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Today's Ethiopia is fighting Yesterday's Wars

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The late Donald Levine used to speak of Ethiopia's "missed opportunities." One such missed opportunity was the 1974-1975 Ethiopian Revolution. Had it not been hijacked by the forces that be, the burning issues of the day might have been addressed meaningfully on a priority basis. It would have also opened up the minds of many citizens as the French Revolution did in 1789 and thereafter.

Although inspired by the 1960 coup d'etat, the leadership of the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which played such an important role in shaping public opinion against Emperor Haile Selassie's government, was far removed from the Ethiopian reality. The leadership lacked a deep understanding of the country's intricate problems.

As a result, it ended up in fighting the revolutionary wars of other societies on Ethiopian soil- French, Russian, Chinese, Egyptian and Cuban, and culminated in singing un-harmonized lyrics. Preaching the doctrine of "the dictatorship of the proletariat", in a society where the proletarians could be counted at finger tips, surely, could not be considered as a sign of understanding the society itself.

If the leadership had a correct understanding of the objective and subjective conditions of the country, as well as of the international situation, a step- by- step approach to addressing the problems of the country would had been realistic and appropriate. Reforming the church, as well as the negative values of the society could have been given priority. The monarchy could have been abolished and be replaced by a progressive bourgeois Republic that is empowered with all the duties and responsibilities of a democratic state of transparency and accountability - a republic of the rule of law, where the individual is innocent unless found guilty, and not always guilty unless he proves his innocence - and a

republic which respects diversity of opinions and plurality of views. Furthermore, restoring the federal status of Eritrea ,and extending devolution to the provinces and leading to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia ; land reform; mass education ; expanding health facilities; encouraging domestic and foreign capital to help build the economy; protection of minorities including women, children and the natural environment; legalization of Pan- Ethiopian political parties of the left, the right, and the centre, to give the electorate meaningful opportunity to choose from among the political, social, economic and administrative alternatives which could be offered.

In such a set up, the left would have benefited. It would have gained the legal right to work freely and to educate the public without fear of persecution. But unfortunately, political experience of the real world, away from the ivory tower of idealism was sadly lacking. The intellectuals and conscious elements of the time were simply outwitted by ordinary soldiers, who did not even have a quarter of their education.

Many of the leaders of the left had studied Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao Tse Tung. Some had read Mikhael Bakunin - the anarchist, and even Roman Prochazka – t he Austrian Nazi propagandist, who recommended that the best way to destroy Ethiopia was to recognize the right of tribes to self – determination. Although the TPLF leaders, who have now become billionaires had claimed to be Marxists, some of us have had serious reservations about their claim. Marxists are internationalists not tribalists. Marxists are for simple living and high thinking , and are not for self-enrichment through corruption and outright robbery of the state. It was indeed the TPLF leaders like Meles who took Prochazka's theory so seriously that they attempted to organize Ethiopia on a tribal basis and even copied the apartheid map of Mussolini's Ethiopia of the 1930s.The first organizers of TPLF as a group and the late M. Zenawi , the so-called Prime Minister of the time, were keenly aware of the consequences of their doing to Ethiopia's stability and continuity as a state.M.Zenawi is reported to have said, with a sigh of relief, “if Ethiopia disintegrates ,so be it. It means, it was not

meant to be.” Likewise, Meison, EPRP ,OLF, and others all called for self determination of the tribes, including their right to secession.

The Question of Tribes/nationalities:

During the hey-day of the Ethiopian student movement of the late 1960s ,I wrote a paper on the so-called problems of Nationalities in Ethiopia using Yugoslavia as a model. I submitted it to a scholar for his comments. Two weeks later, he returned it to me with an “F” on it, and instructed me to see him in his office. He then asked me three basic questions: [1] Have you studied Ethiopian history?[2]Have you travelled extensively in Ethiopia? [3]Have you published anything about the provinces of Ethiopia? When I said "no" to all his questions, he looked at me with contempt and said, “ What then is the basis of your paper? Why even use Yugoslavia as a model? If your leaders were foolish enough to take your uninformed views seriously and make Ethiopia a federation of the tribes, you may end up by destroying the country. For your information , Yugoslavia may not even exist after Tito. You may want to read Andre Amalric's books - Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?

That was what woke me up from my ignorance and long sleep. I do not know if some of you are still where I was in 1969 – 1970. Thanks to those comments, since then I studied Ethiopian history, as well as different social, economic and political systems, travelled widely including Shoa, Harar, Djbouti, the Ogaden, Arussie, Bale, Sidamo, Afarland, Issaland, Eritrea, Gondar, and Wollo, and published on different topics related to Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa.

Challenging the Theory:

Rosa Luxemburg, in a long debate with Lenin on the question of nationalities, had observed, "that the so-called right of self-determination of peoples ,or something which was really implicit in this slogan ,is the disintegration of Russia. It is nothing but a ridiculous, hollow, and humbug pose of a few university professors and students inflated into a political force. It is not the people who engage in such

reactionary tendencies which split the working class." History testifies to the accuracy of her warning. She was, without doubt, a clairvoyant thinker. And according to Vladimir Putin, "Lenin had placed an atom bomb under Russia by drawing administrative borders along ethnic lines, that Lenin ruined the Soviet Union by conceiving a federative state with its entities having the right to secede, that Lenin was wrong in a dispute with Stalin who advocated a unitary state model, and that this destructive legacy contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union." Putin could have also included Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

Ethiopia has its own history, civilization, and culture. Why then copy a system that the Russians created in 1918 to solve their own problems? Who said that is the standard model for every society? Is it because there is no other way, other than tribalism, or copying from other countries, which can be used as a short cut for acquiring power? Why not come out with a political program for the whole of Ethiopia and contest the election?

If we do not bring an end to this primitive, outdated, and misplaced system of nation building, in a world of globalism when nations are busy internationalizing their values, we will not just be odd misfits, but will destroy the country as well. If there are groups which do not like to live as Ethiopians, then the government should allow them to go and live anywhere that they want. The door should be open. Otherwise, they should not be tolerated to deny the people peace and basic security.

In this regard, the widely recognized and one time leader of the Ethiopian student movement, Hagos Gebreyesus minces no words: "The national question in Ethiopia has become the ideological cover for national self-hatred of the nihilist groups and their alleged claim that Ethiopia is full of dozens of fully fledged nations and nationalities who have the right to separate. The politics of separatism is then dressed up as the principle of self-determination which all genuine Socialists must uphold and propagate. Not only do they insist that Ethiopia must be broken up into 10 or 100 nations, which must further atomize themselves to the last clan or family. Only then we are assured, can every people

self- determine itself and live happily thereafter. Their program is a blue print for the virtual disintegration not only of Ethiopia ,but also of any state now in existence, since there has never existed any country in the world which would in any way fit their definition."

The creation of Ethnic enclaves in Ethiopia:

The leaders of the TPLF and the OLF, whose commitment to the maintenance of Ethiopia's territorial integrity is still highly questionable, are responsible for the creation of the apartheid system of ethnic enclaves that is nothing short of Social Darwinism. Their ignorance of Ethiopian history and the ethnic make- up of the country, is simply mind boggling. Besides, they had no mandate at all to abolish the status of Ethiopia's historic provinces and to create the ethnic enclaves that have become nightmares to any reasonable and rational citizen. The people of Ethiopia have, therefore, the right to abolish the constitution as well as the ethnic enclaves that were imposed on them by force, and restore the historic provinces, and provide them with a reformed self-administrative and democratic structure.

There is no objective and reliable census in the country. Neither the Oromos nor the Amharas are the majority in Ethiopia. It is in fact those Ethiopians who are products of mixed marriages estimated to be 65% of the entire population, who are the majority in the country. If they organize themselves and contest the elections to provide workable solutions to Ethiopia's major problems, such a party could easily win the hearts and minds of the electorate.

The Ethiopian Institute of Nationalities carried out extensive research work in 580 Woredas in order to determine their ethnic make-up. It came out with the following conclusion: That out of 580 Woredas, only 30 Woredas [i.e 5%]were mono-lingual .The rest of the 550 Woredas, [i.e 95%] were multi-lingual. As we can see, the attempt to redraw maps on linguistic basis to determine the ethnic make -up of the country was wrong. That is the other reason why the kilil system should be abolished.

Some Oromos resent the presence in their midst of non-Oromos like the Amharas, Tigreans , and others in the south as “Metewoch” i.e, "emigrants". Apart from being rude and insulting, those who express such views are themselves uninformed about Oromo history. For example, Aba Bahrey’s book, *The History of the Galla*, [1954] , [see Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1503-1546*, which provides an eye-witness account of the invasion of Ethiopia by the Oromos is a good source to start with. The so- called emigrants lived in southern Ethiopia long before the Oromos began their invasion of Ethiopia [1530-1730]. It would not be difficult to visit the historical monuments and the relics that they left behind throughout southern Ethiopia. The Ottoman inspired, armed, and manned 15-year devastation of Ethiopia was what exhausted the country and which gave the new comers an easy ride. The Oromos even went as far as Axum, which they burned down in 1611. It was Emperor Fassiledes who re-built Axum when he came to power in 1632. Their claim to Addis Ababa is even more preposterous. It happens to be a city in which some years ago 73% of the population was Amhara, and only 10% Oromo. [see Grover Hudson, *North East African Studies*, vol.6, no.3, 1999, p.99]. Given the fact that nearly all Ethiopian emperors who took power after 1270 were Shoa centred, the claim has no historical or demographic basis. Entoto, Tegulet, Berera, Debre Birhan and others served as administrative centres.

The origin of the problem can be traced back to the situation when Oromos started to change the names of rivers, mountains, villages, or provinces, to give the impression that they were the original inhabitants. Unfortunately, no one objected. Just to mention one or two examples, even Amhara Saynt became Borana, and Damot changed to Wollega. Why should it then surprise anyone today if they call Addis Ababa “finfine’, or give Debre Birhan, Dessie, Gondar or Axum Oromo names? In any case, who gave them the authority? When the provinces are restored, the local governments should take care of this ridiculous travesty of history. To clear the confusion, therefore, these and other issues should be openly debated in public. Some of us will have something to say about

it. In any event , the so called OLF grabbed 30% of Ethiopia that contains the commanding heights of the Ethiopian economy. The implication of this arrangement to the security of Ethiopia is only obvious. For instance, over the last 26 years, some 5,233 industrial plants have been established in the country. Of these, 1,656 factories (32%) were opened in the so- called Oromia, not to say much of Tigrai. During the same period, in the so-called Amhara enclave ,only 221 industrial plants, or only 4% of the total were inaugurated. During the same period, the TPLF leaders established 15 hospitals in Tigrai. But for the 7 million people of Gondar province only one referral hospital exists. The other hospital was opened by the Italians in 1937.The TPLF leadership did not stop there. They had even the audacity to annex the northern districts of Gondar and Wollo - namely - Wolkait,Tsegede and Tselemt, as well as Raya, claiming without any historical basis, that those lands belonged to Tigrai. But the truth is, they have never been part of Tigrai, and the people do not consider themselves to be Tigreans. The Tekezie River was the boundary for 500 years. When the EPLF closed their out let to the Sudan, they went to Wolkait seeking an alternative means of communication. That was the first time when they entered the area. Even the names of the military commanders who committed untold crimes against the people have become public knowledge. In this regard ,no less a person than the highly principled leader, H.H. Leul Ras Mengesha Seyoum, one time Governor of Tigrai, and great grandson of the Great Emperor Yohannes IV, declared on TV that these territories have never been part of Tigrai. Unable to face the bitter truth , while Ras Mengesha was writing his recently published book that I enjoyed reading, it has been widely discussed that he was intensely lobbied not to tell the truth about the history of these illegally annexed territories.

Many of the native inhabitants of Wolkait,Tsegede, Tselemt and Raya have either been killed ,imprisoned or massively evicted from their ancestral lands to give way for the re-settlement of hundreds of thousands of Tigrean peasant farmers and refugees. But if the TPLF leadership thinks the game is over, it will be making a big mistake. The so-called referendum is another stage-managed farce that is being hatched, in which the settlers are supposed to speak as if they were the

original inhabitants of the areas in question. However, who is who is well known in that part of the country. Nevertheless, the struggle will continue using different tactics and strategies until every inch of land which belongs to Wollo and Gondar is recovered, adequate compensation is paid by the TPLF companies which have been bleeding the inhabitants dry, and those who have been evicted are returned to their ancestral lands and rehabilitated. It should be noted that much of the transformation of Tigray is in part due to resource transfer from the annexed areas of Gondar – corn, teff, millet, sorgham, cotton, oil seeds, pulses, gold, livestock, and so on. One hopes that the rational elements in Tigray will prevail over those who seem to offer only death and destruction. Liberated from reckless demagogues, the people of Tigray can live in peace with all their neighbours and benefit from development cooperation.

The 1994 constitution prohibits political organizations and leaders from engaging in profit making schemes. Yet, many of the TPLF leaders have now become billionaires. The money that has been stolen and stashed away in foreign banks, estimated as over \$30 billion, if recovered, could pay all of Ethiopia's debts and even finance many development projects. To that end, the government should work closely with the Stolen Assets Recovery Office of UNO/WORLD BANK, as well as the USA, China, Germany, France, UK, Switzerland, UAE, Malaysia, Thailand, and others.

The forthcoming election:

If the TPLF comes into an agreement with the other political partners that it had created, and goes for the election, it will win. After all, it claims to have 7 million members. It commands the media, the army, the police and security services, and dominates the economy. As a result of its re-election, nothing will change. Mass terror, bloodshed, more construction in Tigray, more territorial expansion into Gondar and Wollo, more theft, and the usual plundering of the state will continue unabated. Under such circumstances, removing ethnic identities from ID cards, discarding Art.39 from the constitution, or injecting the spirit of “being Ethiopian” within the federation, is not going to make any difference.

What would make a difference would be the creation of a transitional government that will bring to trial those who have committed treason and unpardonable crimes against the state, corrupt individuals who have amassed fortune illegally, abolish ethnicity as means of governing, discard the constitution as well as the Kilil system and the electoral board, restore the status of the historic provinces of Ethiopia, sponsor the preparation of a federal constitution, legalize pan-Ethiopian political parties of the left, the right and the centre which have viable national political program, create an independent electoral board, allow Ethiopians with foreign passports to participate in the election, and then invite international observers to supervise the election. Under such conditions, the centre oriented pan- Ethiopian political party could win and create an atmosphere of peace, security, and stability.

Thank you.