

Fetsum Abraham:

Conversation with the dignified Oromo Scholars and Professionals

For every war that involved Ethiopia, the young Oromos were in the minds of the Ethiopian leaders to sacrifice without concern. Their answer to “who will fight your war?” has always been “የፈረደበት ኦሮሞ”. As a result, any time I remember the wars of destruction in our region, “የፈረደበት ኦሮሞ” comes to my mind and it always felt terrible. This expression had been Ethiopia’s reckless and vindictive means of fueling its imperial wars in the region. Nothing could express the sadistic attitude of chauvinism against the dignified Oromos more than depreciating their lives through the terrible expression that lingered on in contemporary Ethiopian experience until the arrival of PM Abiy.

My dear brothers and sisters; it has been long since the majority Oromos have been used to serve Ethiopian wars everywhere without any reward in return. It is really hard to imagine how many Oromos perished in different wars through the years but everybody knows they were sacrificed more than any other Ethnic group in the country to deserve equality, freedom and peace from here on. I congratulate the people of Oromia for finally achieving the capacity to lead Ethiopia after decades of suffering by dysfunctional cultural disconnection.

The tragic chronicle goes way back in time but the historic Battle of ADWA was fought mainly through the blood and sweat of the Oromos that dignified the Black race in general and the Africans in particular by winning it against European colonialism for the first time in continental history.

The Oromo people suffered incalculable injustice under Ethiopian feudalism. Emperor Haileselassie was partial. He represented the few upper class Amharas at the top of the list serving their interest at the cost of the rest. This class was allowed to own massive Oromo land enslaving the local people to serfdom for many decades. The Emperor colonized Eritrea in 1961 and sustained his colonialism using the Oromo blood at the highest composition of his imperial army. Too many Oromos perished without recognition since 1961 until his downfall in 1975.

Then the DERG took power in 1975 and TPLF started its struggle for liberation around that time. Once again the Oromos became the DERG’s fuel of war enterprise as Mengistu fought the Eritreans, the Tigreans and the Somalians almost exclusively with helpless young men from that community in the front line. They also paid in thousands fighting the regime as part of the collective resistance and EPRDF. The catastrophic 17 years ended in 1991 after Eritrea and EPRDF won the war; the tragedy continued, nevertheless.

TPLF's radical political shift in favor of staying Ethiopian had a lot of advantages and disadvantages in my opinion. Among the negative, the Oromo people's original question of self-determination was compromised. To make it worse, Isaias betrayed the Oromo people and helped TPLF to violently arrest their struggle and many freedom fighters died and went to prison as a result.

Then came the Badme conflict and TPLF went to work following the same old method of fighting through the blood of the Oromos. TPLF might have fought the Eritreans in the beginning of the war using its fighters but it did not involve them as much in the progression: it used the Oromos as usual and they perished in tens of thousands without trace. As PM Abiy said in one occasion, most victims of the war happened to be the poor Oromos that had been culturally used in the country as inferior beings only good for wars. They were also unjustly used in the Assab front then after. To this effect, a keen observer says "hundreds and thousands of poor peasants from Harar, Bale, Sidamo, and other Oromo regions were brought by truck loads to the killing field of Burre in a bid to capture the port city of Assab during the Ethio-Eritrean border conflict about 20 years ago".

Apparently, Ethiopian history is infested with incalculable damage to the Oromo people through selective conscription and clear cut discrimination. Death happened to be the fate of the beautiful Oromos brutalized under imperial and ethnic prejudice all over the country. The entire situation was fatal for all Ethiopians, countless crimes were committed against the many minorities in this regard but I believe none of the other Ethnic groups suffered as much family destruction as the dignified Oromos by intentional political mishap. It was family destruction at best that left the society traumatized forever. Likewise, the Eritreans were victims of family destruction in the receiving side of the fence making the two societies Strategic Allies by concrete experience.

Clearly, the era of EPRDF contributed a lot to the positive transformation of Ethiopian minds in general. It accomplished a lot in a very short time. But today's political environment was accomplished through endless sacrifice that neutralized the political intrigues and prejudice of the past for a fresh beginning with all the region as a component. The dignified Hailemariam Desalegne initiated the bliss and the sons of Oromia took the relay towards genuine democracy and peace in Ethiopia, while TPLF remarkably accepted the dynamics without any sign of violence. It was a beautiful drama to watch! This peaceful dynamics is very important for the struggle of oppressed Africans in general and our region's sanity in particular. In other words, the collective struggle of the people under EPRDF effectively neutralized Ethiopian feudalism setting up the current reality directly or otherwise; but the final knockout punch, genuine democracy will have to be delivered by the Oromo elites currently navigating the nation politically. I hope the outstanding cultural values of the Oromos will influence us all towards peace and development neutralizing the violent culture of central and northern Ethiopians, and that of the Eritreans' once and for good!

There is much that can be said about the genuine relationship between the Eritreans and the Oromos and their experience in the long struggle for freedom that goes way back in history before the existence of TPLF. For those who do not know it, the least I can say is quite a few Oromos died in the Eritrean struggle for independence abandoning the Ethiopian army willingly. They paid for our cause alongside our martyrs where the lucky ones returned home after securing our independence in Eritrea. I personally saw Isais Afwerki walking through armed Oromos that were fighting for our independence as EPLF members in Afabet in 1990.

At the same time, there is a lot more left for us to do to create a decent region with down to earth relationship. The emergence of Abiy and his willingness to demarcate the borders by the book is only the beginning of the promising future ahead, still with all associated problems in place. Please enjoy the latest message of the Oromo Scholars and Professionals in USA, Canada, Europe and Australia to the Eritrean (February 28, 2020).

The dignified Oromos: “We are mindful of the rough patches in our longstanding relationship, moments that offer opportunities to reflect upon. In 1991 when Oromia fell under the control of the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), Eritrea sided with the TPLF attacking Oromo freedom fighters across the country. It was a sad and bitter moment for Oromos, especially given the fact that much was expected from Eritrea that just acquired its freedom from the same oppressive empire after decades of bloody struggle. Ironically, within just few years, the TPLF also betrayed Eritrea, provoking the infamous war of 1998 in which about 70,000 innocent lives perished from both sides. Eritrea’s political stand of 1991 cost Eritrea tens of thousands of lives, and a portion of Eritrea’s land, which is still occupied by Ethiopia. For Oromos, Eritrea’s historic mistake of 1991 cemented 27 years of untold misery under TPLF brutal rule. Eritrea later seemed to have admitted its wrongdoing and supported the Oromo struggle against the TPLF regime. Although some may think that the support was too little too late, it was our hope that the renewed understanding would create a lasting peace between Eritrea and the people of Oromia as well as Ethiopia. In this sense, the support carried great hope with a profound meaning. This indeed is exactly why your recent interview has become quite shocking to many Oromos, once again violating our tenacity of hope.”

Comment: We are not as shocked as you were, as direct sufferers of his 27 years of destruction needless saying you know it all from distance. Cruelty, deception and betrayal have been the unique dictator’s signature profiles vis-à-vis the Eritrean people and the region in general. Yes, TPLF betrayed the Eritreans big time but Isaias betrayed the Tigreans big time as well. Both of them betrayed the two brotherly peoples that had nothing to do with the problem. The incalculable damage done to our people by TPLF aside, the dictator’s position has always been something that satisfies his greed and violence through rigid and contradictory political zigzags.

The dictator switched back to the Oromos during the war as you said but relapsed and betrayed you again in the latest episode related to his interview. He betrayed you twice in this situation alone. His betrayal was, however, a bitter pill for the Eritreans to swallow, we just could not help it! And now he plans to disintegrate Ethiopia at the expense of the entire region,

the only difference today being everyone knows what he is up to. We, therefore, feel your pain and resentment about what happened to your people by the two vicious groups (EPLF and TPLF) because we have been their direct victims as well.

The Oromos: “Your interview has three points that vividly demonstrate your government’s hostility towards our people: You dismissed the need for free and fair elections in Ethiopia, You expressed that ethnic Federalism cannot continue in Ethiopia, You indicated your government’s apparent readiness to intervene in matters internal to Ethiopia, for a reason that can only be interpreted as a desire to squash popular resistance,”

Comment: The first is none of his business but he had to do it because his absolute dictatorship cannot survive in democratized region. He knows Ethiopia’s and Sudanese democracies will be fatal to his dictatorship while the Eritrean people understand them as the best solution to the region’s development and peaceful coexistence. We support the democratic air because we badly crave it like any oppressed societies in cosmos. We are part of it, we will follow the rout, needless saying our intellectuals and professionals are today working on how to transit our society to genuine democracy. He knows our democracies need one another to make it and his dictatorship does not fit. The option he chose is to condemn the region (mainly Ethiopia and Sudan) to long lasting dictatorships and elongate his survival by remotely controlling the situations in both countries. Therefore, the anticipated Ethiopian election *‘must be avoided by any means necessary’* even at the expense of the country’s disintegration.

The second is also none of his business but he thinks he can further destruct Ethiopia by stopping Ethiopians from adopting ethnic federalism. It is all about power and domination. He thinks he can stop the Tigreans from enjoying their freedom within Ethiopia at the expense of the Amharas and the Oromos et al. (because they support the concept as well and dismissing one automatically dismisses the others as a ripple effect). He thought he could isolate the Tigreans and deliver his damage without your interference.

It matters the least but he is justifying his lunacy by the outdated political orientation that manifests *“an independence struggle is only justified to challenge a society’s colonial question and not its national question per se”*. Well, all Africans fought for independence based on their respective colonial questions but this limitation has been neutralized by the South Sudanese independence based on national question for the first time in continental history. Apparently, this reality justifies any Ethnic group in Africa to request independence based on national question as well, but only if they want.

Unfortunately, Isaias had to nullify the Southern Sudanese independence to undermine ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. He has revenge against the Weyanes in mind, reversing everything he contributed to the cause in the past and to stop the resistance for change as you said, at minimum. This is a contradiction considering his past activities with OLF and TPLF and far beyond (training and supporting the Southern Sudanese freedom fighters against Sudan). This is a clear cut duplicity, external interference so to say. It is also against the Eritrean

independence by default logic, although our struggle for independence was based on colonial question like all African countries with the exception of Southern Sudan.

The third is, of course to kill the Eritrean resistance against his dictatorship by immersing our people in unjustified wars with the Ethiopians so that they don't concentrate on his removal in favor of democracy.

The three issues you raised here are genuine and thank you for being part of the solution; for trying to stop another violence in the region.

The Oromos: "It should be evident to you and your government that a democratic multinational federation is the minimum bond that permits the existence of Ethiopia as a country, from which your young country stands to gain. Your disregard of this fact becomes a direct expression of a desire for the disintegration of the country. Your open expression of apparent readiness for military intervention is an ostensible declaration of war to once again buttress dictatorship in Ethiopia; a troublesome diplomacy to say the least. We worry that a destabilized Ethiopia becomes prone to vindictive intervention in internal matters of Eritrea at another time, planting endless cycle of conflicts."

Comment: His dream of disintegrating Ethiopia mostly emanates from his problem with the Eritrean people; the irreversible mistrust he caused through uncountable political mistakes. We Eritreans worry as much because Eritrea's unjustified intervention in Ethiopia's politics would certainly cause endless vindictive wars that would vilify our societies beyond repair. But one thing is for sure here: he is sleeplessly trying to stop your democracy so he can intercept the Sudanese democratic journey through cross boundary terrorism as usual.

The Oromos: "Your hostile policy towards Oromia, combined with unhealthy relations with the regional government of Tigray, plants a dangerous seed that could one day grow into a vicious conflict that could engulf the entire region. Your objection to federalism in Ethiopia also sounds hypocritical, given the fact that as a leader of the Eritrean liberation war, you refused to federate with Ethiopia and led your country's bloody fight for independence. Such lack of principled stance on a matter pertaining to human freedom and dignity is tantamount to forfeiting the very ideals that validated Eritrea's independence. It is hard to imagine that there is a reasonable Eritrean who doesn't agree with us, that a federated and democratic Ethiopia guarantees peace and stability with Eritrea."

Comment: He is hostile to everything, a man that lives with indefinite excuses to justify his poisonous mind one way or another. Our people are more than exhausted and only waiting for his disposal to start living in the country like other human beings on planet earth.

Yet, his action certainly forfeits our independence but he does not care about it because he cannot reconcile with the Eritrean people and turn things around with his confrontational and rigid concept of life. For what we know, he only represents himself and he will face the

Court for his crimes. It is not his principles that concern us any longer but our hard earned freedom to lawfully live in our country and peacefully coexist with our neighbors.

As for your “It is hard to imagine that there is a reasonable Eritrean who doesn’t agree with us, that a federated and democratic Ethiopia guarantees peace and stability with Eritrea.”; the answer is YES. Our Interest in peace and freedom cannot be accomplished without democratic systems in the region making Ethiopia’s and Sudanese democracies crucial to the Eritrean experience at large. There is no question about it, needless to say the political choice of the Ethiopians is none of our business. We Eritreans only have to accept whatever political form Ethiopia takes in the future as long as it stays peaceful.

I remind you my brothers and sisters that the Eritreans and the Oromos suffered most of the damage inflicted by the previous regimes and the era of imperial wars and ethnic chauvinism should end through your wisdom for the sake of the two brotherly societies and humanity at large.

The Oromos: “After all, it is the Oromo youth, the Querol/Qarree that paid the ultimate sacrifice to bring about the changes that PM Abiy uses to create noble diplomacy with Eritrea. On this ground, it remains puzzling why your government started promoting hostile policy against our people at a time when Oromo national demand has crystalized as a formidable political force in the country. It defies any logic that when most Ethiopians have encapsulated their dream for Ethiopia’s unity as a component of their rights and collective identity, i.e., federalism, you appear to stand on the contrary. It behooves your government to reveal any conceivable reason why young Eritreans should march to Ethiopia to die or kill for a matter that they can neither stop nor change, to leave another historic scar that may one day backfire precipitously.”

Comment: The Eritreans historically felt very comfortable with the Oromos. The era of Amhara chauvinism was hell to our people as much as the last government had been for the last 26 years. Eritrea was used and reused as a political card; a target for pacifying internal crisis and the Oromos paid the price till this point in history. We survived decades of violence with strong sense of insecurity and destruction as much as you lived dying and killing as a result. It was indeed a very long wait for us to see your success, just to experience another approach from your country vis-à-vis the Eritrean people that only want peace with the Ethiopians. I thank God for your success and I hope I am right in this regard.

Apparently, the brotherly relationship between the Tigreans and us is something natural that will continue forever because it does not depend on the relationship between EPLF and TPLF. It depends on both peoples at grassroot level of the matter but only in the absence of disrespect, shroud politics and INCONSISTENCY. In the flip, you are our dependable ally, the reason you are trying to stop another blood shade between us unlike few flip-flopping elements of the past that intend otherwise. You understand the meaning of harmony from bitter experience.

Apparently, we were all tired of TPLF's political games to say the least and our people warmly received Abiy hoping something positive would come out of the new political shuffle. Indeed, this was true: His desire to make peace with Eritrea was unprecedented. It was modest, completely different from the way the former leaders did it. Abiy's approach to peace does not only represents the dignified Oromo people's positive intention for the region but also reflects your decent society that none of the former Ethiopian leaders lucked out to experience by cultural orientation. It is about your civilized cultural values, one that does not know political zigzags; a direct approach minus deception, capitulation and contradictions that we, all of us (Amharas, Tigreans, Eritreans, etc.) should learn from and adapt in order to peacefully coexist forever.

Unfortunately, we don't feel as optimistic without closing the door for the effort. Abiy was not consistent with his love and peace prophesy when it comes to the condition of the Eritrean people. His exceptional approach to regional peace and outstanding contribution to the Sudanese democratic journey are promising indeed, but I beg to differ that he did not cause a noble diplomacy with Eritrea. It was rather a conformist and opportunistic diplomacy with its absolute dictatorship.

Once again we are waiting firmly believing that Abiy's disappointing outlook of the matter as of today would not change the fundamental relationship between our peoples a bit. We are moving on with our struggle for liberty remotely watching the matter without giving up our unconditional support to the cause of the dignified Oromo people despite the temporary snag in the way. We are doing this clearly acknowledging the dictator's terrible effect vis-à-vis your country in this very short time since Abiy's arrival: the destructive intervention that exasperated the drift between Abiy and TPLF and the short lived contradiction between the Prime Minister and the vibrant activist Jawar Mohammed being few cases in point.

As for the dictator's intention to create war that affects young Eritreans who would be forced into death and killing, the devil has no compassion left in his soul to realize the effect of his actions. He is desperately looking for any way out of the trap he made for himself. He knows we cannot stop or change the Ethiopian situation and that war would worsen the scar we respectively suffered as a result of the destructive EPLF and TPLF dilemma since their inception. Yet, no heart to influence the situation positively; he just does not have it! As you said, his intention will swiftly backfire against the Eritrean people only if applied in practice. We, therefore, have the collective responsibility to stop the madness ahead of its actuality. We have the responsibility to support the struggle of the Ethiopians for freedom for whatever they want and you have the responsibility to assist the Eritrean people's struggle to remove the common enemy and bringing him to justice.

Unfortunately, the Eritrean opposition camp that stayed idle in Ethiopia under the EPRDF dictatorship has been held hostage again in today's Ethiopia, severely endangering our activism therein. We feel uncomfortable with Abiy's recklessness in this regard. We feel hurt about his decision to disallow our refugees in the refugee camps following the dictator's

instruction on the matter. Still, we patiently wait for policy change without giving up hope. Please allow me to express my gratitude to the Tigrean people's warm reception of our refugees despite the obstacles in this opportunity.

The Oromos: "Mr. President, In closing, we would like to stress the need to nurture relations between our peoples, value opportunities that have arisen to build a lasting peace in the region and learn from history not to repeat costly mistakes of the past. To this end, we call upon you and your government to: Respect the democratic path that the peoples of Ethiopia have embarked on, Refrain from blatant acts of intervention that will ultimately harm the people on both sides of the border; and, Align, should you wish, your political measures to be on the side of the people to foster lasting peace and prosperity for our peoples."

Comment: The genuine relationship between our peoples will always continue till the end of time but you cannot expect this from the devil who cannot learn from history and does not want regional peace for psychopathic reason beyond commonsense. He is too late for peace in Eritrea to depend on the Eritrean people anymore, the reason he is looking for external means of survival at the expense of the promising democratic air in the region. He cannot respect your democratic journey from his absolute dictatorship in Eritrea, nor can he refrain from his compulsion of destructing society as a purpose of existence. This man cannot be expected to foster for lasting regional peace and prosperity because he cannot survive in peaceful conditions.

In conclusion, I believe the tendencies of the expired systems to depend on wars emanated from the notion that the Oromos would pay the price at the end of the day. It was overdue for people to say enough is enough by stopping the selective madness in favor of genuine equality in every aspect of the society's life ahead. The success of the Oromos in Ethiopian politics after centuries of chauvinism and discrimination is, therefore, the success of Africans in general and that of the entire region in particular. It is the success of the Eritrean people indeed!

The reason is simple! We all suffered because of lack of leadership in both countries for you to confidently say what you said in this noble message to the cause of the problem. We are here together appealing for regional peace because we were conditioned to fight one another for all dirty Ethiopian wars against humanity: your people as cannon fodders and ours as the target. They selectively brought you to the slaughter house and we had to resist the offense from the other side of the fence as a matter of unfortunate political miscalculation and failed leadership. Death and destruction were the common denominators for both of us. In short, our common experience as the most damaged societies in the region should elevate our dependable alliance to natural alliance by all rational implications in the ground!

Things will change for the better and the time will come when the Eritreans and the Ethiopians will prosper with maximum respect to one another, needless saying the Oromo people have now the opportunity to consolidate the relationship from the highest hierarchy of

political power. Please stay away from the expired chauvinists' political pollution and stick to your organic culture in this opportunity where you have the chance to transform us all for the better. Please educate us all on how to live peacefully in our respective regions using your bitter experience, wisdom and the precious cultural and traditional values of your society. Thank you for creating this situation and good luck!