

Pan-Ethiopian Agenda Vs Sectarian Ethnocentric Politics

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This essay, as its title suggests, intends to discuss the significance and preponderance of an overarching Ethiopian nationalism over narrow ethnic nationalism. This is not the first time I have addressed a pan-Ethiopian agenda that is more inclusive vis-à-vis exclusive or divisive ethnocentric politics; I have indeed produced many similar articles in the past , some of which are: 1) ለኢትዮጵያ የሚበጅ የፖለቲካ ስትራቴጂ መቀየስ የሁላችን ሐላፊነት ነው (2006); 2) የትምክህተኝነትና የጠባብ ብሔርተኝነት አደገኛነት; 3) Beyond Ethnocentric Ideology and Paradigm Shift for A Greater Ethiopian Unity.¹

The above mentioned articles, including the present essay, propose and underscore one strong unified Ethiopia as well as the unity and solidarity of the Ethiopian people, without undermining the self-determination (short of secession) of the various Ethiopian nationalities. After centuries of evolutionary process, the many linguistic groups that make up Ethiopia forged a common Ethiopian identity (hence “people” instead of “peoples”). Consequently, Ethiopians expressly and proudly demonstrate their identity by saying “I am Ethiopian” instead of saying I am Amhara, Tigrayan, Afar, Oromo, or Gambella. There is nothing wrong for Ethiopians to identify themselves by their ethnic “nationhood”, but the problem arises when ethnic sentiments are overemphasized and exaggerated to the extent of being resentful to other nationalities.

An inflated and overblown ethno-nationalism is dangerous and it can lead to animosity and civil strife. By contrast, the Ethiopian identity incorporates a pan-Ethiopian psychological makeup and there is no room for disliking, hating, and/or resenting other ethnic groups. It logically follows, thus, that the pan-Ethiopian agenda, at least theoretically, accommodates the interests of all nationalities on equal footing.

At this juncture of Ethiopian history and in light of globalization where transnational corporations (TNCs) predominate and have a tight grip on the global economy, a pan-Ethiopian agenda would be imperative, because only a unified Ethiopian nation can bring about peace and progress to Ethiopians; and only a pan-Ethiopian agenda can enable Ethiopia to prevail, if not compete, in the global economy; only a unified Ethiopia can play a constructive and positive role in safeguarding the interests of the Ethiopian people; only a unified and strong Ethiopia can strengthen the pan-African political program of the African Union. By contrast, ethnocentric politics, a more negative and toxic agenda of ethno-nationalists, goes against reason and the general trend of progress, and contravenes the constructive contributions of the pan-Ethiopian agenda.

How can we then reconcile pan-Ethiopian nationalism and ethnocentric nationalism? In order to meaningfully answer this question, it is first important to critically examine the essential differences between “primitive” or traditional societies/communities and modern nation-states. Unless we understand what exactly characterize traditional and modern communities, we will have a hard time understanding narrow and cosmopolitan outlooks respectively.

In order to have a full grasp of the elements or factors that shape and characterize traditional and modern communities, it is important to follow the methodological rigor Emile Durkheim employed in analyzing societies. Durkheim, credited for being the founder of sociology, while discussing social cohesion and collective consciousness, attributes ‘mechanical solidarity’ to traditional societies and ‘organic solidarity’ to modern societies. Mechanical solidarity is based on similarity, that is to say everyone in traditional community is alike; and they have the same experience, views, and feelings. By contrast, in organic solidarity cohesion is based on

differentiation and interdependence. While mechanical solidarity is monocultural (think of a village in Gojjam or Tigray), organic solidarity is essentially multicultural (think of Addis Ababa and other major cities in Ethiopia or Ethiopia as a whole). In mechanical solidarity, the members of the community have same psychological makeup; in organic solidarity, as Durkheim aptly put it, "people can live together and feel solidarity without all having to think and act alike."

Now, based on the paradigms discussed above, if we put to test our country Ethiopia, we can safely assume that the larger Ethiopian society hosts both mechanical and organic solidarities; the former is manifested at village level and the latter at major cities and national levels. But given the general trend of history and the nascent hegemony of globalization, we have no choice but to prioritize and reinforce our organic solidarity. On the other hand, if we opt in embracing mechanical solidarity and willingly degenerate to narrow ethnocentric nationalism, then we must realize that we have just signed our death warrant voluntarily.

Ethiopia is not unique in being multi-ethnic and multicultural. All nations in the world, with some exceptions, are multi-ethnic, although Western societies exhibit more organic solidarity, thanks in large measure to capitalism that has created political and economic uniformity. However, some Western nations lack uniformity in languages and cultures and yet they are unified under the same market economy and political philosophy that promotes their national interests. A good example of the latter are: Switzerland with four official languages, namely German, Italian, French, and Romansh; Belgium with two languages (French and Flemish); and the United Kingdom or Great Britain with four autonomous regions (England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland).

Once Ethiopians entertain their collective consciousness via organic solidarity, they will begin to appreciate and celebrate their diversity in spite of their linguistic and cultural differences. Moreover, Ethiopians will realize that their country is indeed a tapestry and a garden salad at the same time. When I taught 'The World as a Total System' (undergraduate) and 'International Diversity and Integration' (graduate) at Central Connecticut State University, I instructed my students to explore the commonality between nations and cultures across the globe; in due course of their research, they found out so many factors (e.g. non-verbal communication gestures) that can tie up human societies than the differences in cultures that can push them apart. If this is the case around the globe, then respective nations (including Ethiopia), which are part of the World as a Total System, also must exhibit organic solidarity.

Going back to the metaphors of tapestry and garden salad, metaphors that I borrowed from Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester's book entitled *Intercultural Competence*, I like to elaborate these paradigmatic notions and show the reader how Ethiopia fits into the framework of the metaphors. Lustig and Koester define the Tapestry metaphor as "a decorative cloth made up of many strands of thread.... Each thread is akin to a person, and groups of similar threads are analogous to a culture. Of course, the types of threads differ in many ways; their thickness, smoothness, color, texture, and strength may vary." And they define the Garden Salad metaphor as "...distinct cultures that are blended into a unique mixture.... A salad contains a blend of ingredients, and it provides a unique combination of tints, textures, and tastes that tempt the palate."²

Ethiopia very well fits into the metaphors mentioned above, in which diversity is enmeshed into either the tapestry or the salad, or both. Through its long history, Ethiopia not only hosted seven dozen of linguistic groups

but also served as a fabric that uniquely reflects the different threads of these ethnic groups who have been interacting and blending for thousands of years. If Ethiopia is an admixture of both metaphors, why is it then that some Ethiopians seem to gravitate toward ethnocentric politics and are even rallied around mechanical solidarity? Is it because they lack political consciousness or are oblivious to the patriotic zeal and fierce sense of independence of their fathers and mothers? Or is it the lack thereof of both?

During the golden days, when I was a student at Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University), the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) under the leadership of the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) fostered a miniature Ethiopia of unified students that have come from different corners of Ethiopia. USUAA was an embodiment of a unified Ethiopia exemplified by a determined student body with the highest political consciousness. The students promoted a pan-Ethiopian agenda while at the same time raised the question of nationalities (sometimes excessively), among many other issues, including 'land to the tiller'.

Rallied around USUAA, we students were ethnic-blind and we did not care whether one belongs to this or that nationality. For us, Ethiopia comes first and the Ethiopian identity was what mattered then, and based on this national identity we were proactively engaged in challenging the Government of Emperor Haile Selassie. Our political slogans and demands frightened the status quo in general and the regime in power in particular; and the government attempted to instigate ethnic conflict but was not successful, although there were isolated ethnic quarrels at Ba'eda Mariam Laboratory School, Bahir Dar Polytechnic, and Harar Teachers Training Institute. The student leaders immediately took action and quelled the spontaneous ethnic clashes among students in the above mentioned

campuses. Students were triumphant not only on the regime that tried to divide them but also in upholding the sacrosanct Ethiopian agenda.

What happened now? Where has that great legacy of the ESM gone? To answer these questions and the questions I already posed earlier, it is imperative that we dwell on the cause of the current ethnocentric politics. When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, it divided up Ethiopia into nine autonomous regional states based on language and ethnicity. During that time, although I thought the EPRDF transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE) policy of federalism was designed to resolve the question of nationalities that we students have demanded before the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, on second thought I felt that Article 39 of the constitution, that empowered the regional states to secede, could in fact undermine the unity of Ethiopia and could even create havoc to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore in my debut book (1995), I argued the following:

*The TGE's policy of Kilil is commendable, but the consequence of fragmentation as a result of new wave of ethnic political consciousness and the inability of some minority nationalities to become economically and politically viable, would ultimately preoccupy Ethiopians to otherwise unforeseen problem.*³

As I have predicted 21 years ago, ethnic political consciousness in Ethiopia and among Diaspora Ethiopian communities is now at its apex, although narrow ethno-nationalism has been creeping and building up since the formation of the regional states. Quite obviously, thus, the original sin or the etiology for ethnocentric politics is the EPRDF's agenda of demarcating Ethiopia based on languages and ethnicity and establishing mono-cultural regional states. The attendant ethnic identity of the regional states could now be seen as the unintended consequence of EPRDF's federalism that encouraged mechanical solidarity and diminished organic solidarity. While

the EPRDF must be congratulated for liberating hitherto forgotten and oppressed nationalities like Gambella, Beni Shangul Gumuz, Afar, Somali, and plethora of other sub-nationalities in the Southern Regional State, it should also be acknowledged that ethnic animosity has now become the vogue in Ethiopia following ethnic-related restructured Ethiopia. However, of all the regional states, it is in the Oromia Regional State that narrow ethnocentric politics is grossly entertained; in this regional state, the native residents don't want to communicate in Amharic, the official lingua franca of Ethiopia; they have adopted Latin alphabets (that the majority of Oromo peasants don't understand) for Afan Oromo as opposed to Geez Fidel (Ethiopian alphabets that most Oromo are familiar with and understand). Is this not a good example of diminishing a pan-Ethiopian nationalism and replacing it with narrow ethno-nationalism? If we answer this question in the affirmative, we should neither be surprised by the recent Oromo protestation nor blame the protesters, because the latter's psychological makeup is akin to mechanical solidarity that is readily available on their environs; a psychological makeup engendered by the demarcation of Ethiopia based on ethnicity.

As of recent, a lot of Ethiopians, including some intellectuals in the Diaspora, EPRDF officials, former TPLF/EPRDF officials, and former Derg members have spoken out in regards to the problems and dangers of ethnic politics, and the remainder of this article will critically examine the ideas and proposals of these commentators.

One of the above commentators is Ato Abay Tsehaye, an EPRDF high ranking official, adviser to the Prime Minister, and one of the founders of the TPLF. Ato Abay, has been openly discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the EPRDF for the last two years or so; in the 2015 pre-election debates, for instance, he admitted that there is insurmountable

corruption within the EPRDF in particular and the Government in General; and in the recent interview he conducted with Aiga Forum, he frankly told us that his party is troubled by undemocratic practices while he confidently asserted the Government's achievement in the foundational economy.

I am gratified that finally the EPRDF admitted its weakness in regards to the promotion of democracy although for two decades it entertained an obscure policy spectrum of "revolutionary democracy" and/or "democratic developmental state". Despite its claim of democracy, however, it is a well known fact that the EPRDF trampled over democracy by alienating the opposition parties in Ethiopia and by declaring a 100% victory in the 2015 election. It is also an established fact that EPRDF's state, euphemistically named developmental state, actually is a one-party dictatorship.

I can say now I am vindicated by Ato Abay's own admission of the lack of democracy in Ethiopia, because I have dealt with this problem in its macro sense (lack of democratic culture in the government and in the larger Ethiopian society) in my earlier articles and my most recent book. For instance, in a review I wrote on Meles Zenawi's (MZ) thesis entitled "African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings", I argued, "How is Mr. Zenawi going to reconcile the virtual absence of democracy in Africa with the rich democratic culture of Northern Italy? Moreover, the Ethiopian political landscape of the last fifteen years [now two decades], have not witnessed a climate of democracy and tolerance, and unless MZ is anticipating a democratic Ethiopia of the future and his associates and himself are ready to lay the cornerstone for such a future, zero-sum politics will continue unabated in Ethiopian political culture."⁴

In a similar vein to the above critique that was written in 2006 but was incorporated as a chapter in my book in 2013, I have also argued the following:

Democracy as understood and practiced in the West or even in India and Botswana does not exist in Ethiopia. To be sure, the current government of Ethiopia presided over by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party allowed a modicum of democratic culture such as elections and free press, but it also took contradictory measures at suppressing the democratic rights of the opposition perceived as actual threats. Moreover, political parties contesting elections are unable to enjoy rights in mobilizing public support and against the seating government; the elected legislature is dominated by the EPRDF cadres; electoral procedure and the Electoral Board are controlled by the ruling party; civic organizations that could potentially challenge the status quo are not allowed to organize at a national level; the free press is suppressed and editors are sent to jail if they are "too critical" of the government. As a result, the initial promise of the EPRDF of implementing democracy in Ethiopia has been indefinitely delayed.⁵

What is most important is not my critical observation of Ethiopian politics as shown above; what is crucial is Abay Tsehaye's criticism of his own party, which I hope his colleagues also endorse his ideas. But what the EPRDF still did not realize is that its artificially imposed policies could become a recipe for disaster, and it never thought that the Ethiopian people could challenge the status quo in the form of uprising or insurrection, or spontaneous protestations as it happened in the Oromia, Konso, and Gonder areas. Long before these protestations, however, it was in Tigray that the government encountered criticism in town-hall meetings in Adwa, Adigrat, and Wukro; the people openly told the local officials that they did not get any government provisions as promised and they have no confidence in the government. Incidentally, as we shall see later, these anti-government commotions have not yet assumed the level of an organized people's uprising.

On the other hand, and in spite of the lack of democracy in Ethiopia and obdurate style of governance of the regime in power, the EPRDF has made spectacular achievements in the overall development of Ethiopia. Some intellectuals, not to mention the relatively uninitiated Diaspora opposition groupings, don't want to give credit to the EPRDF with respect to the changes that took place in Ethiopia in the last two decades, because they harbor the paradox of mental vision manifested in insanity and senseless emotions. I am not trying here to give a face lift to the EPRDF; I am just trying to be objective and fulfill my scholarly obligations; and to be sure I have given credit to the Derg as well in my debut book.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the EPRDF laid down the basic foundational economy that could enable Ethiopia to make a transition from a predominantly agricultural economy to an industrial manufacturing sector. In the last two decades the Government has built numerous roads and bridges that connected all Ethiopian regions; clinics, schools, and electricity that have now reinforced rural development; colleges and universities that have now quadrupled in number compared to the Derg period; there are now 33 universities throughout Ethiopia and evenly distributed in all the regional states and this a remarkable stride in educational development although quality education remains a major challenge. On top of the above mentioned development-related initiatives, major projects that could also boost the Ethiopian economy are the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway; the Addis Ababa City light rail, and other railroads that are under construction; one major dam, Gilgel Gibe III that is complete and the Millennium or Renaissance Dam that is in full swing and almost near completion. Moreover, industrial parks like that of Hawassa and Kombelcha are also significant in terms of employment and mass production capacity that will enable Ethiopia to play a major role in export and trade at least at regional and continental levels.

However, if the political crisis continues unabated and the EPRDF Government does not take necessary measures to mitigate or overcome ethnic confrontations, the economic achievements scored so far could be lost, and as some observers expressed concerns Ethiopia could be heading toward instability and civil strife. Some of these observers are former Air Force chief General Abebe Teklehaimanot; former Chief of Staff General Tsadkan; and former Derg member Major Dawit Woldegiorgis.

Abebe Teklehaimanot argues, Derg-style governance is on the rise and democracy is being extinguished in Ethiopia and he appeals to the Ethiopian people to be vigilant. His commentary is written in Amharic and in order to preserve its authenticity, I will present it here in its originality. Here is how he put it:

የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝቦች ከህግ ውጭ አንገዛም ማለት ጀምረዋል። የአሮሞ ህዝቦች ዲሞክራሲያዊ እንቅስቃሴ፤ የቅማንት ህዝቦች ዲሞክራሲያዊ ትግል፤ በትግራይ ደግሞ እንደ አምባሰነይቲ ዓይነት ዲሞክራሲያዊ እንቅስቃሴ፤ የኮንሶ ህዝቦች ዲሞክራሲያዊ ጥያቄ እንደ ምሳሌ ሊወሰዱ ይችላሉ። ገዢው ፓርቲ ቆሚላ ወይም ወደ ኋላ እየነገደ ነው፤ ባጭሩ ጥልቅ ፓለቲካዊ ችግር (political crisis) አለ። ሆኖም ይህንን ችግር መፈታት ያለበት ሕገ መንግስታዊ በሆነ መንገድ እንጂ ከዛ ውጪ በሆኑ መንገዶች መሆን የለበትም።

In a nutshell, Major General Abebe believes that the democratic movements of the Oromo, Qemant, Tigray, and Konso are manifestations of the political crisis in Ethiopia and he suggests that this crisis must be resolved within the framework of the constitution and not outside it. He is in effect proposing a peaceful rather than violent resolution to the crisis.

Major General Abebe also critically examines the lack of constitutionally mandated operations within the EPRDF and seems to abhor the current seemingly outshining role of the military; he implicitly states that “eliminating” some via power struggle within the EPRDF is imminent. He

does not rule out coup d'état within the EPRDF, engineered by itself. Read what he wrote in Amharic between lines:

ደርግነት በሁለት ኢ-ሕገ መንግስታዊ ስርዓት-የለሽ በሆነ መንገድ ሊከሰት ይችላል። አንደኛው በግላጭ መፈንቅለ መንግስት ማድረግ ነው። ሁለተኛው የህወሓት ማእከላይ ኮሚቴ ብሎም በኢህአዲግ ምክር ቤት ወይም ፈጻሚውን መመርያ በመስጠትና በማስፈራራት “እከሌ ሊቀመንበር እንዲሆን እከሌን አውርዱት” ወዘተ በማለት ሊሆን ይችላል። በድርጅቱ ባለው ሁኔታ ይህ አይቻልም ማለት የዋህነት ነው። የግንቦት ሃያ በዓል አስመልክቶ የተደረገ ፓነል ይህንን ለማስረገጥ እንደሆነ መጠንቀቅ አለብን፤ ኢህአዲግ ያለው ችግር ባልተመሰቀለና ሕገመንግስታዊ በሆነ መልኩ ከህዝቦችና እና ሌሎች ፓርቲዎች ተሁኖ መፈታተ ያለበት ጉዳይ ነው፤ ያለምንም የወታደር ጣልቃ ገብነት።⁶

The second commentator (in right order as per date of publication of their viewpoints) is Major Dawit Woldegiorgis, a former Derg member, one time governor of Eritrea, and who presided over the Ethiopian Relief during 1984/85 famine in Ethiopia. Like many of us who are concerned about the stability of Ethiopia and the welfare of the Ethiopian people, Major Dawit too has sincere concerns. He has written a piece on the possible Ethiopian ethnic civil strife likened to that of Rwanda, if necessary precautions are not taken and solutions are not made ahead of time. Here is how Major Dawit put it:

The genocide in Rwanda happened because of ethnic politics and state sanctioned incitement to hate and kill...The situation in Ethiopia has not reached that level yet but if it is allowed to reach that level there is no way to stop it...Ethiopian leaders are accountable for what is happening now and worse on what may happen unless remedial measures are taken...The damage done on the relationship between the various groups in Ethiopia is grave and warrants the intervention of the international community to exert meaningful pressure to stop this build up tensions that could lead to a catastrophic end with severe consequences that dwarf the Rwanda

genocide. The government should be made accountable and be willing to take steps that could restore sanity and heal the gaping wounds. For this to happen, Ethiopia needs leaders who are not consumed with narrow ethnic and personal interests but leaders who capitalize on the common thread that binds the people and the common vision for unity and democracy.⁷

Major Dawit's caveat should be taken seriously and all Ethiopians who love their country must collectively strive toward promoting national reconciliation that could effectively counter the present ethnic animosity and fanatic and narrow ethnocentric politics. However, while I agree with the basic tenet of Major Dawit's analysis of the Ethiopian situation, accountability with respect to the grave problem that has countenanced our country should not be squared on the government only; we should all be accountable, but more specifically the opposition groupings in Ethiopia and the Diaspora as well as media outlets like ESAT should be accountable as well. Moreover, while I very well understand Dawit's genuine concerns (and who would doubt the current negative climate in Ethiopia), I don't think Ethiopia will be heading toward a major fratricidal genocidal warfare that could dwarf the Rwandan genocide, and I say this for two main reasons: 1) the history and experience of Rwanda, Somalia, and South Sudan are utterly different from that of Ethiopia; while the former three countries were artificially inseminated by the former colonizers and they were haphazardly made into nation-states from essentially pastoral and cattle breeding societies, Ethiopia had a unique civilization of antiquity and the medieval period chiefly characterized by sedentary agriculture that, in turn, gave rise to a multi-ethnic Ethiopian nation-state, as I have reasoned at the beginning of this article; and 2) there is no history of genocide in Ethiopia thus far save the civil wars like the period of the Era of Princes, in which regional lords fought for power for nearly six and half decades (1769-1855). This was not a war of people against people, or ethnic conflict, or

tribal warfare as we have witnessed elsewhere; it was a war for hegemony in which one lord could aspire to become the king of Ethiopia and ultimately that one man became the magnificent Emperor Tewodros who reunited Ethiopia. One other disagreement I have with Major Dawit is on his proposal for “international intervention” in Ethiopian affairs. I believe Ethiopians are capable of resolving the present contradictions that have surfaced in the form of ethnocentric politics, but it will require patriotic commitment on the part of the people and accountability and transparency from the government. It will also require a swift action by the government, but in the event the latter is incapacitated, a task force with a dynamic ad hoc committee of Ethiopian intellectuals, professionals, and ordinary patriotic citizens must be established for the sole purpose of preserving Ethiopian unity by promoting a pan-Ethiopian agenda and keeping ethnocentric politics at bay.

The third commentator is Lt. General Tsadkan Gebre Tensae. General Tsadkan, like the two commentators mentioned above, is deeply and sincerely concerned about the stability of Ethiopia and the welfare of the Ethiopian people, and although he spoke out after years of silence, I believe his remarks and analysis of the Ethiopian situation are timely and constructive. Tsdakan, like Abebe, underscores the significance of the constitution and democracy in bringing about change; I will state my own position with respect to General Tsadkan’s thesis later; for now, I like to simply put an abridged form of his relatively lengthy article in Amharic:

ህገ መንግሥታችን መሰረት አድርገን በሕገ መንግስቱ የተቀመጡትን ሰብአዊና ፖለቲካዊ መብቶችን ሙሉ በሙሉ ተግባራዊ ማድረግ፤ በዚህ ማዕቀፍ ውስጥ ፖለቲካዊ ሃይሎችም ያለምንም ተጽእኖ ያልተገደበ ፖለቲካዊ እንቅስቃሴ አድርገው በመጨረሻም በገለልተኛ በዓለም አቀፍ ታዛቢዎች ነጻ ዲሞክራሲና ያለምንም ተፅዕኖ የተከናወነ ምርጫ መሆኑ

ተረጋግጦ የተካሄደ ምርጫ የሚሰጠንን ውጤት ተቀብለን ለመጓዝ ቆርጠን ስንነሳ በሚል አስተሳሰብ ያጠነጥናል።

አሁን አገራችን ያለችበት ሁኔታ የህዝብ አመኔታ በመንግስት ላይ በጣም ዝቅተኛ በሆነበት፤ በህዝቦች መሃከል ያለው መቀራረብና መዋደድ የተቀነሰበት፤ ጥላቻ የበረታና በግልጽ እየተነገረ፤ የህዝቦች የእርስ በርስ መናቆር እንዳይመጣ የሚፈራበት ስለሆነም ውስጣዊ አንድነታችን በጣም የላላበት፤ የመንግስት መዋቅር የመፈጸም አቅሙ ደካማ የሆነበት፤ ከዚህ የተነሳም ህዝቡ ተስፋ የቆረጠበት፤ በየካባቢው ችግሮች ሲነሱ በታጠቀ ኃይል (ፖሊስና መከላከያ) የሚፈታበት፤ ህዝቡ አሁን የሚታየው ችግር ይፈታል፤ አይፈታም፤ እንዴት ይፈታል እያለ ከፍተኛ ጥርጣሬ የገባበት ሁኔታ ውስጥ ነው ያለው።

የትግራይ ህዝብ

የትግራይ ህዝብ በታሪኩ ራሱን ኢትዮጵያ ለምትለው ሃገር መመስረትና በታሪኳ ውስጥ በተለያዩ ውድቀቶች ይሁን ድሎች ዋና ተዋናይ አድርጎ ነው የሚያስበው። ከዚህ ውጪ በሌላ መንገድ አያስብም።

አሁን ሃገራችን በምትገኝበት ሁኔታ ላይ ሙሉ ዲሞክራሲያዊ መብታችን ተጠቅመን እንወያይበት።⁸

With respect to the possible scenario of civil strife and/or ethnic warfare engendered by ethnocentric hate politics, General Tsadkan comes very close to Major Dawit; he also shares the idea of foreign involvement in Ethiopian affairs with Major Dawit, although he is proposing an international observer group to monitor the Ethiopian elections. I personally am not in favor of international observer group monitoring Ethiopian affairs and this is for two main reasons: 1) As I have stated earlier in relation to Dawit's idea of international intervention in Ethiopia, Ethiopians (and by extension other Africans) are capable of solving their problems; and 2) if international observers always monitor our affairs, when are we going to overcome dependence on Westerners? The fierce sense of independence of our fathers enabled Ethiopia to remain the only

independent country in Africa, and if that kind of resolve is rekindled by the present generation of Ethiopians, I believe we could overcome the seemingly insurmountable and compounded political problems without the help of foreign forces.

But in terms of the use of the constitution and the employment of the democratic process, Tsadkan entertains virtually the same ideas as Abebe, but the big question remains. Can Ethiopians make the constitution a working paper at this point and are the Ethiopian people going to enjoy a democracy that would enable them to install a government that would, in turn, represent their interests?

One other thing that General Tsadkan wants to remind Ethiopians is surrounding the psychology and position of the people of Tigray in regards to Ethiopia. He clearly stipulates and clarifies that the people of Tigray view themselves as chief actors in the founding of the Ethiopian nation, as well as in its achievements and failures.

Since the ascendance of the EPRDF to power, Ethiopian ethno-nationalists increasingly evolved anti-Tigrayan sentiments and began to be suspicious of Tegrawot as a whole as extensions of TPLF; and Tegrawot in the Diaspora especially had to unwittingly prove their Ethiopian identity to other non-Tegrawot Ethiopians. It is in this context that General Tsadkan's message has to be perceived.

There are many wonderful non-Tigrayan Ethiopians who are not blinded by ethnocentric politics and who understand the contribution of Tigray to the evolution of Ethiopia and I will quote some of them below for the purpose of opening a platform of understanding among Ethiopians and also for promoting a pan-Ethiopian agenda, an agenda that I see as the most crucial panacea in solving the current Ethiopian political crisis. Before I cite

several views on Tigray, however, I like to first include here a part of a relevant essay that I wrote in 2003. The title of the essay is *Hail the People of Tigray, Defenders of Ethiopian Sovereignty and Custodians of its Civilization*, and this is what I said in part:

It all began in Tigray. Tigray is the cradle and hub of Ethiopia's ancient civilization. In Tigray, Ethiopia's future seems to contend its past while the present testifies cyclical historical events as constant reminders of the distant and near past. In Tigray, the modern period seems to lend the requisite touch of antiquity, as if to deliberately endure uninterrupted Ethiopian political state. After all, this quintessentially Ethiopian northern regional state is the plain field of ancient civilization and unparalleled conventional wisdom, and as the custodian of that epic African ingenuity.⁹

Unlike the narrow nationalists who vent hatred against Tigrayans there are numerous Ethiopians who wanted to embrace the pan-Ethiopian agenda and want to tell the truth about their Tigrayan brethren; here are some of them:

On July 19, 2016 Mulualem Gebremedhin wrote a very interesting piece on the people of Tigray and appealed to Ethiopians to make distinction between the TPLF and Tigrayans; the title of his essay was የትግራይን ሕዝብ ለቀቅ፤ ህወሓትን ጠበቅ! እናድርገው።¹⁰ Roughly translated, it means Lets Go Easy on the People of Tigray and Firm on the TPLF; I recall very well the same title with a similar content presented by Negede Gobzie some years ago, but I still want to extend my gratitude to Mulualem for his contribution to pan-Ethiopian nationalism.

Another Ethiopian with good intentions and love of Ethiopia by the name Nesibu Sebhat, who incidentally survived the Red Terror of the Derg and who is author of ፍፁም ነው እምነቴ፤ ቀይ ሽብር:- የከፍተኛ 15 እውነተኛ ታሪክ has

the following to say about the people of Tigray although he was highly critical of General Tsadkan's article:

የትግራይ ሕዝብ በእምነቱና በኢትዮጵያዊነቱ ኮርቶ ያለ ኅብረተሰብ ነው። ለትግራይ ኅብረተሰብ የአክሱም ሃወልት ኢትዮጵያዊነት መኩርያው ነው። በርካታ አብያተ ገዳማት የእምነቱ መሰረቶች ናቸው። ትግራይ የኢትዮጵያ መሰረት ናት። ዓድዋ ለትግራይ የኢትዮጵያዊነት ብቻ ሳይሆን የጥቁር ሕዝቦች መኩርያ ድሉ ነው። ይህ ኅብረተሰብ ኢትዮጵያን ሊያጠፋ አልተነሳም። ይህ ኅብረተሰብ በአርቶዶክስ ክርስትና እምነት ላይ ሊዘምት አልከጀለም።¹¹

Similarly, another Ethiopian by the name Meysisaw Tatek has contributed interesting piece entitled "Ethiopia and Gonder, Tigray and Gonder", a timely essay if carefully read in light of the massive popular demonstration in Northern Gonder. The people of Gonder, like most Ethiopian people, are brave and patriotic Ethiopians but what is relevant to our present discussion is Meysisaw's presentation on the affinity of the people of Tigray and Gonder and here is how he put it:

ትግራይና ጎንደር

ሃገራችን ኢትዮጵያ ጥልቅ በሆነ በታሪኳ ውስጥ በትግራይ ተወላጆች ስትመራ ይህ የመጀመርያው አይደለም። ትግራይን ከኢትዮጵያ ለይቶ ማየት እራስ የሌለው አካል ወይም ስነተፎጥራዊ ጉድለት ያለው ፍጡር ይሆናል። በቀደም ታሪካችን ሃገራችን ኢትዮጵያን በፍቅር አንድነት አስደናቂ በሆነ መንግስታዊና ሃይማኖታዊ አመራር ላይ ለረጅም ዘመናት ባስተዳደሩ ነገሥታት እነ አዳ ገብረመስቀል፤ እነ ንጉሥ አርመሐ በቤተ መንግስቱ የሚጠቀሱ መሪዎች ሲሆኑ በሃይማኖቱ በኩልም እነ ብጹዕ ወቅዱስ አቡነ አረጋዊ ዘደብረዳሞ እነ ቅዱስ ያሬድ ዘአክሱም፤ በቅርብ ጊዜ ታሪካችን ደግሞ እነ አዳ ዮሐንስ፤ ታላቁ አርበኛ እነ ራስ አሉላ አባ ነጋ ከትግራይ አብራክ የተገኙ የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ በሕይወት የመኖር እስትንፋሶች፤ ጌጦችና ፈርጦች ናቸው።¹²

While the above mentioned kind words and constructive perceptions on the people of Tigray as well as the observations of the three commentators

including mine that were written years back meaningfully contribute to pan-Ethiopian agenda, it is worrisome that most Ethiopians are for the most part reactive to spontaneous events; it is about time that Ethiopians must acknowledge the significance of a proactive rather than reactive political action. We Ethiopians generally are reactive in many of our activities and we act only when we encounter a problem. On the other hand, if we are proactive we will plan ahead of time and prepare for any eventuality; and it is for this apparent reason that I cautioned fellow Ethiopians of the coming of ethnocentric politics 21 years ago (see quote from my book above). Similarly, a decade ago, I contributed an article entitled ለኢትዮጵያ የሚበጅ የፖለቲካ ስትራቴጂ መቀየስ የሁላችን ታሪካዊ ሐላፊነት ነው that is already mentioned on page 1 of this article, and in that piece an attempt was made to define what 'nationality' means while at the same time I tried to provide solutions for ethnocentric politics that undermines pan-Ethiopian nationalism. Please read what I wrote in that article with care:

ማንኛውም አገር ወዳድ ኢትዮጵያዊ ዘርና ጎሳ ሳያነሳና ሳይጠቅስ "ኢትዮጵያ" የሚል ብቻ ነው ማንገብ ያለበት፤ ከሁሉም የዘርና ጎሳ ጥቅምና ፖለቲካ የኢትዮጵያ አጀንዳ ነው የበላይነት መያዝ ያለበት። ዘርና ጎሳ ትምህርታዊ በሆኑ የጥናትና ምርምር መድረኮች ካልሆነ በስተቀር አገር ወዳድ ኢትዮጵያዊ እንኳን እንደ መርሆና ፖሊሲ ሊያራምዳቸው ይቅርና ለውይይትም ቢሆን መቅረብ የለባቸውም ብሎ ያምናል። በአንፃሩ የሕዝብ አንድነት እንዳይደፈርስ በንቃት ይታገላል፤ የሁሉም ብሔሮች እኩልነት ለማረጋገጥ ሌት ተቀን ይጥራል፤ ሁሉንም ብሔሮችና ብሔረሰቦች ያፈቅራል፡ ያከብራል፤ በታሪክ፡ በኃይማኖት፡ በምጣኔ-ሃብታዊ ግንኙነቶች የተቆራኙ መሆናቸውን በጥልቅ ይገነዘባል። ከሁሉም በላይ ደግሞ፡ አገር ወዳድ ማንኛውም ኢትዮጵያው የአንድ ብሔር አባል የሆነውን እንዳጋጣሚ መሆኑን፡ ኢትዮጵያዊነት ግን በታሪክ የተገነባ መሆኑን በቅጡ ይገነዘባል። ይህ በቀላል አማርኛ እንዲህ ማለት ነው፡- አንድ ግለሰብ ኢትዮጵያዊ የትግራይ ተወላጅ፡ የአማራ፡ አሮሞ፡ ጉራጌ፡ ሲዳማ ወዘተ አባል ሊሆን የቻለው እንዳጋጣሚ እንጂ ሆን ብሎ በእቅድ ከዚህ ብሔር ልፈጠር ብሎ በመምረጥ አይደለም። እንዲህ ያለ ክስተት ተሰምቶም ታይቶም አይታወቅም፤ ለወደፊትም አይኖርም።

Once I emphasized the significance of a pan-Ethiopian agenda over narrow ethnic proclivities, I also proposed some solutions in the same article before Ethiopia is engulfed with ethno-nationalism; and I urge the reader to read my proposed solutions in the context of when we did not encounter yet ethnic movements and protestations. Here is what I wrote then:

1. አንድነትን ለማጠናከር ባገር ደረጃ ማሰብና በግብርም ማሳየት
2. የጎሳና የዘር አጀንዳ ሁሉ ማስወገድ፡ መታገል
3. የብሔርና የክልል አጀንዳዎች ለአገር-አቀፍ አጀንዳ ተቃራኒና ተቀናቃኝ መሆን የለባቸውም
4. የጎሳ ብቻ ሳይሆን የኃይማኖትም ጭምር ልዩነቶች እንዳይዳብሩ ጥንቃቄ ማድረግ፤ ከአርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶና እስልምና ኃይማኖት ውጭ እምነት ያላቸው ኢትዮጵያውያን ኃይማኖታቸውና እምነታቸው እንዲከበረላቸው ማድረግ፡፡ 'ኃይማኖት የግል፡ አገር የጋራ' መሆኑን አሁንም ቢሆን መዘንጋት የለበትም፡፡
5. ማንኛውም ግዙፍ አገር-አቀፍ አጀንዳ በኩርፍያ መተግበር ስለማይቻል፡ ንቃተ ህሊናቸው ዘቅተኛ ለሆነው ወገኖች፡ በተለይም አንድን ብሔር ነጥሎ ለማስወገድ (ሰላምታም ሳይቀር በመንፈግ) ለሚጥሩ ሁሉ በማስተማር ንቃታቸው የሚዳብርበት መንገድ መፍጠር አለብን፡፡
6. ሰፊ አገር-አቀፍ አጀንዳ ለመተግበር ከፈለግን ኢትዮጵያውያን በሙሉ የሚሳተፉበት መድረኮችና ማሕበሮች መፍጠር አለብን፡፡ የኢትዮጵያውያን ማሕበር ወይም የፖለቲካ ፓርቲ ነው ከተባለ ደግሞ መዋቅሩ ሆን ተብሎ ልዩ ልዩ ብሔሮችና ብሔረሰቦች ያቀፈ መሆን አለበት፡፡ ያሁኑ ተቃዋሚ ኃይሎች (ኅብረት፤ ቅንጅት) ከሞላ ጎደል ኅብረ-ብሔር ናቸው ማለት ይቻላል፡፡ ኢትዮጵያን ካለው ችግርና ቀውስ ለማዳን ከተፈለገ ግን የድሮ የኢሐፓ መዋቅር እንደ ምሳሌ ማየት አለብን፡፡ ከሁሉም የድሮ የፖለቲካ ፓርቲዎች እውነተኛ አገር-አቀፍ ፓርቲ የሚባለው ኢሐፓ ብቻ ነበር (መኤሶም በዚህ ረገድ ወደ ኢሐፓ ይጠጋል)፤ በፖለቲካ ፕሮግራሙ ብቻ ሳይሆን ሁሉንም የኢትዮጵያ ብሔሮች ያቀፈ ኢሐፓ ብቻ ነበር፡፡ ያሁኑ ፓርቲዎች የድሮው የኢሐፓ መዋቅር ቢከተሉ (ፓርቲው እንከን አልነበረውም ማለት አይደለም፤ ድክመትም ነበረው) ኢትዮጵያ ከመዓቱ ትወጣለች፡፡

7. በተቻለ መጠን ኢትዮጵያን የሚወክሉ አርማዎችና ምልክቶች እንጂ አንዱን የሕብረተሰባችን አባል ሕዝብ፡ በቀጥታም ይሁን በተዘዋዋሪ መንገድ የሚያስወግዱ አርማዎች ያለማንገብ ይመረጣል።¹³

By way of concluding, I like to reiterate the urgency of establishing an all-Ethiopia task force for the redemption of Ethiopia, but the composition of this task force should decidedly reflect the diversity of Ethiopia and should at least include major nationalities like Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, and if possible other Ethiopians from Gambella, Beni Shangul Gumuz, Afar, Somalia, and the Southern nationalities. It should never bear the name of 'Ethiopia' and yet is led and administered by one or two dominant Ethiopian nationalities.

The main mission of the task force should be: 1) to open a platform for Ethiopian intellectuals from all nationalities to openly and candidly discuss a pan-Ethiopian agenda with themes focused on the unity, stability, and peace of Ethiopia; 2) following series of discussion by a panel of Ethiopians, the task force must publish the proceedings and post/distribute them so that Ethiopians all over read and give feedback to the task force; this will create a positive discourse at mitigating ethnocentric politics and reuniting Ethiopians; 3) the task force should revitalize or reinvigorate Ethiopian patriots such as Alula Aba Nega; Balcha Aba Nefso; and Belai Zeleke (just to mention few) to the relatively older Ethiopian generation, and reintroduce or regenerate these patriots to the young generation of Ethiopians. This is going to be a wonderful opportunity in restoring pan-Ethiopian nationalism while at the same time discouraging and defeating ethno-nationalism. The task force also must carefully study the current popular movements that have erupted in the Oromia and Gonder areas (I theme I mentioned earlier); the movements are genuine peoples uprising but they are not pan-Ethiopian and most importantly they lack organized leadership; we must

learn from the realities of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, in which all Ethiopian people from all sectors rose against the status quo, but clearly there was dearth of leadership to organize and guide the revolution, and as a result the military hijacked the popular movement and assumed power.

There will be, per force, challenges to the mission and objectives of the task force; most Ethiopians love their country and they will support the noble mission of the task force, but some diehards will go against it; there are three kinds of diehard Ethiopians: 1) some intellectuals that masquerade among Ethiopian communities and deliberately foment ethnocentric values and hate; their mission is not known but they are clever at deception and they should not be allowed to further incite ethnic phobia against any Ethiopian ethnic group; 2) the second group include former Derg members and former Emperor Haile Selassie's government officials; the latter is phasing out and it is split into two: a) some repatriated to Ethiopia after showing their support to the EPRDF; and b) some who prefer to stay in the Diaspora and oppose the EPRDF ("Woyane" as they want to call it); these group ironically has formed alliance with the former Derg members who were involved in the murder of their bosses; 3) the third group encompasses multitude of ordinary Ethiopians who are either less educated, unexposed, and had no knowledge of Ethiopian politics prior to 1991. They are a generation under age 40 and most of them were either kids or teenagers when the EPRDF assumed power; they are confused and disoriented but they have a great potential in recapturing the history, glory, and magnificence of Ethiopia if the task force opens their eyes and enlighten them; they are young and dynamic and they could change in spite of their current hatemongering behaviors. The young Ethiopians that are part of group 3 are victims of fragmented consciousness and a subconscious to hate that evolved following the establishment of the ethnic demarcated Ethiopia, but they have also been targeted by Groups 1 and 2

who fed them perpetual bitterness; they, therefore, need help from public intellectuals and patriotic Ethiopians who love their country and who genuinely want to promote pan-Ethiopian agenda. Groups in 1 and 2 will not change because they are old, lethargic, unwilling to change, and could not keep up with the young blood in group 3. This has been the fate of Ethiopia thus far but we can change the course if we have the commitment and love for our country.

Note

1. *Beyond Ethnocentric Ideology and Paradigm Shift for A Greater Ethiopian Unity* can be read in its entirety by opening the following link: [www.africanidea.org/Beyond Ethnocentric Ethiopian unity.html](http://www.africanidea.org/Beyond_Ethnocentric_Ethiopian_unity.html)
የትምክህተኝነትና የጠባብ ብሔረተኝነት አደጋኛነት can be read via www.africanidea.org/April_2007.pdf
2. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, Pearson, 2012
3. Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition*, University Press of America, 1995, p. 166
4. Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: Democracy, Devolution of Power, & The Developmental State*, Institute of Development and Education for Africa, 2013, p. 119
5. Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ibid*, p. 9
6. Abebe Teklehaimanot (Major General), ደርግነት እያቆጠቆጠ፤ ዲሞክራሲው እየጨላለመ ነው፡- ሕዝቦች ጠንቀቅ በሉ Horn Affairs, June 4, 2016
7. Dawit Woldegiorgis (Major), *The Case of Rwanda: Lessons for Ethiopia*, Ethiomedia.com, July 22, 2016
8. Tsadkan Gebre Tensae (Lt. General), የሀገራችን ፖለቲካዊ ሁኔታና መፍትሔ ሃሳቦች Horn Affairs, July 24, 2016

9. Ghelawdewos Araia, *Hail the People of Tigray, Defenders of Ethiopian Sovereignty and Custodians of Its Civilization*, read it via this link: [www.africanidea.org/hail the people of tigray.html](http://www.africanidea.org/hail_the_people_of_tigray.html)
10. Mulualem Gebremedhin, የትግራይን ሕዝብ ለቀቅ፤ ህወሓትን ጠበቅ እናድርገው (ተጋሩን አትንኩ) ethiomeida.com, July 19, 2016
11. Nesibu Sebhat, ለመፍትሔው መፍትሔ የወያኔ/ህወሓት ዕድሜ ለማራዘም በሌ/ጄ ዓድቃን ገ/ተንሳይ የመፍትሔ ሃሳቦች www.africanidea.org
12. Meysisaw Tatek, ኢትዮጵያና ጎንደር፤ ትግራይና ጎንደር ethiomeida.com July 2016
13. Ghelawdewos Araia, ለኢትዮጵያ የሚበጅ ስትራቴጂ መቀየስ የሁለቱን ታሪካዊ ሓላፊነት ነው 2006; this article was published on several websites including Africanidea.org, Ethioobserver.net, Ethiopiafirst.com

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