

Betray Not Tigrai Again!

Helena H/Selassie, MD 09 June 2017

Background

This piece is based on personal experience. During my recent return to the Motherland, I visited several cities and development projects throughout Ethiopia. I gratefully thank those who guided me all the way through. To learn what is going on in the social, economic, and political spheres, I spent most of my time in Mekelle. To my dismay, I observed a prevalence of maladministration, a chronic corruption, which manifested a failed governance system? Hopping for full acceptance as an Ethiopian and as a professional physician, I introduced myself to everyone as a medical doctor. The final outcomes revealed to me, however, that my hope was against hope. I had a dream project, which was to invest in a small rural clinic in one of the Tigrean villages where my family roots start. But, I was frustrated extremely by:

- (i) The ineptitude and incompetency in the current Governance System of Tigrai;
- (ii) The lack of trust among us Tigreans – particularly, if you're a diaspora you're looked down with suspicion and hostile attitudes;
- (iii) The lack of socioeconomic

infrastructure (acute shortage of electric power, water, and rural access roads as well as ruined hospitals, clinics, and schools in the rural areas), and (iv) most importantly, the *fatalistic* and *cynical behavior* of the officials, from the President's Office down to the Courts, the Municipality, the departments, and the local administrators (zone, woreda, tabia). On the advice of the NGO that was ready to help me establish the small rural clinic, I have suspended my plan. I am back to my residence, but thinking about the unfortunate-rural- poor relatives. I suspended, not stopped, my dream project hoping for a future that will usher in social, political, and economic climate conducive for genuine sustainable development. This is really disheartening, a spirit killer phenomenon.

From conversations I had with friends, it appeared to me that many Tigreans, diaspora as well as those who live in other regional states of Ethiopia, have given up to do anything to help Tigrai free itself from the **chronic poverty trap**. Tigreans are investing in Addis and in the regional states of Gambela, Benishangul, and Southern. Why not in the homeland? The people of Tigrai do not deserve this. It is a betrayal. The present government of Tigrai is absolutely devoid of effective governance capacity. During casual conversations, the officials pretended to be clever. They point out repeatedly the corruption challenges they have. Well, they have been advised repeatedly to clean up their act and usher in the spirit of *Weyane*. It is very simple. It is a matter of establishing an effective governance system characterized by the principles of: *strong nationalism and professionalism, accountability, transparency, justice, equity, rule-of-law, collective decision-making, universal suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, right to liberty, freedom of conscience, and other civil liberties and civil rights.*

Forget not the tragedies that occurred in the Amhara State¹: Isaias Afeworki of Eritrea, Birhanu Nega the traitor and their Arab sustainers (primarily Egypt) hatched tragic actions against Tigreans who lived in the Amhara Regional State and elsewhere in Ethiopia to create social upheaval throughout Ethiopia. They did not succeed, thanks to the patience and far Sightedness of the people of Tigrai. As they say, taking **high moral ground pays-off** more than 1 The following two paragraphs are from Admass Seged (10-10-2016). *Victimized in their own Motherland*, posted on various Websites retaliatory immediate reactions. Thus, Tigrean patriotism remains intact; Ethiopia is in peace; and the wishes of all Ethiopia's enemies, such as Ginbot-7, Shaébia, and the Arabs were dashed; and their next moves are being monitored closely. Particularly, the Egyptians are advised to learn

Lessons from the humiliating defeats their forefathers had to suffer at the battlefields of: **Gundet, Guraé, Senhit, and Aylet** in the hands of Raési Alula Aba-Nega. But, mob-lynching crimes against Tigreans were committed in Bahir-Dar and Gondar, the Amhara State, where federal and state security services exist presumably. These historical tragedies will remain recorded in history books from which the present and future generations will learn lessons.

The acts were ultimate betrayal of the Tigrean magnanimity. Bearing the burden of leading roles, the people of Tigray sacrificed more than 60,000 of their young daughters and sons, the **Tegadelti** heroines and heroes, including my sister and brother, during the 17-year bitter struggle to free all Ethiopia's nations, nationalities, and peoples from the grips of savagery of the despotic Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. This Marxist-Leninist junta not only massacred about a million Ethiopians, it also destroyed Ethiopia's social, economic, institutional, legal, and political infrastructures. Ethiopia was absolutely ruined. What did Tigray get for bearing the heavy burden of sacrifices to free and reconstruct the modern Ethiopian State? Go to Tigray and be an eyewitness of a **failed governance system**.

Evidences of a marginalized TPLF

Failure to play proactive governance roles: Incompetency of the current Government of Tigray during crises and peaceful times reveals complete lack of capacity to govern effectively and efficiently. It was possible to avoid the above tragedies Tigreans had to go through, if this Regional Government had taken actions against the ominous signs emanated from the Amhara Regional State sometime in April and May (2016). During that period, in the Metema area, properties of Tigreans were destroyed and their lives were threatened. The victims pleaded to all administrative and security agencies of the Federal and the Amhara State for help. Because they were denied justice, they took a long and expensive journey to Addis Ababa to plea for justice. The world heard via Aigaforum that they were received by the Minister of Federal Affairs, Mr. Kasa Teklebirhan, and other authorities. To the knowledge of many of us, the case of these poor households did not receive a just resolution yet. Knowing well the difficulties these Tigrean victims were going through, what measure did the Regional Government of Tigray take? None! Thus, the case what I have called **the Metema Fiasco** remains in **limbo**. This means that the Gondar and Bahir-Dar tragedies did not come out of the blue. There were enough ominous signs that required immediate and decisive political actions. The people who lost their lives and properties remain **uncompensated**, but they must.

It is the ineffectiveness of the Regional Government of Tigray that disheartened Tigreans most. It has neither the courage nor negotiation skills to defend its citizens and to seek compensation from the Federal and the Amhara governments for those Tigreans who lost their lives and properties in the hands of Amhara jobless hooligans, who were paid by Ethiopia's enemies? On top of these, the current Government of Tigray has totally failed in the socioeconomic development goals and objectives. **How many development projects were successfully completed in Tigray over the 26-year rule of the TPLF/EPRDF?** Tigray does not have even a single internationally acceptable stadium that can accommodate various sports' events. What happened to the Mekelle stadium? **Do you think a single Industrial park can function fully in Tigray under the current circumstances?** Compare the tremendous successes in other regional cities and rural communities to that *dismal performance* of Tigray.

In a legally enshrined federal system, a political organization that does not possess courage, determination, knowledge, and negotiating skills cannot even help itself let alone influence decisions made at the Federal level to help the people it represents. The current Regional Government of Tigray does not seem to realize that the TPLF is being

marginalized to the extent of being irrelevant. There is an urgent need for transferring the **Woyane Torch** to the young generation immediately before it is too late. **A sudden breakdown of a depreciated and decayed political capital stock** is extremely dangerous. Underground popular anger is simmering. Self-serving opportunist elements might take advantage of any type of upheaval. That dangerous outcome will further perpetuate the poverty trap's grip on Tigray. I would like to bring to the attention of everyone concerned that the abhorring conditions that brought the *unceremonious downfall* of Emperor Haile Selassie, who ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist for more than 40 years, should teach us very important lessons. History matters!

Historical Roots to Learn from

The current treachery of the Amhara chauvinist elements is a reminder of the historic betrayal of Minilik II, who sabotaged Yohannes IV's military strategies to fight foreign invaders,. Emperor Yohannes demonstrated his patriotism, leadership skills, and military prowess against all Ethiopia's enemies of his time. For example, the Ethiopian forces, under the command of the renowned African General, Raési Alula Aba-Nega, routed well-equipped **Egyptians**, led by European and American mercenaries, in the following battlefields: (i) in 1875 at *Gundet*; (ii) in 1876 at *Guraé*; (iii) in 1880 at *Senhit*; and (iv) in 1887 at *Aylet*. Again, in that year (1887), just after *Aylet*, Alula Aba-Nega scored a decisive victory over Italian invaders at *Dogali*. The Italians called their humiliating defeat at this historic battlefield as "**The Dogali Massacre**"².

While Emperor Yohannes was fighting all these wars, however, Minilik was making secret deals with the Italians and other enemies of Ethiopia to either undermine or kill Emperor Yohannes IV. Shortly after the *Dogali* debacle, the Italians agreed in a secret treaty to supply Minilik with 5,000 Remington rifles and money; and to recognize him as a sovereign power in return for his promise to assist Italy's colonial expansion. Subsequently, between 1885 and 1895, a total of 189,000 weapons were delivered to Minilik.

Emperor Yohannes IV died on Mar. 12, 1889 at Metema, in today's *Amhara Killil*, while defending his beloved country against the Mahdists of Mahdi Mohammed Ahmed of Sudan. How and why Emperor Yohannes IV died remains a historic mystery. Who fired the fateful bullet and what part of his body was hit? One only hopes historians of political history will reveal the truth. Many writers believe that Minilik's agents under the auspices of the Italians killed Emperor Yohannes, the King of Kings. The degree of betrayal and greed of Minilik for political power at any cost (including the sale and dismemberment of Ethiopia) revealed his idiotic mentality and greed for political power at any cost. As if he was to live for eternity, immediately after the death of Yohannes IV, just in less than two months, on May 2, 1889, Minilik signed the *Treaty of Wuchale*; claimed the Ethiopian Imperial Throne; and sold Ethiopia's Red Sea frontier, Bahri-Negash (dismembered the Motherland). Then, the buyers, the Italians, named Bahri Negash Eritrea.

How about the 1896 African Victory of Adwa? Frequent wars fought against external invaders in Tigray's soil are the major historical events that perpetuated poverty in Tigray. In a span of 40 years, "*some twenty major battles were fought in Tigrean soil between the Battle of Adwa (1896) and the Italian invasion of 1935*"³ (emphasis added). Tigrean men and women, the peasantry, had to bear the brutalities of the wars. In addition to their bravery in fighting the foreign enemies, the poor Tigrean households took care of wounded heroes and heroines and provided food, water, and shelter. Keep in mind that was a peasant army fighting a modern European war machine. Ethiopia did not have a salaried-national army

until 1941. The rules of war during those years were to let “*soldiers feed themselves at the expense of the 2* <http://www.historynet.com/first-italo-abyssinian-war-battle-of-adowa.htm>, accessed on 05 June 2017. 3 Young, John. 1997. Peasant revolution in Ethiopia: the Tigray People’s Revolution Front, 1975 – 1991 (p. 46). Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

Peasants on whose lands they traversed. Indeed, pillaging (plundering and robbing) from the peasants and collecting war booty were the soldiers’ chief incentives for joining the army” (emphasis added).⁴ Moreover, the Tigrean men and women provided crucial topographic information on the war frontlines, transportation logistics (donkeys and mules), and intelligence about the whereabouts of the enemy. Didn’t you learn about the patriotism of **Bashai Awáalom**? It is bitterly annoying to observe Ethiopia’s writers and policy makers give lip-service to Tigray’s sacrifices to protect Ethiopia’s sovereign Integrity. Minilik should not be given all the credit for the African victory of Adwa. It should be recorded as a victory of the frontline people!

The present Ethiopian generation must *immortalize* the enlightening patriotism of Emperor Yohannes IV and his brilliant general, Alula Aba-Nega. Monuments must be erected in Addis Ababa and in Mekelle, at the top of *Enda-Yesus* escarpment, facing to the northern Ethiopian frontiers, the battlefields of: *Gundet, Guraé, Senhit, Aylet, and Dogali* . These were the main battlefields where the Emperor’s most trusted general, Alula Aba-Nega, routed Ethiopia’s enemies, the Egyptians and the Italians. For Raési Alula Aba-Nega, I suggest that his imposing (huge) statue must be erected at a national park somewhere in Tembien, his birth homeland; and his tomb at the **Endaba Gerima Monastery** must be rebuilt, modernized, and enshrined. These monuments along with the other many tourist attractions Tigray has will be great sources of revenues. One only hopes that the Federal and the State of Tigray governments will take the necessary measures.

Closing Remarks

Without going into details of the 17-year bitter struggle that destroyed the heinous government of Mengistu Haile Mariam, a call for redressing miscarriages of justice is in order. The patience, the civility, and the magnanimity of the people of Tigray must be acknowledged. Although Tigray paid immeasurable sacrifices to defeat external invaders and dictatorial and corrupt political oppressors, the people are willing and happy to live in freedom, peace, security, prosperity, and harmony with all their Ethiopian compatriots in a democratically united Ethiopia. The people of Tigray have never been and never will be vindictive. They would like to be seen as civil, compassionate, magnanimous, and patriotic Ethiopians. But, civility, humility, and patience are **not** signs of weakness. The quest for justice that remedies all historical grievances must be addressed. **Enough is enough!** Let it be known that this generation of Tigreans will not remain complacent to all the injustices that afflicted enduring harm on Tigray. There is an urgent need for redressing all miscarriages of justice.

Betray not Tigray for the sake of Ethiopia’s unity in diversity!

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