Failure to learn from history

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It is important to note that for centuries the Oromo lived in the Horn of Africa as a free, independent, and sovereign nation. During those centuries, they developed a democratic republican form of political system known as Gadaa system. It was a system of political and military collective leadership. For centuries, they lived under this system in unity. Under this system, they drew their national power from their democratic governance, their unity, their collective Gadaa leadership, their natural and human resources, their defense army and art of war and their determination live as a free and independent nation. However, by the beginning of the 19th century internal change began to take place within Oromo society. This was a period in which the nation began undergoing a state of political commotion. This commotion was created by the emerging of a new political system that was alien to the existing social and political order and to the institution of Gadaa system. This was a time when various kingdoms evolved by breaking away from the collective leadership and abandoning the Gadaa democratic system and its institutions. Hence at this particular time in history two rivalry systems were in operation side by side; the Gadaa democratic system on one hand, and feudal system of kingdom on the other. From the central Oromiyaa to the south and east Oromiyaa Gadaa system was in operation, while in Oromiyaa's southwest, west and north various kingdoms evolved. For instance, there were two states in western Oromiyaa, in Wallaga, five states in southwest in Gibe region, and six states in the north in Wollo. Altogether, there were thirteen petty states. This change weakened the Oromo society and their institutions. Consequently, the Gadaa collective political and military leadership declined and the Oromo people for the first time entered their weakest point in their history. This decline was followed with tragic history. With this as a background, let us proceed to understand the role of collaborators in this tragic history.

Menelik II's conquest and empire formation, 1880s - 1930
An overview of old and new collaborators

It was this weakness that encouraged King Menelik of Shawa to attack Oromiyaa, specifically the regions adjacent to Shawa. Not only this, Oromo weakness also inspired him to conquer the whole Oromiyaa. In order to conquer the whole Oromiyaa, however, Menelik needed two things: material resources and manpower. For this, he needed collaboration from prominent Oromo personalities and found the ablest and a willing collaborator in Gobana Daacce. With Gobana's collaboration, Menelik was able to get the human and material resources he needed for conquest including slaves, coffee, marble, gold, ivory, and other commodities to pay for the importation of modern firearms from Europe to fight against the Oromo nation. This changed the balance of force in favor of Menelik and his collaborators. Hence, at this historical junction of Oromo weakness, Gobana Dacce, collaborated with Menelik and became his instrument in the campaign of conquest, occupation, and colonization of Oromiyaa and in the destruction and slaughter of over five million of his own people. The introduction of modern firearms in the war, the Oromo resources, and the Oromo collaborators changed the whole history of the Oromo people for a century to come. In conjunction with these, the absence of a unified Oromo leadership to put up a united resistance also helped Menelik to conquer every region of Oromiyaa, one by one.
No Oromo region came to help the other. Consequently, they were conquered one by one. With the conquest, the Oromo people lost everything. They lost their country, their land, their sovereignty, their independence, their human rights, and their human dignity.

After military occupation, Menelik turned to the affairs of administering the conquered land through his military leaders. First, he confiscated the Oromo lands and gave to his soldiers. In addition, he encouraged Abyssinians to move to the conquered land for land and other benefits. Hundreds of thousands of Abyssinians flocked to Oromiyaa for settlement. Settlement was a colonial land policy. The settlers were armed, and given lands and legal protections. The goal of encouraging them to move to conquered territory was to serve the newly conquered territory as governors, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, policemen and tax collectors and to perform many other functions. After occupation of Oromiyaa, his first priority was to stabilize his rapid and bloody military conquest and occupation. In order to stabilize it, he turned to his collaborators Gobana Daacce and his cohorts. In addition, his regime also created new collaborators. The expanding colonial regime's goal was and always has been not only to conquer the people and their natural resources, but also to stabilize, maintain and strengthen the occupation itself, as the TPLF is doing today. For this, the new regime needed to build networks of support and alliances with Oromo nationals. This had a critical importance for the imposition of colonial rule. Along with these, armed settlers' outpost sites were established as a center for extending colonial power across the conquered land. These outpost which later came to be known as "Ketema" or urban centers are connected to Finfinnee/Addis Ababa the social, cultural, economic and political hub of colonial empire. This set the base for the continuity of Abyssinian rule of land and people he conquered and colonized. Professor Harold Marcus put it well: "As king of Shoa, Menelik had exploited the south and south-west to purchase weapons; as emperor, he used its wealth to bolster the north's sagging economy, and to ensure the continuation of Amhara-Tigrean political and cultural hegemony." And in fact, since then the Amhara-Tigrean identity and culture have been and is presented as the national culture of the peoples in the empire.

**Haile Selassie rule and the centralization of imperial state, 1930s - 1974**

Emperor Haile Selassie for the first time established constitution for the empire. The constitution was meant 'to ensure the continuation of Amhara-Tigrean political and cultural hegemony'. Along with the constitution, his regime created hereditary local landlords in Oromiyaa as subordinates to implement the colonial policy. Using the constitution, his regime legally expropriated the Oromo people of the ownership of their land and other natural resources. Their land and natural resources were transferred to the members of royal family, the soldiers, provincial governors, the Church, and to its local Oromo collaborators: the balabbats and other subordinates. The Oromo people became landless tenants. Hence in all regions of Oromiyaa, Emperor Haile Selassie's regime created a series of hereditary local landlords known as balabbats, for every "tribe" to rule itself as a subordinate to the center. Through these localized political hierarchies, that is the system of balabbats, the colonial center meaning the colonial administration in Finfinnee controlled the political, economic, and social system of the Oromo people and maintained the stability of the empire Menelik established. This regime also systematically launched a policy of not only the exploitation of human and material resources, but also the policy of oppression, alienation, and dehumanization of Oromo people and their subjection to humiliation. Their culture, identity, names, their traditional religion, and language were despised. And education was denied to most of the Oromo children. This long-standing policy of denying education to the Oromo children was communicated by Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold to General Tadesse Birru.
an Oromo and the president of literacy campaign known as "Fidel Serawit" by mistaking him for an Amhara. He cautioned him in these words, "We are leading the country by leaving behind the Oromo at least by a century. If you think you can educate them, they are ocean can engulf you" indicating the size of the Oromo population. Moreover, in 1958 UNESCO also documented that it is against Ethiopian law to write or provide any reading material in any language others than Amharic. And indeed, it was illegal to write, publish, teach or broadcast in Oromo language from the time of Menelik until Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed.

The rule of the Military regime, 1974 - 1991

Mengistu Haile Mariam's and his military leaders after having overthrown Emperor Haile Selassie, created collaborators known as cadres at all levels in Oromiya. The cadres became the administrators, spies, informers and infiltrators. Along with these, his regime created the resettlement of people into designated village centers known as villagization as a means to control and supervise the movement of population believed to harbor disloyalty. As its predecessors, this regime also kept on expanding the colonial settlements from the north to Oromiya, in the name of building "New Ethiopia." Indeed, it is to the same "New Ethiopia", today the new Oromo collaborators with Ginbot-7 have added a new label "republic" rephrasing it as the "New Republic of Ethiopia."

Using these cadres the Dergue regime murdered so many peasants, men and women, intellectuals, elders and youths. Thousands of intellectuals were dragged into jails and tortured and some even disappeared. Dergue regime nationalized the land. The land that belonged to the Monarch and the aristocracy, now transferred to the state. The people were still kept landless.

The rule of the Neo-fascist Tigrean regime, 1991 - 2000s

Interestingly, as the fall of Mengistu's regime approached, Meles Zenawi organized new collaborators into an organization known as OPDO (Oromo people's Democratic Organization) even before setting his foot in Oromiya. His army, the TPLF, came to Oromiya with the guidance of OPDO. TPLF came to the land it never set its foot on before and the people it had never met or knew before. But its collaborator, the OPDO carried it into Oromiya and served it as a liaison and it is still serving TPLF as its eyes, its ears and its foot soldier on Oromiya's soil. Later, this TPLF regime turned into a deadly and dangerous regime to the Oromo people and their land. Of all Abyssinian regimes, the Tigran regime of Meles Zenawi specifically targeted the Oromo people as a people. It is a regime that came to power primarily for economic plunder of the conquered lands. For this, to control the population and pillage the resources, it turned the empire's institutions into webs of spy rings of informers and infiltrators of social organizations such as churches, mosques, organized sports, family, communities, professional organizations, and opposition groups. TPLF is a terrorist colonial regime. Since it came to power, it has been engaged in devaluing, diminishing, debasing, and degrading Oromo nationals including highly respected Oromo personalities and elders. It extended its spy rings from domestic to diasporas. In Oromiya, OPDO serves this purpose. Under this regime, Oromiya is turned into land of concentration camps. The concentration camps are and have been filled with Oromo youth, children, women and men, intellectuals, and elders. In addition, it has also created detention, rape, torture and killing centers of Oromo and others across the empire. It has extended its
infiltration of communities and sport club and others in the diaspora. In the diaspora, most of its informers and infiltrators operate in secrecy.

As previously stated, TPLF has been brutalizing, persecuting and terrorizing the Oromo people to silence them from speaking out against the sale and lease of their land. Under this regime, lands are legally made a private property. The whole land is exclusively owned by TPLF regime and so it can sale or lease at will to any who can afford. Because of this, thousands of international land-grabbers and commercial farmers have been flocking to Oromiya. It is a regime with an aggressive political culture, a culture oriented towards consuming everything today, leaves nothing for tomorrow. In expressing such a culture, Aristotle once said that a barbaric culture consumes all of its resources to support itself in the present, whereas a civilized culture preserves them for later generations. This is a great contrast between Abyssinian political culture and Oromo political culture. In Oromo culture, everything is sacred and to be preserved. The land and its rivers, its lacks, its forests, its trees and all its wild habitats are sacred. It is for this, all these have been flourishing in Oromiya for centuries and for the time immemorial, while the Abyssinians consumed away their own and exposed their next generations to danger. The coming of Meles Zenawi regime to Oromiya has changed this for the worst. It has been engaged in destroying what the Oromo people have been preserving for centuries. It is destroying everything sacred in the Oromo culture: lands, its natural resources and its environments. Consequently, today environmental degradation is underway resulting in desertification of Oromiya.

In general, it was because of collaborators that all the successive Abyssinian rulers undertook and are still undertaking the deliberate and systematic destruction of political, economic, cultural, and religious institutions of the Oromo people. The occupation targeted the Gadaa system, Oromo religion (Waqqeffannaa) and Oromo history. No Oromo generation born in the colonial system is taught the Oromo history, the Oromo heroes and heroines and yet every Oromo who went to school taught Abyssinian history, names of their heroes and heroines. The Oromo children were taught Abyssinian history; the war they fought in, the battle they lost and the battle they won. In Oromiya, the schools were named after their heroes and heroines. In Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) in the heart of Oromiya the monuments and statues of Abyssinian personalities. At the same time, Oromo people were presented as a people who came from outside as invaders. And hence, they claim that the Oromo have no a tangible and knowable history. In this way, the Abyssinians removed Oromo people from their own history. This campaign is and has been to disorient a new Oromo generation. As it is oftentimes said history establishes the linkage and continuity of a nation over generations: between those generations who were dead, those generations who are living, and those generation yet to be born. By removing Oromo from their history, the Abyssinian attempt was and still is to disconnect the interconnectedness of Oromo history over generations. This is outcome of the conquest. On the contrary to the Abyssinian distortion of history, Oromiya is a country with a rich past with defined borders. It has a defined geographical location with a long-settled Oromo people in it from the time immemorial, long before the Abyssinians appeared in this region of Africa.

**Ginbot7 and its new Oromo collaborators**

Now let us understand Oromo collaborators with Abyssinians in its historical context. The origin of collaborators lies at the time of Oromo conquest it did not appear overnight. It is a continuation of past history. It began with Gobana Daaccee. What Gobana Daaccee created a
century ago is still following us. For this, we have to link the past and the present in our attempt to go forward. While the debate has been about how the "Agenda for peace", the "Bergen Conference", and the "Political Program of 2004" devastated and weakened the national struggle and fragmented the nationalists, B/G Kemal Gelchu et al made a new coup d'etat and joined Ginbot 7. Ginbot 7 was able to recruit new Oromo collaborators in order to fight the OLF and Oromo national movement. It recruited apolitical Oromo nationals who were the former members of OPDO and later joined the OLF. Among the recruited are found the disgruntled members of OLF to join the ranks of Ginbot7. Indeed, Ginbot7 has successfully created new collaborators in the name of OLF.

Who are the collaborators?

The collaborators are those who have lost faith in the struggle for liberation of Oromiyaa. It is those who have abandoned Oromumma (Oromoness). It is difficult to understand their rationalization for flocking to Abyssinian political organization whose purpose is and always has been against the Oromo struggle. But one thing must be understood that throughout history of colonization the colonizer always recruit those individuals with low self-confidence in their ability and opinion. Such individuals who do not trust themselves and their ability is always likely to obey and take orders from others with a little question. These are individuals with extremely knowledge of political issues who came to OLF with doubt, hesitation, uncertainty, and ambivalence in their minds as to what the Oromo struggle is all about. Because of this, they have become the fertile ground for Ginbot7 recruitment into its ranks. The slogan of these new collaborators is the establishment of a united 'New Republic of Ethiopia'. This is an illusionary fiction rather than a reality. It is only meant for detention. It is time to remind this group the Abyssinian saying "Gallan maaman kamootee bohala naw." Which means to trust Oromo is after his/her death. Galla is a derogatory name Abyssinians used to humiliate Oromo which is equivalent to nigger/. For this, before collaborating and before it is too late, the collaborators should ask themselves whether they do not run the risk of destroying themselves in the process. The unavoidable fact is this: Ginbot 7 will destroy its collaborators as Menelik destroyed Goobanaa Daaccee who delivered Oromiyaa to him.

On what basis did Kemal Gelchu et al become collaborator with Ginbot 7?

To find this out that one needs to listen to journalist Sisay Agena's interview with Mr. Andargachew Tsige of G7 on ESAT (Feb 13, 2012). The fist question was on compromise. The question was asked in Amharic as: "Ka Onag gar diriddir laay nawu aallachutti. Badiriddir laay maasxaatina maqqabbal aalle. Innasuu Itoophiyaa wusxi, ba Itoophiyaa, ye Itoophiyaa hideti wusxi aakaal lamahon ka rajjime gizee, jamiroo betalayaayye mangadi siyaanasu yenabbaree nager alle. Ok, innaasuu yaannin Itoophiya wusxi, ba Itoophiyaa, ye Itoophiyaa yhidatuu aakaal innihonaalleen siluu, bannaante bakkul yemmittisaxuu nager mindinaw?" Roughly translated as "You are in negotiation with OLF, in negotiation there is give and take. They have been saying for a long time and in different ways that they are in Ethiopia, that they are for Ethiopia, and they want to be a part of Ethiopia. If they say these, in negotiation in your part what do you give, you Ginbot 7?" Mr. Tsige's answered in Amharic, "Baxaam yemigarmi nagar, izzi nager laay yemmissaxom, sattowu yemmittiqabbal nager yellem." In English, it roughly says this, "A very surprising thing, here on this issue, there is nothing to give, nothing you give and take." It simply means, 'Just surrender, no compromise.'
**Ginbot 7 on federation**

Again here is what Mr. Tsige said in Amharic "Ka Onag gaar ba ahunuu ba killil astedaadar format, woynim ba anqatse 39, woynim leelaa aynati federation yinooaal yemmibal inquwaan nigiggigir maadirag annichilím." Roughly translated it means with OLF in regard to current administrative format, or article 39, or to say other types of federation exist, we even cannot negotiation on it. The position of Ginbot 7 is clear, "No federation."

**Ginbot 7 on right to self-determination, referendum and Oromiyaa**

Again here is what Mr. Andargachew Tsige has to say in Amharic, "Oromiyaa yemibal natsa gizat temasarritoo, ba Ikonomii iyyabalatsagee; ba quanquwaa iyyatexaqamee, ba hiiluun iyyasadagee yemihedi andi ager; natsa ager mamasarat nager ba Òtoophiyaa teccabaacci hunetaa limaxaa yemaaychil naw." Roughly translated as, establishing a self-administrating Oromiyaa whereby its people continues developing their economy, using their language, and developing their culture as a free country is impossible in the objective condition of Ethiopia (translation mine). In regard to self-determination, this is what he has to say in Amharic, "Referendum yemibal teyyiizoo, gabtoo yemmissarraa nager yellem. Ba federation yemimaxaa negar aallee bileen iminati yellenim." Roughly translated as, nothing can be done with the so called referendum. We do not believe anything will come from referendum. The whole point is this as ESAT put it up on its screen "No right to self-determination", "No referendum", and "No Oromiyaa". These are exactly what Mr. Andargachew Tsige, the number two officer of Ginbot 7 said in his interview with ESAT. No one can understand the political position the Oromo collaborators accepted in joining Ginbot-7.

In an interview with journalist Sisay Agena on ESAT(January 30, 2012), Obbo Kasim Abanesha, a head of foreign relation of "OLF" group, the group that recently collaborated with Ginbot 7 responded to the question asked in this words: "Inyaa ba Òtoophiyaa xilaa sir, YeItoophiyaa li’uulawwinati xabiqeen, lehulum Òtoophiyaa hizibi innitaaggalaalleen." Roughly Translated, "We struggle for all Ethiopian people under Ethiopian umbrella, accepting the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia." Hence to make this change he said, his group has changed the political objective of the Oromo Liberation Front. Another question posed to him was this: "You said you changed your political program and the political objective and you said you are an independent political organization, then why don't you have another name instead of the OLF name? It is possible a legality question can be raised", the interviewer asked. Kasim Abanesha responded, in Amharic "miknaatuu miksimu baxaam qonjoo nauw. Yebizuhan dem fasowletali, 'scarifies' tekafilobatal. Silasii nau yihin sim yeminigaara"- translated in English: "Because the name is a very beautiful one. Many shed blood for it; many paid scarify for it. It is for this we share this name." Here the irony is the group only interested in the name of OLF because it is a popular name but not in what it symbolizes and stands for. This should not come to us as a surprise. Because, opportunists whenever an organization is at its weak point, always raise their heads up so high to take advantage of opportunity as it arises, when it arises and if it arises, regardless of the principle.

As one can see from the above interviews, both Andargachew Tsige and Kasim Abanesha expressed the basis of their political unity. Their political unity is based on the unity of the Ethiopian empire, the empire Menelik established and against the struggle for the independence of Oromiyaa. It can be simply put that such an alliance on the part of the Oromo new collaborators with Ginbot 7 is a shameful capitulation and an abdication of national responsibility. The new collaborators followed Gobana Dacce's exemplary by
abandoning the Oromo organizations and allying themselves with the organization that opposes the struggle for the independence of Oromiyaa. This unity epitomizes the history of Oromo betrayal repeating itself all over again.

**A failure to learn from history**

In this struggle of ours, it seems we have forgotten the reasons that led to the conquest of Oromiyaa. We forget that it was the Oromo internal fragmentation of collective leadership and the decline that exposed the nation to conquest. And we tend to forget the crimes committed on the Oromo people and their land by the successive Abyssinian regimes from Menelik to Meles Zenawi. In the words of Mr. Winston Churchill, "A nation that forgets its past is doomed to repeat it." Indeed, it seem that we are unable to recall the tragic history that our people have been going through since the occupation of their land and why they failed to overcome it. Again a Russian medieval historian Vassily Kluchevsky has to say this: "History teaches nothing; it only punishes for not learning its lessons." Every nation has its past; the past has its stories and lessons. As Oromo we need to learn our past stories and lessons. But, the Oromo nationals failed to learn from stories and lessons of their history, history that brought the nation to this tragic stage. Consequently, since our occupation history has been punishing us unforgivably, because we have failed to learn from it. Today, because of this failure, the nationals that once prided themselves on carrying the torch for nationalist tradition, the torch for the liberation of Oromiyaa and the torch for the unity of their people have ignominiously degenerated into regionalism, abandoning the Kaayyoo which is bilisummaa, and some even joined the very group they were fighting against. This internal fragmentation into small groups and subgroups led the Oromo struggle to a low level of visible resistance. This in turn gave rise to the TPLF colonial regime to successfully control and exploit Oromiyaa and enjoy legitimacy of world community.

Now this generation is at the crossroads. The question is whether to cross or not to cross. The reason why this generation is at the crossroads is because there are members of the generation who have refused to cross and other members who want to cross. It is at this junction the struggle turned inward among Oromo nationals since 2001. Here to cross means to liberate and declare the independence of Oromiyaa and not to cross means to remain integral part of the empire of Ethiopia. The "Agenda for Peace", "Bergen Conference", and "political program of 2004" all call for not to cross the crossroads. It is this confrontation that weakened the national struggle and brought internal fragmentation which is similar to the fragmentation and decline of 19th century that encouraged Gobana Daaccee to collaborate with Menelik II and became his instrument of conquest, occupation and colonization of Oromiyaa. Today's condition is similar with that of 19th century. The nationalists are fragmented, divided, and weakened and consequently, the Oromo liberation struggle is weakened and the struggle has entered into a state of stagnation. By being divided ourselves, we have become our own worst enemy. Our internal fragmentations opened up a door of opportunity for the agents of Abyssinians to infiltrate and divide us more than ever before. Because of this nonstop division, we are consistently causing ourselves to fail in this struggle and exposing our people to the more and more danger and doing more harm to the Oromo struggle than even the ardent enemy is doing. It was such as division in the last quarter of 19th century that encouraged Gobana Daaccee to collaborate with Menelik. And similarly today, in 21st century, it is the division among the nationalists that gave an opportunity to the Oromo generals such as B/G Kemal Gelchu and B/G Hailu Gonfa and their associates to become the second wave of collaborators after a century, this time with Ginbot 7 in order to undermine the struggle for independence of Oromiyaa and to stabilize and maintain the old dying Ethiopian empire, the empire Menelik built a century ago.
In conclusion, because of Oromo collaborators with the Abyssinian colonizers our people lost their liberty, their dignity, and their rights in their land, on their soil. In the above paragraphs, an attempt is made to show that collaborators are snakes in the Oromiya gardens. They aided the conquest of Oromiya. And since the conquest, successive generations of these snakes have been working on the behalf of Ethiopian empire in poisoning the Oromo nationals, the Oromo people and their struggle. Nationalists and the patriots need to combat collaborators as well as the colonizer. Nationalists cannot afford standing at the crossroads. To cross or not cross is the question. In order to cross the crossroads, the conflict between Oromiya and Ethiopia has to be clearly understood by all. That is Oromiya is a colony. It has to be independent. Ethiopia is a colonizer. It has to leave Oromiya. Hence, the fundamental goal of the Oromo struggle is the same today as it was a century ago: the independence of Oromiya. William James, the twentieth century American philosopher, wrote in opposing the American war against Cubans' resistance for independence in these words:

“Here was a people toward whom we felt no ill will....Here were the precious beginnings of an indigenous national life...we are now openly engaged in crushing out the sacred thing in this great human world-the attempt of a people long enslaved to attain the possession of itself, to organize its laws and government, to be free to follow its internal destinies, according to its own ideals.... We are destroying the lives of these islanders by thousands.... We are destroying down to the roots every germ of a healthy national life...for one generation at least their faith in God and man.”

The quote summarizes the goal of Oromo people in this struggle and the Abyssinian colonial regimes' military campaign to destroy it. The sacred goal of Oromo people is and always has been the establishment of People's Democratic Republic of Oromiya which is a sovereign independent state, but the Abyssinian rulers’ attempt is and has been to crush it out. For this, nationalists need to be organized themselves militantly and mobilize their population in order to dismantle the colonial occupation and liberate Oromiya. It is time to learn from the past mistakes and the tragedies that followed and the current mistakes and their tragedies so as not to repeat them all over again. The time is in demand of the unity of Oromo nationalists and patriots to take this struggle to its final conclusion.

Oromiya Shall BE Free!