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### Patriotic resistance against Italian invasion in Sadan Sooddoo Oromo (1936-41)

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#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to highlight the resistance made by Sadan Sooddoo Oromo patriots against Italians during 1936-41. Qualitative research methodology with Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study and the relevant respondents from the target group were selected carefully by the researcher to get reliable and rich data. Available primary and secondary sources, the paper seriously took those in to account. In this paper the Sadan Sooddoo resistance, the notable patriots and the battle fought with Italians during the period was discussed and analyzed. This study casts some light on how the patriots made struggle against colonizer. This paper argued that, even though Haile Sillasie I was fled to outside after the battle of Maichew the patriots including Sadan Sooddoo Oromo patriots pay great scarification and made struggle against Italian colony until the liberation of 1941.

#### 1. Introduction

The Oromo of Sadan *Sooddoo* are named as such because they are three in number. They are Odituu (the elder), Tumme and Liiban. They are generally settled in the areas to the South and South West of the overall settlement of the Tulamaa with an extension to the area south of the Awash river as far as Arsi and the Borana of the Southern part of Oromia. Oromo of Sadan *Sooddoo* of

Oromo are located in Sadan *Sooddo Woreda* and *Sooddo Dachii* i.e. in East Shawa, around Ada'a Liiban Woreda in Tole, Qersa Malimaa, Woreda, half of Bacho and Quarter of Waliso, in Agamja in Tiya. As one part of Ethiopia several patriots continued their resistance to Italian invasion.

The Italians under Benito Mussolini were determined to have Ethiopia as their colony and make it pay for the humiliating defeat it had inflicted upon them at the Battle of Adwa in 1896, when a modern Italian army under four generals was crushed in one morning. The 1896 Italian defeat at Adwa, however, sent a shock wave to Rome that lingered right up until the invasion of 1935. Italy had, during this time, been contemplating a comeback to maintain its colonial interests amid competition from France and Britain in the scramble for East Africa (Snachi, 1985).

The Wälwäl incident of 5 December 1934, when Italian and Ethiopian forces clashed inside Ethiopian territory over the line of the frontier was not the actual cause of the Italian invasion. As early as 1925, Mussolini gave orders for military preparation with a view of waging war against Ethiopia, but not until 1934 did plans for the conquest of Ethiopia receive his full attention. Early in October 1935 the Italians made a rapid advance towards Adwa, which was 30 kilometres from the colonial frontier that divided Eritrea and Tigray, the northern region of Ethiopia (A. Mockler, 1984). Despite fire and air superiority and the use of mustard gas, the Ethiopian rebels and resistance fighters, who came to be known as 'Patriots' (locally known as Arbegnoch), began to regroup in their respective districts under their local leaders to confront the enemy. A series of major battles was waged over a period of three months: 15 December 1935 at Shiré and Enda-Baguna; 20-24 January 1936 at Worsege-Tembien; 27-29 February at Workamba and AbiadiTembien; 1-3 March at Selekhekha; and in the second week of March at Emba Aradom and all the way to Alage (Aregawi, \_).

By the time the Italian army had Addis Ababa under its control and Mussolini had declared Ethiopia part of the Italian Empire on 9 May 1936, only a section of the northern part of the country was firmly under their control. 'Five months after the defeat of Emperor Haile Selassie, Badoglio and Graziani controlled only one third of the country'. After the Battle of Maichew, resistance commenced more or less immediately. Many groups from the defeated army went into the bush and started resistance actions. Throughout the occupation period these Patriots remained active and made life difficult for the Italians, especially in rural northern, eastern and central Ethiopia. The country was thus never effectively occupied or colonized. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, a significant indigenous resistance movement, the Patriots Movement, emerged. Many of the younger Patriots, aware of the ensuing authority gap caused by the Emperor's absence, did not approve of his departure into exile. But Italians were not yet masters of all Ethiopia's vast territory. They could be more-or-less safe in places where their army had passed through and had left military garrisons behind (J. Calvitt, 2008).

During the 1935-1936 war, behind the lines declared 'liberated' by the Italians, hundreds of Patriots emerged in their respective localities to wage a war of

resistance in defiance of the occupation. While resistance proliferated nationwide, the different groups of Patriots were, however, operating on their own, some in traditional ways (raiding, hit-and-run attacks) and others employing modern tactics. There was no unified, central command structure. In most provinces, including Tigray, Gondar, Gojjam, Showa, Wollo, Arusi and Wollega, similar acts of resistance could be observed (Aregawi,--). Because of the Patriots' Resistance Movement during the Italian Occupation, which is discussed below, Italian rule in Ethiopia was, largely confined to the towns; hence it was mainly in the urban centres that the impact of the Occupation was felt (Bahru, 1991).

## 2. Materials and Method

In this paper, the authors used both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data sources were collected by assessing published and unpublished materials. To collect primary data, the authors employed individual interviews as well as discussions with the key informants. Historical reconstruction on a certain topic of oral community requires a close assessment of oral traditions using the available written sources for cross-checking. According to Dereje (2012) "*All human history is oral in origin.*" Since the 1960s in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular significant uses of oral traditions have made the reconstruction of people's past possible. Therefore, the current importance of oral traditions in the studies of African peoples in general and the Oromo in particular attests the relevance of oral sources. The available oral traditions were used as sources of data in reconstructing this history. After that, the data would be described, expressed and articulated qualitatively. All the data would be analyzed carefully and interpreted in accordance with the standardized canons of the social science disciplines based on the nature of information obtained

## 3. Result and discussion

### **The Conflict between Sadan Sooddo and Italy**

#### **The Battle of Buwii: The Death of Dajzmach Gabra Mariam Gari**

To avenge the shameful defeat at the battle of Adwa (1896), to realize their colonial dream and to stabilize the serious economic difficulties faced at home the fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, by using the Walwal incident as a pretext (Bahru, 1991).

In fact, Emperor Haile Sellassie mobilized (call up on the then regional governors) in order to halt the Italian advance. The mobilization of the Emperor could also get a positive response from the regional governors and the Ethiopian people at large. The Ethiopian arm led by the Emperor himself was defeated at the battle of Maychew on March 31 1936 (A. Del Boca, 1969). Following the defeat at the battle of Maychew, the Ethiopian soldiers retreated in to the interior and the fascists' forces advanced in all directions to control the different corners of the country (Ibid). Informants also confirm that the regional forces who accepted the call of the Emperor had involved in the

national war returned to their local region after the unfortunate battle of Maychew. It was in this way that the Italian troops occupied some parts of Ethiopia, including the areas of the Oromo of Sadan *Sooddo*. However, the Italians were confronted with a nationwide war of patriotic resistance. The Italian efforts to divide and rule was not successful. Moreover, that the war of resistance movement encompasses all regions and ethnic groups of Ethiopia. Even if the resistance was a nationwide, it was strong in Shawa. Informants also agreed that, the Oromo of Sadan Sooddo began their war of resistance movement after the arrival of the Italians in the area in 1937 (Bahru, 1991).

According to informants, the following individuals has great contributions in leading and coordinating the war of resistance in Sooddo area against the Italians: Qagnzmach Beyene Gudata, Fitwarari Mardasa Gada and his brother Jamama Gada, Dajzmach Balcha Safo and the like. During the war of resistance the Oromo of Sadan Sooddo divided themselves in to different groups and made heroic war of resistance against the Italians.

On the eve of the Italian occupation, Dajzmach Gebre Mariam Gari was appointed as the governor of Hararge region. In addition, following the occupation of Ethiopia, by the Italians the army of Dajzmach Gebre Gariam Gari has marched to the Southern fronts. However, following the defeat of Ethiopia Dajzmach Gebre mariam Gari escaped and had returned to Sooddo. However, on the way to Sooddo Dajzmach Gebre mariam Gari was caught and killed by the Italians forces at the place called Buwii located between the borderers of Southern Nation Nationalities and Oromia region. It was well known that Dajzmach Mariam Gari was a well-known patriot of Sooddo. His mother was from Roobee, whereas his father Garri Godana was from Sarboo group. After he was served as a palace guard and he got military training and merged to national military force. He was also participated on the war of Sagale. After completion of his responsibility and service in Hararge, he was returned to Finfinne and became the minister of defense force. He confront with Italian army prepared for forty years and got a victory at different times. For instance, in Arsi, Boqojjii he fought with Italy and pay great sacrifice. After the battle of Boqojjii, he fought them again in Sadan Sooddo. However, he was shouted here by Italian and killed (Shalama, 2007).

### **The Battle of Baddaa Qeerroo: The Initial Success of Sooddo Oromo Resistance**

Since the beginning of Sadan Sooddo the war of resistance the three brothers namely Gaamessaa Fuuqaa, Agamaa Fuugaa and Dhabaa Tola, confront with Italians at the place called Baddaa Qeerroo of Hulaa Sonboo (located West of Sadan Sooddo currently located in Walisoo Woreda).

As one strategy to weaken the war of resistance, the Italians had continued using their policy of divide and rule. That is by aggravating conflicts between each ethnic group and individuals against the state and so on (Tekalign, 1995). As their policy of divided and rule, the Italians considered that the Macha to be loyal or collaborators and they had given more attention to the resistance of Sooddo people and had tried to use the Machaa Oromo neighbor against the Sooddo Oromo. However, the neighbor groups of Sooddo; the Macha have

been served as inner patriots to Sooddoo vice versa to Italians expectations and they were locally named as “ Simbirtu himtuu ” . Beyond that patriots such as Garasu Duki, from the Macha group made great contributions in the war of resistance .

For example Garasu Duki initiated by the sons of Fuqaa became a patriot. The three brothers, Gaamessaa Fuuqaa, Agamaa Fuugaa and dhaabaa Tolaa directly joined the army of Garasu Duki in his local village located around Waliso. According to my informant, after the army of Garasu was coordinated they had prepared themselves for attack against the Italian army in the area. It was at this time that the Italians heard about the integration or the unification of the arm in the area and decided to crush it. Eye witness accounts states that the army of Italians accounted to about fifty campaigned to the area (the village of Darasu Duki) at specific place called Badda Qerroo.

The news of the arrival of the Italians soon reached to the unified forces of Darasu. Before the Italians army reached the area the unified armies of Darasu and the three brothers’ took an ambush and have been waiting the Italians. By using such tactics (through Guerilla fighting) the army of Darasu killed all (fifty) soldiers of the Italians at Badda Qerroo. The victory of Sooddoo patriots at Badda Qerroo was taken as the initial success of Sooddoo against the Italians. The victory of Sooddoo patriots has great significance in the course of patriot resistance against the Italians in the area.

It was following their victory at Baddaa Qerroo that the Sooddoo patriots divided themselves in to different contingents and had continued their patriotic resistance, which finally lead for the evacuation of the Italian army from the area. As to their agreements Bekele Weya and Beyene Gudata had continued their preparations together, they have made their army to be equipped. On the other hand, Mardasa Gada and Obsaa Jimmaa continued their preparations .The two sons of Sobbooqaa: Galate and Tefera have also continued their preparations by assigning their own war leaders.

Although the above listed groups were formed to continue the wars of resistance against the Italians in Sooddoo area, Dajjzamazh Balcha Safo, by taking his own army alone campaigned to in accessible parts of Wacaca mountain a place located about thirty Kilometers West of Addis Ababa currently found in Bantu Woreda .

### **The Battle of Habebe: The Death of Dajzamazh Balcha Safo**

Dajjzamazh Balcha Safo was born in south west shawa in Tole. He was participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Italian war with Menelik II and 2<sup>nd</sup> with Haile Sillase I. Even though, he lost his beloved friends on two wars he didn’t gave his country to colonizers.

Balcha safo was appointed by Zewditu and ruled Sidama. In 1924 Ras Tafari Mekonnen was went to Eupe for visit and returned to ethjiopia observing the civilization developed in different European countries. On his return he called several administrators to discuss what he observed. However, Balcha refused to come Finfinnee. At the end he came to Finfinne by the request of Zewditu with his 500 soldiers. When he reached a palace he shakes the zewdiru’s hand and refused to shake the hand of Tafari mekonnen. Starting from the day Ras Tafari

mekonnen was angry to him. Therefore, he took over Sidama from him and decided to prison him. Surprised by the issue Balcha says:

*Itophiya Enate mogninesh telala*

*Ye motelish kerto ye gedelesh bela*

As it was well known, following the invasions of Ethiopia in 1935/6, Balcha Safo, had marched to fight the Italians in the Southern front, which was led by Rudolf Grazziani. However, after the defeats of Ethiopia, both in the Northern and Southern fronts, Balcha has returned to his home base to Sooddoo to continue the war of resistance against the invaders.

At Wacaca Mountain, Dajzmach Balcha conducted stiff war of resistance. Fighting the Italians for two years at Wacaca, he had tried to return to Sooddoo with his army. When he reached at a place called Habebe, the Italian army who had information encircled his army and a great battle was fought. As the result, large numbers of people had killed from the two groups.

On the other hand, the patriot forces of Sooddoo led by Bekele Weya, Garsu Duki and Fitwarari Mardasa Gada had continued in their wars of resistance following the death of Balcha Safo. According to informants, around mountainous areas of Gibe area a confrontation took place between the Sooddoo patriots and the Italians. Since the conflict was conducted with balanced forces of the two groups, it was not easy to the enemies to get an immediate success. Therefore, after their initial clash in the area, they have postponed the major conflict for the other time, and they had continued their preparations on their side.

To give additional support, for the Italian army in the area, another group of the Italians was sent from Addis Ababa to Gibe. On their march to Gibe, the Italian force faced a surprise attacks from the forces of Garasu Duki, Dajzmach Bekele Weya and Fitwarari Mardasa Gada. The patriots of Sooddoo led by Garasu Duki, Bekele Weya and Meradasa Gada were divided themselves in to two. That is the army of Sooddoo led by Darasu Duki by taking the right flank, and the army led by Dajzmach Bekele Weya and Fitwarari Mardasa Gada taking the left flank followed secretly the activities of the Italian army in the area .

By following the Italian army in the area the patriots opened sudden attacks on the Italian army in the Gibe Mountain. As the result of the attacks, the Italian forces were completely defeated. Following their defeat, the hopeless forces of the Italian were also killed one after another by the patriots of Sooddoo. It was to commemorate the patriots of the Sooddoo that the singers song in this ways:

Oromo

*Yaa sooddoo yaa sooddoo*

*Biyya Baqqee Wayyaa*

weya

*Siifan guggubadhee*

*Akka Dhagaa gaayyaa.*

smoking.

Gloss

Oh, Sodo Sodo

The country of Bekele

I am burned for you

Like clay stone used for

### **The Aftermath of the Victory of Sooddoo Patriots at Gibe**

The victory of the Sooddoo around Gibe became additional efforts for the future resistance of the patriots. Informants unanimously agreed that, following their victory at Gibe the patriots of Sooddoo had intensified their war of resistance and had stationed at inaccessible part of Leemman currently, located in Kersa Maallima Woreda (i.e. South East of Addis Ababa) to continue the war of resistance against the other force of the enemy around the area.

During the time, the Italian armies were going from Addis Ababa, to the south (Jimma ) to give additional assistance for the Italian army defeated by the patriots of Sooddoo and retreated to Jimma town. However, before reaching Gibe, around Lemman the Italian soldiers were faced a sudden attack. The Italian armies that were marching to Jimma were organized in eleven cars. The Italian army faced an attack from the Sooddoo patriots led by Dajazmach Bekele Weya. Using their war tactics the patriots of Sooddoo first gave the chance for one of the Italian car that carry soldiers to pass and then they opened attack on the rest [ten cars of the Italians]. By doing such a heroic struggle the patriots of Sooddoo led by Dajazmach Bekele Weya have bombarded the Italian army. The local people expressed this tragic event through the following poem: \_

Amharic

Gloss

*Leman hafaf lay*

on Lemman Mountain

*Biret mitad tefto*

roasting pan is lost

*Habelan bekele be metereyes kolto*

Bekele feeds us roasting them (Italians)

by *Meterayas*.

### **The Aftermath of the Victory of Sooddoo Patriots at Lemman**

After their victory at the battle of Lemman and heard the news of the defeat of their army the other group of the Italian army, had campaigned to the area. Following that a major war was fought between the two groups around the area not far from Lemman. Even if the victorious forces of Sooddoo conducted patriotic resistance in the war, Beyene Gudata and Jamama Gada were killed by the Italian forces. Following the death of the two war leaders, the army of Bekele was highly disturbed and they have been very sad. According to informants, the following poem was told during the time: \_

*Yemay mot sewu mote*

*Yemay belash*

*Qagnazmach beyene*

*Kere be bilash*

Although, the resistance movement of Sooddoo patriots seems to be declined following the death of Gudata and Jamama Gada at Lemman , the rest leader of patriots such as Dajazmach Bekele Weya had kept the resistance alive among the Oromo's of Sadan Sooddoo .

After they were recovered from mourn, the patriots of Sadan Sooddoo were continued the war of resistance. Following their defeat at Lemman the patriots of Sadan Sooddoo retreated back to Sooddoo area. However, on their way still they were followed by the Italian army that were organized both in air and

ground forces. The army of the Italians followed the patriots of Sadan Sooddoo were bombarded by Dajazmach Bekele Weya at a place called Itanne. By killing the Italian soldiers Dajazmach Bekele has revenged the death of his war brothers.

The patriots of Sadan Sooddoo who confronted the Italian forces for five solid years since the battle of Maychew played significance role in the final defeat of the Italian army too. Although, many local people lost their lives they inflicted heavy damages on the enemy forces and eventually, forced them to leave the whole Sadan Sooddoo area. Thus, the Oromo of Sadan Sooddoo patriots allied with other Ethiopian fighters forced out the colonial power from the region in the late 1941.

Generally, the patriots of Sooddoo doing such heroic resistance they totally withdrawn Italians from the area. What were the factors that had contributed for the success of the patriots?

The first contributing factor was that most of the patriots have blood relationship (they were relatives) which had contributed for their success and that had strengthened their intimacy. According to informants the mother of Dajazmach Gabra Mariam Gari, Qagnazmach Beyene Gudata, Bekele Weya and Fitwarari Mardasa Gudata and Garasu Duki were from one group (i.e. the mothers of all of the patriots were from Maru group). The other contribution factor was that they have been secretly followed every activities of the enemy and they had opened an attack on the enemy when conditions favorable to them.

### **Sadan Sooddoo in the Post Liberation**

The process of privatization of land, which had already been started before, 1935, accelerated in the post war period. Thus, the post liberation period witnessed a remarkable growth in land sales. In spite of series decrees on land issue (1942, 11944, 1966), made to raise state revenue and reduce peasant, Gabar consisting majority of the burdens of taxation. The land privatization process initiated with the institution of land-measurement (qalad), and unequal distribution increased. Extensive land grants by the state to its officials and supporters reduced a substantial portion of the peasantry to the status of tenancy, particularly in the southern half of the country. (Bahru, 1991).

After Emperor Haile Sellassie returned from exile i.e. from 1941 to 1974, he significantly increased the wealth power of and privileges of the *Balabats* by making them hereditary landlord in their respective regions as a means of controlling their own people who expropriated share croppers.

The son and the successor of Ture Galate that came to power in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup>c following the death of his father was, Arada Ture. However, Qagnazmach Arada Ture was ignorant by nature he does not gave much emphasis for the Shawan rule. Since his father Ture Galate knows the behavior of his son from the beginning, he make the well known general of the time Fitwarari Habte Giorgis his religious father. After taking power, when order was given, Qagnazmach Arada refused to take the orders of the Shawan .It was during this time that Fitwarari Habte Giorgis have said “Tureen Dhagaa guddaa dugda kootti na hidhe”( Ture tied a big stone on my back ).

Following the refusal of Qagnazmach Arada to take the Shawan order his administrative areas was given to Qagnazmach Gebriyas. However since Qagnazmach Gebriyas had no blood relationship with Ture family later on Dajazmach Gebre Mariam was appointed over Sadan Sooddo. Again later on Gabra Mariam also indirectly appointed his nephew Bonsa Dhaba. After Ethiopia was liberated from the Italian rule, the conflict between the people of Sadan Sooddoo and the Balabats had continued for more than twenty-five years. As the result of the conflict, the amounts of land occupied by the Balabbat had reduced.

The people of Sadan Sooddoo revolted against their *Balabbats* through the coordination of individuals such as Gobena Walda Giorgis, Gobanna Immatoo, Getachew Dawwi and Aseffa Wakene. Since the conflict had continued between the people of Sooddo and Balabats, in 1974, the Dargue came to power by eliminating the monarchical rule of Haile Sellassie. After Darg held power in 1975, all rural land was nationalized and peasant associations were established as the lowest level of administrative units in rural parts.

After Ethiopia was liberated from the Italian rule when four tier of administrative subdivisions were set up in Ethiopia the current center of Sooddoo people i.e. Sadan Sooddo Woreda was part of the Chabo Awraja, which was also incorporated to the Southern Nation, Nationalities, and people of Ethiopia. After Darg came to power, the Sadan Sooddo Woreda was established in 1971 as an independent

#### **4. Conclusion**

To avenge the shameful defeat at the battle of Adwa (1896), and to realize their colonial dream and to stabilize the serious economic difficulties faced, at home the fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, by using the Walwal incident as a pretext. In fact, Emperor Haile Sellassie mobilized (call up on the then regional governors) in order to halt the Italian advance. The mobilization of the Emperor could also get a positive response from the regional governors and the Ethiopian people at large. The Ethiopian arm led by the Emperor himself was defeated at the battle of Maychew on March 31 1936. However, the Italians were confronted with a nationwide war of patriotic resistance. The Italian efforts to divided and rule was not successful. Moreover, that the war of resistance movement encompasses all regions and ethnic groups of Ethiopia. Even if the resistance was a nationwide, it was strong in Shawa. Informants also agreed that, the Oromo of Sadan Sooddoo began their war of resistance movement after the arrival of the Italians in the area in 1937. The Sadan Sooddoo Oromo fought with Italian at the battle of Buwii, Badda Qeerroo, Habebe, Gibe, and Lemman.

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The authors read and approved the final manuscript

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The author's declares that they have no competing interests.

**Availability of data and materials**

All the data we have used in the manuscript( in the introduction part, methodology and to support result are available online and some of them are available in the library like Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) which is found in Addis Abeba Sidist Kilo campus.

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