressors and their instruments of subjugation." What is more "An Oromo has no empire to build, but a mission to break an imperial yoke, that makes his mission sacred and his sacrifices never too dear." The mission is to restore lost liberty and to live with dignity in our country under our own laws. The action of the Jijjiirama faction clearly obstructs this mission.

Historically our Oromo ancestors have lived in their homeland making and obeying their own laws. They were ruled by leaders they elected periodically. But during the last 130 years we have lived under laws that were made by those who conquered our land. These laws were/are made not to protect our rights, but to deny us justice and human dignity in the country of our birth. General Waaqo Guutuu was pointing out that when he, in one of his mobilizing speeches during the Bale Oromo uprising of the 1960s, reminded his compatriots: "Remember they have plundered [our property] and distorted our historical legacy...they have violated our dignity calling us filthy Galla. Do you realize how many times you have been denied justice in their court of law?" General Waaqo was describing the life of Oromo subjects in the Ethiopian empire of that time.

Denial of justice in Ethiopian courts of law was experienced at all levels of our society: ordinary peasants and workers, men and in private business and public service were and are being affected. It also affected high-ranking military officers and distinguished civil servants because they were/are Oromo. That is why General Taddese Birru told the Ethiopian court which sentenced him to death in 1968: "I am denied equality before the law because of my nationality. Because of my nationality I am treated differently." Comparing the outrageous treatment he received to the way the 1960 abortive coup makers led by the Neway brothers were treated (they were not tortured or dispossessed their ranks), General Taddese asked the court: "Why am I disgraced and severely tortured?" What the General was saying was that he was tortured and disgraced because he is an Oromo while the 1960 coup makers were not.

It is common knowledge that General Taddese spent six years in Haile Selassie's prison and was assassinated by the Dergue in 1975. General Waaqo also spent his last days in exile and died in Kenya in 2006. What is not well known is that the two Oromo leaders struggled to improve the conditions of their people and not to do any harm to Ethiopia. Normally, governments listen to the grievances of citizens, accommodate the claims they make, and allow them to live in peace. That has never been the case with those who ruled and are still ruling Ethiopia. They exercised and are still exercising tyranny against all the peoples they ruled. However, their cruellest and crudest tyranny has been exercised against the Oromo because they hate and fear them most. The "Oromo Voice against Tyranny" mentioned above was written based on the experience the two organizations, namely Bale Oromo uprising and particularly of the leaders of the Macca-Tuulama Association. Since then, thousands of Oromo politicians have been jailed, tortured, and murdered without justice. Denied human rights and justice, thousands more are in Meles Zenawi's prisons at the moment.

### **Jijjiirama's New Political Program, Ginbot 7 and the Oromo Question**

A survey conducted in 2003/4 by Edmond Keller indicates that the wish of 76 per cent of the Oromo respondents is to live in their own independent state. The survey included samples for each nationality in Ethiopia and was gathered, analyzed, and compared using statistical methods which ensure a degree of reliability of the information produced by Keller's survey.

The findings of Keller's survey contradict both the political program of the Jijjiirama faction and the policy of Ginbot 7 which is opposed to the division of the Ethiopian state along ethnic lines. Dr. Berhanu Nega, the leader of Ginbot 7, has remarked that it was the Oromo prisoners' bitter feelings against Ethiopia he observed in Qallitti prison which made him to go into politics. He said what disturbed him most was that the prisoners were saying that they were colonial subjects and not Ethiopians. Dr. Berhanu went into politics to solve this problem among others. His solution to the Oromo problem is simple and his recommendations are the following: (a) convince the Oromo people that they are Ethiopians like anybody else, (b) discourage their talk about an independent Oromo state, and (c) reject the notion that there are differences that based on ethnicity or nationality in Ethiopia. These recommendations appeared in the Ginbot 7 political program (15 May 2008) which declared unambiguously: "We reject the notion that the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia are social units tied together with mechanical force as false and divisive." The policy statement can be read as an indirect criticism of the policy of the current Ethiopian regime. In other words, they are saying that only individual rights and interests must be respected. According to Ginbot 7 it is wrong to speak about collective rights and interests.

Indeed, the behavior of the Tigrayan ruling elite has reinforced Oromo rejection of Ethiopian identity making their dissatisfaction with life under the Ethiopian law to boil over the brims. However, Ginbot 7's liberal policy will not endear Ethiopia to the Oromo people. Dr. Berhanu's recommendations for the solution of the Oromo question show a superficial understanding of the problem he will solve. He thinks that the colonial question which the Oromo have raised for over forty years will suddenly disappear if people are encouraged not to think or talk about national or ethnic differences. His party's policy about the question of nationalities is ahistorical. It reduces the division of Ethiopia into regional states to a consequence of TPLF's evil intention. That Meles Zenawi's regime is misusing ethnicity does not mean it is the inventor of the conflict out of which the national liberation fronts that signed the Transitional Charter of 1991 were born. The Transitional Charter acknowledged and stipulated the division of Ethiopia into regional states based on ethnicity and language because the recognition of the ethno-national identities and territorial autonomy of the different peoples was the only solution to Ethiopia's political problem which, in July 1991, was on the brink of disintegration. Ginbot 7's politics ignores the cultural, linguistic, and territorial identity which the Oromo people have claimed as their birth right and which, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, they won through bitter struggle. Needless to say that Dr. Berhanu's solution is already on a collision course with the interest of the Oromo people even as an idea.

The political declarations and speeches which the Jijjiirama leaders and representatives have been making during the last four weeks suggest that they have listened to Dr. Berhanu's advice and accepted his party's political program without contemplating what that means in reality. That is why what they are promising the Oromo people is just the opposite of what Dr. Berhanu and his party advocate. They say the Oromo people will, under Jijjiirama's new political program, retain the fruits of their long struggle. The achievements to be retained include, among others, territorial autonomy in the shape of the regional state of Oromia. The question is: if the Jijjiirama are going to form a government in alliance with the Ginbot 7 party and the like how are they going to do that?

### **One-Man One-Vote Democracy to Protect Oromo Rights and Interests**

The Jijjiirama leaders' answer to the questions I have raised above is "one-man one-vote democracy". We are told not to be afraid of democracy because "the Oromo constitute a good 40 per cent of the Ethiopia population" (on *Ethio-Current Affairs Paltalk* of January 7, 2012). Liberal democracy is also what the Ethiopian political organizations including Ginbot 7 claim they have in their political programs. The first question is, will they practice it in case they manage to come to power?

In an interview with a journalist (ESAT, January 5, 2012 ), the former US Under-Secretary of State for Africa, Ambassador Herman Cohen said that he asked an Ethiopian Professor in Addis Ababa why Mr. Meles Zenawi's regime which came to power promising democracy became authoritarian and the Professor answer was "Ethiopia cannot be governed any other way. This is our culture; this is how we govern ourselves." What the unnamed Ethiopian Professor says is, of course, plain truth. Autocracy was the rule for centuries in Abyssinia and has been the political tradition of Ethiopia since it was created as a colonial empire at the end of the nineteenth century. The Jijjiirama leaders ought to know that as Oromos we are not afraid of democracy. But, I do not think that the Abyssinian elite will abandon their political culture and adopt democracy as quick as the Jijjiirama leaders and other Oromos who believe in the "democratization of Ethiopia" as an answer for the Oromo question wish. The idea of "one-man one-vote democracy" is appealing to Oromos, but its application to the Ethiopian situation is undoubtedly problematic.

The second question is: can a "one-man one-vote democracy" enable the Oromo to protect their collective interests such as linguistic rights and territorial autonomy? I can say certainly not. We know that the Oromo at most constitute about 40 per cent of the Ethiopian population. Obviously, even if all Oromos were to vote and cast their ballots for a single party that is not enough to put a majority rule in place that can protect their linguistic or territorial autonomy. In fact, Jijjiirama's political program jeopardizes the achievements the Oromo have made in terms of territorial autonomy and linguistic identity through a bitter struggle. It gives chance to the Amhara political opposition who vow to replace the present regional states by old style provinces in which Ethiopia was divided before 1991. The Oromo have to stick to the goal of independence and not to be swayed by the rosy promise of one-man one-vote democracy; they can exercise democracy without interference only in an independent state of Oromia. The one-man one-vote model of democracy is feasible when Oromia is independent. I will even argue that free Oromia can become a model state and "export" genuine democracy and political stability to the neighboring states and peoples in the Horn of Africa.

The OLF must continue with its politics of cooperation with the political organizations of oppressed nations, nationalities, and peoples who share the brutal history of Abyssinian colonial rule with our people. But, the Oromo people should, under no circumstance, impose their will on any people or nationality big or small. They should approach the political organizations of the non-Abyssinian peoples and cooperate with them in the struggle against the present regime; they must be ready to enter into closer cooperation that will result in mutual benefit in every field now and in the future.

### **Failure to Learn from History: Looking for Relief in a Wrong Corner**

Experiences from the last 20 years show that the general Oromo attitude is that of the proverbial Oromo woman who rebuked her wily adversaries with resolute skepticism, "lama nansuufani"—"I won't be fooled anymore." It seems that the Jijjiirama leaders have not listened to the Oromo people whose message is "enough is enough, this time our destination is blisummaa (freedom) how rough and tough the journey may be." They are tired of Oromo individuals and organizations that ally with Amhara or Tigrayan political organizations, keeping them under the nightmare of endless dictatorship. As it is now, whether they are working with the present regime or opposed to it, pro-Ethiopia Oromo political parties and organizations are lacking the support of the Oromo people.

Every Oromo knows that during the last four decades the Abyssinian ruling elite have won in all political games and grasped power using Oromo allies and making false promises. Once in power, all of them abused the Oromo and other peoples' trust. The so-called revolutionary democracy of the TPLF is different from the "socialist democracy" of the Dergue, only in its

rhetoric. If not more, it is at least as brutal as the “socialism” of the Dergue. The Dergue intensified the cruelty that Haile Selassie’s regime exercised against the Oromo. It labeled those who were opposed to its politics as anti-revolutionary, killed them, read their names over the radio, displayed their corpses in public and demanded their families to pay the cost of the bullets the “state” used to kill them. The regime was ‘brutally frank’ about what it was doing. Its state-run radio program sang a deafening “fukera” called “yefiyel waxaxee” and the list of the executed was read for the nation and the families of the executed. Milan Kundera wrote that

Fascism was based on frank anti-humanism and created a moral situation which was perfectly clear and simple, black and white. ... Fascism left humanist principles and virtues untouched, because it emerged as its antithesis. Stalinism was more dangerous for all its virtues and ideals, because it began as the advocate and gradually converted it into the opposite: love of humanity into cruelty, love of truth into denunciation, and so on.

The Dergue’s frank anti-humanism was a good example of fascism which Milan Kundera wrote about. The current regime kills its opponents without fanfare using methods that are even grimmer than those used by its predecessors. Its leaders are cynical: they preach democracy in public, but are maliciously tyrannical and sadistic in their secret political dealings. The evidence for that is overwhelming. TPLF tyranny against the Oromo is committed with impunity and complete disregard for human life. It began in 1992 when the TPLF put tens of thousands of Oromos in a concentration camp. Since then its security forces have kidnapped thousands of men and women, killed them and dumped their corpses in the bushes to be devoured by wild beasts. The families and relatives of the “disappeared” did not (and do not) even have the chance to ‘ransom’ and bury their sons and daughters as was the case during the time of the Dergue.

TPLF atrocities against our people are not confined within Ethiopia’s territorial borders: they are not even allowed to live in peace in the neighboring countries as refugees. TPLF agents have been assassinating real and suspected opponents of Meles Zenawi’s regime in the neighboring countries since 1992.

During the last 20 years, thousands of Oromo children and women have died in refugee camps in Somalia; tens and thousands of them are suffering in shanty towns and refugee camps in Kenya, Sudan, and Yemen in thousands. Nobody knows how many are getting drowned and devoured while fleeing across the shark infested waters of the Gulf of Aden in rickety overloaded boats. Many more have been and are being forcibly deported back to their torturers in Ethiopia from Djibouti, Kenya, and Somaliland. That they carry UNHCR identity cards does not prevent their deportation. The deportations occur often in secret and involve agreements made between the Ethiopian security and those of the neighboring states. Back in Ethiopia the deportees are imprisoned, or killed without mercy.

Menigitu’s regime was meaner than that of Haile Selassie; and Meles Zenawi is even more tyrannical than his predecessors. Given the magnitude of injustices our people are facing, anyone who has a humane heart will agree with the Jijjiirama leaders about the urgent call for getting rid of Meles Zenawi’s regime with whatever means. However, the predicament caused by the TPLF tyranny need not turn the leaders of Ethiopian political opposition parties including Ginbot 7 into saving angels in the eyes of the Oromo. Although what is in the liberal democracy kit with which Ginbot 7 says it is equipped only will be fully disclosed, if and, when they come to power, we know, at least, that its leaders are opposed to the present division of Ethiopia into regional states such as Oromia. In other words they will not recognize a structure that gives the Oromo people a territorial identity making them masters over their natural resources. Forming alliance with an organization that will not recognize the gains made so far by our people to overthrow the present government, is tantamount to jumping into a ‘deep sea’ to escape from the ‘devil’. In other words, the future which the Jijjiirama faction’s political program is promising our people is not going to shorten their misery. In fact, what the faction is inviting us to is a new cycle of

conflict with a new batch of Abyssinian ruling elite. The misery the conflict can cause the Oromo and the other peoples of Ethiopia can be worse.

### **New guards of [the prison house of nations and nationalities]**

Historically, no love is lost between the Abyssinian ruling elite and the Oromo people. As indicated above, the former have succeeded in dominating the latter using violent means while the latter have continued to resist. That is why Ethiopia's "prisons speak the Oromo language" today. The prisons in Ethiopia will continue speaking *Afaan Oromoo* until Oromia breaks out of the "prison-house of nations", to use the name given to Ethiopia by scholars. That is why the new political program of Jijjiirama is being vehemently opposed by Oromos everywhere; they will not be confined to the 'prison-house of nations' indefinitely.

If the Jijjiirama leaders have a vision at all as they claim, it is without doubt, a blurred one: they have failed to see clearly the reality on the ground and learn from the experiences of the OPDO to which they belonged in the past. They believe that democracy will rain on Ethiopia if the Oromo people forget the question of independence and TPLF disappears from the scene. They share their "vision" with ex-President of Ethiopia, Dr. Nagaso Gidada who argues in his autobiography "Daandi: Ye Negaso Menged" (2011) that if the OLF and the TPLF disappear from the political arena Ethiopia will democratize and the Oromo will be satisfied. Such an argument misses the fact that Oromo dissatisfaction concerns not only the atrocities of the current regime but the treatment they have been receiving from the Abyssinian ruling elite during the last 130 years. Our people reject being a part of a state in which past atrocities are repeated endlessly and often with increasing ferocity against them. General Kamal Galchu and his associates know that the past did not die with Menelik, Haile Selassie, or Mengistu. The atrocities committed against our people did not cease with the demise of those ruthless rulers; it continued. The present suffering of our people is not going to stop with the demise of Meles Zenawi's regime, or because of Jijjiirama's dream about a "New Federal Republic of Ethiopia." I strongly believe that it will stop only when we regain the right of giving ourselves laws of our own making and elect our own leaders who obey our laws. That can only happen in the independent state of Oromia envisaged by the OLF political program.

It is important to recollect the fact that the Oromo struggle started in the 1960s with the aim to change their situation in Ethiopia. To use Edmond Keller's words "what the Oromo wanted was their fair share." However, that effort was defeated by the "zero-sum-game" that dominates Ethiopian politics. That was the case both under Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. I do not think the reason for the failure of transition to democracy which was proposed by the 1991 Transitional Charter is unknown to Jijjiirama's leaders. As members of the OPDO, they themselves were instruments of the authoritarian tyranny which derailed a democratic transition, thereby hindering a peaceful settlement of the Oromo-Ethiopian conflict. The irony is that the Jijjiirama officers who joined the OLF to "liberate" Oromia a few years ago are now telling the world that they have decided to join the next Ethiopian regime, replace the current OPDO members, and become the guards of "the prison house of nations and nationalities" once again.

### **Where is the Solidarity that ought to be between Citizens of the Same State?**

The Abyssinian elite will keep Oromia at any cost not for the love of the Oromo people but for the sake of its resources. This is reflected in the views of some of the "progressive" non-Oromo supporters of the Jijjiirama group (Gadaa.com, January 5, 2012) who also claim to be sympathizers of Ginbot 7 and ask: "What will be the fate of the rest of Ethiopia after the independence of Oromia?", and blame those who "dream" about Oromo independence for being "out of touch with reality". These "progressive Ethiopians" do not reflect on why the

Oromo want independence or what they think or how they feel about being under Abyssinian rule. Oromo opinion is irrelevant to them. Oromo suffering does not seem to move their hearts, or disturb their conscience. The fate of those Oromos who are made homeless and landless, the fate of uprooted and scattered families and dispersed communities does not worry them. These are hardly the concern of the Amhara elite. No protest was staged in solidarity with Oromo students who were dismissed from the Ethiopian universities, jailed, tortured and killed in their hundreds during the last ten years. The Amhara elite condemn Oromo nationalists but not the atrocities committed against the Oromo people. What matters to them is that Oromia and its natural resources remain in their control. Thus, while demanding that the Oromo should think about the fate of Ethiopia, they do not show any concern about the suffering of the Oromo people under the Ethiopian rulers.

This utter lack of fraternal solidarity with the Oromo people described above is reflected in a chilling Amharic poem placed on the website of Tensae Ethiopia in December 2011. The poet chants his wishes "Oromowoch yibatatanu, Itiophian sayabarkikuat" which means approximately: "May the Oromo scatter and disappear before they defeat Ethiopia." Summarizing the atrocities committed against the Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia as heroic deeds of her/his forefathers he/she says that groups such as "Galla Geday" will reappear and past atrocities repeated in order to maintain the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. What is remarkable here is that the views of the anonymous poet are not far from the views of politicians and scholars who are reluctant even to mention the word Oromo (they seem to prefer the pejorative "Galla") and think it is blasphemous for an Ethiopian nationalist to utter the word OLF, let alone sitting at a table with its leaders and negotiate on the future of Oromo-Ethiopian relations (see a debate between representatives of Ginbot 7 and Andnet, ESAT August 9, 2011). Thus, when these politicians and scholars talk about "Ethiopian unity", they mean keeping intact the territory that constitutes the Ethiopian state under Amhara control and not the equality of its constituent peoples.

We should not blame the Jijjiirama alone for promoting pro-Ethiopia politics that negates Oromo rights; there are even some Oromo scholars who talk about a "common Ethiopian home" suggesting that the Oromo must strive for that and not independence. While theoretically possible, such an arrangement must start with the acknowledgement of the grievances and recognition of every group's rights in the country. This requires reciprocal recognition of collective identities by the parties involved, combined with the fraternal imagining of being citizen of the same state. Given the facts I have raised above, however, it is impossible to create such a situation in Ethiopia now or in the near future.

The cleavages between the major components of the Ethiopian polity, particularly between the Oromo and the Abyssinians, remain so deep that establishing a sense of solidarity that cuts across ethnic boundaries and which is a basis for the establishment a democratic state is a daunting task. Therefore, the on-going Oromo national struggle should continue by all means until independence is achieved and a democratic republic state of Oromia is established. There is no reason to believe that the leaders of Ginbot 7, or any other Ethiopian political organizations, who have already stated their stand on the national question will ever enter into even a meaningful federal arrangement recognizing Oromo claims for collective rights. That is why independence becomes the sole option to overcome the present predicament of our nation.

It is the right of every nation to live in its homeland in peace. The Oromo dream about own independent state is about freedom from the fascistic and Stalinist genocide that have been perpetrated against them generation after generation. Every human being has the right to life; that includes every Oromo. Every nation has the right to survive; that includes the Oromo people. As Howard Adelman suggests, the breakup of imperial states such as Ethiopia and the desire for nations such as the Oromo to realize the expression of their identities through a sovereign state, "is not the road to ruin, but the path to a new international order built on the rule of law and the protection of the freedom of individuals, the equality of groups." The post-cold-

war break-up of the Soviet Union and ex-Republic of Yugoslavian were recent example of such a process.

### **Should we call Jijjiirama's Action a "Blessing in Disguise"?**

Yes, but we must clear the air of a confusion that paralyzed the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) for the last ten years in order to make best use of the situation created by Jijjiirama's political game. Judging by the reaction it has ignited both at home and in the diaspora, it seems that the political program of the faction is already rejected by the Oromo people. The drums in the fake Ethiopian unity camp will stop making their noises soon. That does not mean the declaration made by the faction on January 1, 2012 is not without consequences. Its repercussions will stay with us for a while causing misunderstanding among Oromo groups in the diaspora. On the positive side, however, the bold declaration made by General Kamal Galchu's faction will give us insights into the differences that existed between two factions of the OLF which were led by Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo and Dawud Ibsaa, respectively.

For almost a decade, the argument was that there is no difference of vision between the two factions about the future of Oromia. Preoccupied by the quest for "tokkummaa" (unity), most Oromos have refused to see, or believe that there was a political difference between the two factions of the OLF. However, this did not bring the two groups together, or strengthen the struggle for national liberation. Now the truth is out in the open and staring at us in the shape of Jijjiirama's politics.

### **Jijjiirama's Politics did not develop in Isolation**

We all know that as Shanee was one organization up to 2008, the members of what became the Dawud Ibsaa and Kamal Galchu groups in August 2008 were sharing the same program. It was a program which mixed Oromo politics with the politics of democratization of Ethiopia and engaged partners such as Qinqit forming the so-called Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD). Even the present collaboration with Ginbot 7 has its roots in the rapprochements made with Ethiopian organizations while Dawud and Kamal were together as Chairman, and Commander of Shanee-forces, respectively.

The AFD rapprochement was defended as a tactical alliance to bring down the present regime, and nothing more. However, a closer examination of the behavior of known Shanee members and leaders indicates that there was more than that even from the start. One can discern three categories of members already under the joint leadership of these two men: These were/are (a) those who are strongly pro-Ethiopia; (b) those who are strongly pro-independence, and (c) those who were in-between, hesitatingly accepting the views of whichever group is influential at the moment.

Thus, in the first category we find those members of the Shanee faction who have declared their position such as Kamal Galchu, General Hailu Gonfa, and Colonel Abebe Geresu, Abba Biyya Abba Jobir and Licho Bukura. These were leaders within the faction before they left it and went in different direction but with the same destination, Ethiopia, in mind. Dima Nogo who argues that the question of independence was/is not in the political program of the OLF (ESAT September 19, 2011) belongs to this group also. There is no question that for many years, members' of the sub-group to which these men belonged were more influential than 'members' of the pro-liberation sub-group within the Shanee faction. The roles they have been playing in Oromo politics reflect clearly the difference between the Dawud Ibsaa and Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo groups. It is impossible to argue that the position of these ex-Shanee top figures on the Oromo question is similar to that of Galaasaa Dilbo, Ibsaa Guutama, Demissie Kebede, Mulugeta Mosisaa, Abiyu Galata and many other prominent Oromo nationalists in Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo's group. Here the point I want to make is that, judged by the positions their prominent leaders

hold on the Oromo question respectively, it is clear that there was/is a fundamental difference between the two factions. One faction is clearly for independence; the other is not. It was this difference which split the OLF in 2001 in the first place.

Going back to Jijjiirama's "new" political program, it should be stated that the division in the OLF started long before the ex-OPDO officers marched to Asmara and joined the Shanee faction. The idea of solving the Oromo problem within the framework of a "democratic" Ethiopia state was present within the OLF since the beginning (Dima Nogo on ESAT, September 20, 2011) and found its expression in the Shanee faction. Leenco Laata's book which entertained the idea in detail was already published in 1999. In public, the idea was expressed, albeit somewhat ambiguously, with the formation of the AFD in May 2006, a few months before General Kamal and his men marched into Eritrea and joined the Shanee faction. What makes Jijjiirama's case different is the attempt to hijack the OLF, pose as representative of the Oromo nation, and "drop" the question of independence—which is the fundamental objective of the OLF. In reality Jijjiirama's "new political program" is a frank version of the Shanee's AFD policy. It is boldly declared, but is not new.

As stated above, the common ideology which underpinned the politics of both faction—the Dawud Ibsaa and Kamal Galchu groups—has now crystalized in Jijjiirama's clumsily formulated political program of the "New Federal Republic of Ethiopia". Anybody who has listened to speeches made by Jijjiirama representatives on public forums and communications with mass media will understand that the basis of their political program has its genesis in the political orientations they were given while in the Shanee group. For example General Kamal in his interview with the VOA argued that his group's political program is not different from what Dr. Dima Nogo was saying in an interview with ESAT mentioned above or a book authored by one of the leaders of the OLF.

Although that the Jijjiirama political program had its origins in Shanee politics shows differences that exist/ed between the Dawud Ibsaa and Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo OLF factions, ironically, there are still those who argue there was no difference between them, and who say that, if it exists, it is nothing but a battle over words or a struggle for power. That kind of self-deception is not useful in terms of Oromo unity. It is, in fact, harmful.

### **Doubletalk Harms: Truth Heals**

One may ask why it important to talk about the differences that existed between the OLF factions now? My answer is: because honesty matters. Let us use the opportunity created by Jijjiirama's bold betrayal of the national cause and speak the truth. Reconciliation requires speaking the truth. Acknowledgement of past mistakes is vitally important to take a new step forward together. We criticize the Abyssinian elite because they have distorted our history. We have a moral obligation not only to stand against external distortion of our history, but also against distortions that come from inside.

With the departure of Jijjiirama, I believe that the majority of the pro-Ethiopia ex-members of Shanee faction have now abandoned the Oromo liberation camp for Ethiopia, and that the differences between the Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo and Dawud Ibsaa groups have diminished significantly. It is the obligation of the two groups to consolidate their forces, and work in unison for liberation. The creation of a strong united OLF requires that the Shanee faction stops once for all its doubletalk of democratizing Ethiopia and liberating Oromia at the same time and join hands with all Oromo organizations that uphold "bilisummaa".

In a speech he delivered at the Congress of Black African Writers in 1959, Frantz Fanon said that "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity." Many in my generation found the liberation of Oromia from alien rule as their mission forty years ago and founded the OLF; and many have paid with their lives while fulfilling the mission. I do not have any doubt that the Oromo masses have now discovered their mission too, which is

independence or “Bilisummaa” in Oromo parlance. However, many of us have been betrayers of the national mission in one way or another rather than working for its fulfillment. Many in the diaspora have taken the comfortable “neutral” position of sitting on the fence blaming the OLF leaders, or criticizing the “bickering” factions for “lack of achievement”. It is sad to read what these fence-sitters are writing on Oromo websites or hear what they are saying in Pal Talk rooms, asking without any reflection or shame: “Warri qabsoo irra jirra jettu maal fidde?” “Did those who are in the struggle achieve anything?” This has been an excuse for not making contributions to the struggle. As I have indicated at the beginning of this article, the Oromo people have achieved a lot during the last 40 years. Instead of making phony excuses like the above, it is now the time to climb down from the comfortable seats on the fence and contribute to the struggle. It is time that they come out from behind their pseudo-names and join the struggle, or at least stop making mockery of the Oromo cause for which thousands of Oromos laid down their lives. It does not work to sit on the fence and complain about Ginbot 7’s involvement in Oromo affairs; in short, it is the obligation of all OLF members and non-members to make use of the opportunity created by recent events and rise up in unity to liberate our people from the tyranny of Meles Zenawi’s regime. This is a common mission; it concerns every Oromo.

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