

DISSONANCE WITH TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Tecola W Hagos, 7 November 2018

***Abstract:** It is unfathomable to me that a current Ethiopian leader would invite former high officials of the brutal murderous military strongman Mengistu Hailemariam to an official State function. Abiy Ahmed just inflicted on us (Ethiopians) another painful and insensitive act of unbridled tyrannical power hubris by inviting the murderous Fikreselassie Wogderese (directly) and Goshu Wolde (by association) to the State Banquette given to honor the departing President Mulatu Teshome.*

I. In General

In the last few weeks much is revealed on both the naiveté and the complexity of the mind of the new Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed (hereafter referred to as either “Abiy” or just “Prime Minister”). Complexity or naiveté does not necessarily reflect an aspect of a state of moral or ethical content. It is utterly possible to be complex without a strand of ethics or morality in a matrix—consider the game of Chess et cetera. Even in such clear case of action taken in self-defense in preserving one’s own life, one’s action on the ground is not as clear cut of ethical or moral content as it is in theory, for numerous individuals are hard-wired for altruistic acts completely sacrificing their individual lives for the benefit of others often complete strangers.

I find myself at some point irritable with almost everything Abiy does as I used to be irritable at some point with everything PM Meles Zenawi did although the two are lightyears apart in their personality, ethics and morality. Meles was dark, foreboding, and vicious, by contrast Abiy, at least on the surface, seems to be very open, kindly, and accommodating to a fault. [I have heard from exceptionally reliable sources that Meles’s Ministers, including the former President Mulatu Teshome and the former Prime Ministers Tamrat Layne and Hailemariam Desalegn, were all terrified of Meles Zenawi as were the Members of the Central Committees of the Members of the EPRDF. In fact, most Ethiopians in general were terrified of Meles. It is quite a relief to have Abiy Ahmed with his affable personality in a position of power, thus his tremendous appeal to millions of Ethiopians everywhere.] However, in one all-consuming aspect Meles and Abiy are very glaringly similar—they both obsessively crave power and adulations, and they both obsessively seek attention. I see that fact reflected in Abiy’s insatiable appetite to travel outside of Ethiopia speaking to adoring huge crowds of Ethiopian immigrants in Europe recently, in the Middle East, and a couple of months ago in the United States. Such adoration by people is addictive.

It is my observation of the few political leaders I am familiar with directly or through reliable sources that those with strong protective mothers and relatively weak/reserved fathers turn out to be far more benign political leaders than those with very strong domineering and often abusive fathers. In the first category are individuals like Abiy Ahmed, Berhanu Nega et cetera, and those in the second category are individuals such as Hitler, Mengistu Hailemariam, Melaku Tefera et cetera. These assessments on personality types are superficial and are not really clinically controlled assessments; they are more impressionistic than scientific. And the significance of such assessment is secondary or minimal to my overall understanding of good governance for Ethiopia. Nevertheless, I think it is worth including in the computations of leadership roles.

II. The New Female Nominations and Appointments

As a matter of my long-standing hope of empowering women and protecting children, I truly appreciate Abiy Ahmed’s recent appointments and nomination of females for the highest offices of the Ethiopian Government. This is a preliminary step in the right direction. However, on closer scrutiny most of the women now in high positions are either wanting in experience or seem to be burdened with unclear and questionable ethical issues. There could have been far more mature and appropriate choices of women leaders.

- a) **Sahle-work Zewde:** The election of Sahle-work Zewde by the House of Representatives on the recommendation submitted by Abiy is a good first step in the right direction in electing a female president. Would Sahle-work be my choice? Not at all for several legitimate reasons. I do know of Sahle-work in 1991 at the start of the Transitional Government when I was helping the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up new ambassadorial appointments and change of the organizational structure of the Ministry. I remember at that time that her name was part of the Ambassadors to be recalled and/or replaced. The main argument for her removal was that she had close connections with the Military Leaders and that her appointment to the West African countries as ambassador was not based on her service record, for she was simply imposed on the Foreign Office from the outside. I personally had never met Sahle-work but was informed later that she was being considered to be moved to a new post rather than being fired.

Among the many people I heard from objecting to the election of Sable-work as the President of Ethiopia, I also read in *Ethiopsis* that Prof Mesfin Woldemariam has objected to such election, his emphasis being that one must consider dedicated Ethiopians who have served Ethiopia right within Ethiopia to this day rather than bring someone who was not involved with the Ethiopian people right at home. I must say I agree with Mesfin's basic underlying fundamental idea of localization of leadership. Of course, the new President is the exception from the rest of the female new officials in regard to age and experience in that Sahle-work Zewde is a mature sixty-eight-year old lady and with a wealth of experience unlike the thirty-something age group of new female leaders.

True to form, Abiy spoiled the august/solemn occasion of the election and swearing ceremony by coming to the House of Representatives dressed in some kind of ill-fitting and ostentatious clothing looking like a clown. I cannot understand this form of juvenile behavior of an adult Ethiopian Prime Minister showing off in weird clothing. Abiy, please, just wear the Shama National clothing of Ethiopia.

- b) **Meaza Ashenafi:** The newly elected President of the Supreme Court by the House Representatives on the recommendation of Abiy Ahmed is a far better choice than the election of the new president. "Meaza Ashenafi was a judge on Ethiopia's High Court from 1989 to 1992 and then an adviser to a commission writing up its new constitution. She also founded the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and helped start the first women's bank in the country, Enat Bank." Meaza Ashenafi is definitely a high-achiever.

Nevertheless, the issue of the degree of involvement of Meaza Ashenafi in the famous kidnapping/rape and murder case in 1996 as defense attorney for Aberash Bekel must be clarified. Meaza Ashenafi must clearly acknowledge the attorney of record was not her but Etagegnehu Lemessa with full credit. The obvious dishonesty of Meaza Ashenafi is in her silence in not telling the truth that she was not the attorney of record defending Aberash Bekel, the real individual who was on trial for murder as was presented to the World as Meaza's famous case that was turned into the 2014 Ethiopian film *Difret*. "The film was promoted by Angelina Jolie as executive producer and went on to win the World Cinema Dramatic Audience Award at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival." Meaza Ashenafi presented herself as the real-life attorney that defended Aberash Bekele at such World forums.

However, the fact was that defense lawyer Etagegnehu Lemessa (who is now deceased) battled for Aberash at the Arisi court. Etagegnhu Lemessa, was working for Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association as a volunteer, and was the defense attorney of record who represented Aberash and argued in court defending Aberash that she acted in self-defense.

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypGVFDgV800>] The deceit was perpetuated with fraudulent intent by changing the first name of the real victim to Hirut and also by changing the name of the lawyer on record to Meaza Ashenafi. If the connection to the case is due to the fact that Meaza Ashenafi was the President of Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association at the time Etagegnehu Lemessa was representing Aberash Bekele, such crucial fact should have been clearly stated to avoid the wrong impression that Meaza Ashenafi as the defense Lawyer of record. This form of intentional deceit could have disqualified any appointment to high government position. I believe Meaza Ashenafi should do now the honorable thing by resigning right away.

- c) **The New Female Ministers:** Abiy Ahmed did carry out what he promised to do in his first address of the joint assembly of the House of Federation and the House of Representatives some seven months ago. I am glad that several women are in high Government positions. In fact, I do not consider it a disadvantage in having even all-women high government officials. But in the interest of efficiency and mature leadership, I value experience in leadership more than bookish approach and reliance in governance through diversity of ethnicity or gender for the sake of superficial appearances. I prefer a lot older and a lot more experienced Cabinet than one that is painfully young and novice. Nevertheless, I am particularly thrilled with the appointment of Aisha. Mohammed, an Afar lady, as Ethiopia's Defense Minister. The following are the new female appointees/nominees by Abiy Ahmed:

- 1 – Sahle-Work Zewde – President of the Republic
- 2 – Meaza Ashenafi – President of Federal Supreme Court
- 3 – Muferiat Kamil – Minister of Peace with high-security oversight
- 4 – Aisha Mohammed – Minister of Defense
- 5 – Adanech Abebe – Minister of Revenue
- 6 – Fetlework Gebregziabher – Minister of Trade and Industry
- 7 – Dagmawit Mogess – Minister of Transport
- 8 – Hirut Woldemariam – Minister of Science and Higher education
- 9 – Yalem Tsegaye Assfaw -Minister of Women's', Children's' and Youth
- 10 – Ergoge Tesfaye -Minister of Labor and Social Affairs
- 11 – Hirut Kassaw -Minister of Culture and Tourism
- 12 – Fitsum Assefa – Minister of Planning and Development Commission
- 13 – Billene Seyoum – Press Secretary
- 14 – Helen Yosef – Deputy Press Secretary

III. Missed Opportunity: Honor HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Great Statesman

PM Abiy Ahmed missed a great opportunity to prove how good a statesman he is by failing to give due credit to Emperor Haile Selassie I, the greatest emperor Ethiopia ever had even eclipsing my favorite Emperor, Emperor Sertse Dingle. There are numerous incontestable facts that fully support why Emperor Haile Selassie I should be honored and cherished by all. Foremost he had the singular vision and hard work to bring Ethiopia from the dark ages into the modern world. Throughout my school years in both High School and College, I never truly appreciated how primitive and backward the Ethiopian society I grew up in was even though relatively speaking I am in the privileged hyphenated-Ethiopians of the community of technocrats, merchants, local leaders et cetera. We Ethiopians have done horrible things to a great leader who had served us very well and delivered us into the modern world kicking and screaming from our primitive state and tumultuous period. I remember clearly my first participation in a student demonstration in the 1965-66 Academic Year. I remember how “gently” we were handled by the Police, the maximum punishment being a few days in security camps in nearby towns, or some local Police Stations ending up with bruised knees.

On a more personal note, what I regret the most was that I did not paint the Portrait of such a great Statesman and great Emperor, and a benevolent leader, during the time of my college days at the University the Emperor endowed with his own personal inheritance. I failed to carry out such simple act of appreciation out of sheer arrogance when I had plenty of chances to show my respect and gratitude by doing the Emperor's Portrait. I am pained greatly whenever I remember our vulgarity as university students in the 1960s in insulting the great Emperor, a truly enlightened leader, with our mediocre poems and shouting half backed borrowed propagandist leftist slogans in our annual ritualistic demonstrations against the Emperor. The student movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a tragic example of generations of Ethiopians that did not accept the reality of the poverty and backwardness of the Ethiopian people and did not take the responsibility of studying to become trained professionals with technical skills and know-hows to serve such seriously impoverished and depraved communities. Instead we all wanted to be kings.

Rather than dedicating ourselves to improve the existential issues of the social conditions of the Ethiopian people by going back home to the community we the students hailed from and teach simple hygiene, table manners, home and family management, digging wells for fresh water et cetera, my generation of students wanted to reshape the Ethiopian Imperial Government structure. The Ethiopian Government was built over the centuries through great sacrifices and sweat and blood of millions, and we the students of those periods fanatically tried to bring about the downfall of the Imperial Regime through demonstrations and disruption of our education. The mess we got into for the last fifty years is due to that irrational over ambitious and nonsensical student movement. Now, the new Prime Minister is doing his version of accelerated transformation of the same primitive minded Ethiopian population into an advanced liberal democratic society jumping over the necessary rigor of centuries of grinding hard work in raising the capacity and intelligence of the population. Through out our thousands of years, we had plenty of resources. The occasional devastating famines throughout our long history notwithstanding, we had all the natural resources to counter all disasters and develop. What kept us in primitive conditions of life for centuries is one fundamental reality that was and still is the lack of constructive knowledge.

IV. The Moral Fragility of Abiy Ahmed, the Manchurian Candidate

Much had been written whether leadership is inherently amoral—not subject to moral or ethical norms. However, one can find as much written material expounding the necessity of moral and ethical standards and guidance in any form of governments. I believe in the absolute necessity of ethics in governance. I expect no less in leaders in Ethiopia

- a) **PM Abiy's Morality and Ethics:** I started questioning whether Abiy has any strong moral or ethical compass to guide him in his populist governmental policies in the past few months due to the fact of his inactions and lack of sincere effort to defend individuals from the atrocities of ethnic based hateful persecutions of minorities in a number of Kilils. Instead he chose to embrace both innocent victims and their criminal torturers and murderers alike. I have been informed that he is a devout Pentecostal (denomination) Church active member. I have also watched an old video wherein Abiy was on his knees in some form of devotional ritual. But being a member of a church does not necessarily constitute in a person a moral compass. Girolamo Savonarola was a devout Dominican Friar, but he committed atrocities against other Catholics and destroyed their vanities including a couple of great paintings by Botticelli. Roberto Bellarmino was a devout Cardinal, but that did not restrain him from viciously prosecuting and burning the great futuristic cosmologist Giordano Bruno alive at a stake in Rome. [Burning Bruno "alive" was not necessary, but for the sadistic pleasure of inflicting maximum pain and suffering.]

It is unfathomable to me that a current Ethiopian leader would invite former high officials of the brutal murderous military strongman Mengistu Hailemariam to an official State function. Abiy Ahmed just inflicted on us (Ethiopians) another painful and insensitive act of unbridled tyrannical power hubris by inviting the murderous Fikreselassie Wogderese (directly) and Goshu Wolde (by association) to the State Banquette given to honor the departing ex-President Mulatu

Teshome. Such invitation is a blatant disregard of the pain and suffering inflicted by the former officials of the Military regime on countless Ethiopians, and there can be no justification whatsoever to invite any of them to an official State function. Whatever little respect I had to this new Ethiopian Prime Minister is gone. Of course, Abiy justified his insensitive and insulting inclusion of former officials of the brutal Military Regime by pontificating in his address of his guests his mantra of “forgiveness” and “medemer” at the State Banquette.

Let me point out the fact that the Families of the victims of Derg’s atrocities were not invited at that State Banquette. The Families of the murdered Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Families of the Sixty high officials savagely mowed down at *Alem Bekagn*, and the families of numerous Ethiopians who were murdered all over Ethiopia were never invited to any Abiy sponsored gathering whatsoever. The highly respected HRH Princess Mary Asfawossen and several other descendants of Emperor Haile Selassie live in Ethiopia; a number of them live in Addis Ababa leading pious lives doing charitable work with great humility and civic responsibilities. Would it not be noble and proper for Abiy to recognize such victims of the Military Regime of Mengistu Hailemariam and his associates at such State function than invite the murderous former Derg Officials whose arms up to their arm-pits are soaked with the blood of innocent Ethiopians? I admonish you PM Abiy Ahmed to think first before making impulsive decisions that affect the souls of victims, and you make us all victims all over again.

- b) Derg’s Winning Strategy and the Manchurian Candidate:** Definitely, Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, Capitain Fikre Selassie Wogderes, Colonel Fisseha Desta, Major Berhanu Bayeh, Captain Legesse Asfaw, Major Addis Tedla, Lieutenant Colonel Endale Tessema, Captain Gessese Wolde-Kidan, Major-General Wubshet Dessie, Major Kassaye Aragaw, Colonel Debela Dinsa, Captain Begashaw Atalay, Second Lieutenant Sileshi Mengesha, Colonel Nadew Zekarias, Lieutenant Petros Gebre, Second Lieutenant Aragaw Yimer, Major Dejene Wondimagegnehu, and Lieutenant Desalegn Belay should have been publicly executed by firing squads in major squares around Addis Ababa, Dessie, DebreMarkos, Harrar et cetera where they committed most of their atrocities. I am not being vengeful but just, after all, they caused the deaths of over half a million Ethiopians and millions of incarcerations. [See the Records of the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International]

Those former Derg Members mentioned above are just the tip of the iceberg of thousands of vicious criminals not yet fully exposed under the radar clocked behind secrecy. They were the most vicious merciless individuals who have either directly or indirectly ordered the murder, torture and dehumanization of thousands of Ethiopians. They are individually and collectively responsible for the death of the sixty High Officials of the Ethiopian Government, the death of the Emperor, the death of the Patriarch and countless student activists and political leaders. Their guilty has been established in a court of law. It is in fact, a perversion of justice that they were allowed to live this long and pardoned too. Steps should have been taken against them when their bloody government collapsed in 1991.

Is it not a great paradox and the result of mediocrity of Meles Zenawi and the EPRDF Leadership that Fikreselassie Wogderese who was pardoned by them is now writing in *Ethiopia* (November 5, 2018) to liquidate TPLF with a veiled suggestion to reestablish or reconstitute the disbanded Workers Party of Mengistu Hailemariam with Abiy Ahmed as its new head? In Fikreselassie’s view Abiy is weak because he depends on the EPRDF to have his orders carried out, and for Abiy to be fully in power he ought to have his own new power base as the new leader with possible reconstitution of the Workers Party of Mengistu Hailemariam. This is a revelation that I suspected all along when I watched a few months back the notorious Kassa Kebede being treated as a returning “head of state” by Abiy Ahmed and the Amhara Kilil Leadership of Gedu

Andargatchew (a former Derg soldier) and Demeke Mekonnen. It seems that Mengistu Hailemariam and the former Officials of the defunct Military Regime are now defeating the EPRDF without shooting a single bullet by just using the greed and stupidity of the Leaders of the EPRDF and Abiy Ahmed as their Manchurian Candidate.

Conclusion:

Whether it is Abiy Ahmed, or the Supreme Court of the Federation, or the House of Representatives or anybody else does not have the moral authority to pardon or forgive any of the convicted Derg Members. Taking into account the recent manipulations of the defunct Derg Members who were pardoned and released from prison and the willingness of Abiy Ahmed to use them in order to consolidate his power against EPRDF/TPLF, Abiy Ahmed must be put under strict control and all of his contact with former officials of Mengistu Hailemariam completely banned. This ban of contact should be equally applied to all Kilil Leaders, The President of the Ethiopian Government, all Members of the House of Representatives, and every Member of the Executive Branch of the Ethiopian Government. I also urge the Ethiopian Military to take into custody all pardoned former Derg Officials starting with Fikreselassie Wogderese. I urge once again the Ethiopian Military to take over the reign or chain-of-command of “Power” and act as guardians with the current Abiy Ahmed’s Government structure in place but under strict control using the earlier Turkish model of control by the Turkish Military before that structure was destroyed by the current President of Turkey Tayyip Erdogan in the period 2002-2007.

I am restating in this essay the assertion I have often stated in several of my past comments that weak and/or despotic societies “forgive,” but powerful/democratic communities dispense justice. This assertion may be as provocative as it is simple to understand. Indeed, Ethiopians hold justice “ፍትሕ” above everything else. It is also my observation that people who are too eager to forgive their abusers, tend to abuse others in their turn. It is a fact that those who are publicly perceived to be the paragon of virtue are wanting in their private lives where virtue truly matters. In a world where people have difficulties going over a much lower threshold of “fairness,” it is appropriate to set “justice” as a social goal rather than pursue acts of “forgiveness” or “pardon” as a solution in social conflicts and/or individual crimes.

Almost a century and a half years ago, Immanuel Kant penned down what obviously contradicts his optimistic general view on the spiritual and social progress of mankind by stating, “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.” I will not go that far completely discounting the many real good things man has done to improve his own circumstances. Ethiopia is on the verge of great breakthrough and would emerge out of its present chaotic situation as a regional economic power house. The turmoil that we are experiencing right now, even with a gifted orator leader but with mediocre governance skill, should not be seen as the last phase of the destruction of our long suffering but as an emerging and enduring country. This complex often disconcerting process of change is nothing more than the birthing pang of a vigorous renewed Ethiopia.

Tecola W Hagos,
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