

Why Do Ethiopians Remain Under Tyrants?

Tefera Dinberu

February 16, 2016

This question revolves around many folks due to their aspiration for change, common among men and women who participated in the student movement since 1960's and 1970's. That generation having been emotionally affected regrets very much as the revolution was hijacked by the military junta /Derg/ and Weyane /EPRDF/ in a row. After so much material and human sacrifices, the very peoples that were supposed to benefit from changes have rather been negatively affected by dictators that galloped behind their backs. Since the large number of people did not benefit from political developments, a common person typically in reminiscent of the continuous ups and downs is worried about what worse will happen as a new year unfolds anticipating no better days to come. Why? Is it really despairing?

There are two main causes of this loss of optimism:

The first source of fear is created by the ruling regime. The regime intentionally puts the people in danger and simultaneously pretends to play a role of problem solver or pacifier. For example, it was well known that Weyane was behind the Arba Gugu, Bedano, Qelem, Jimma, Asebot, Harar, Ogaden, Gambella mass killings; it was behind the Amhara eviction from Bale, Gura Farda, Jimma, Beni Shangul, etc. However, after satisfying its interest, it pretended to be neutral and mediator of the issues as if it did not know how they originated at all. It took the blame to other parties in order to calumniate them. It orchestrated the enrichment of its affiliates through different forms of corruption; however, when it found individuals on its way, it simply attacked the personalities that participated in the corruption by using the records in hand at the same time taking advantage to buy popularity from the naive people.

Weyane monitors churches and mosques through its agents to make sure that these institutions preach the people an "achievement of peace" so that they can accept the present deplorable circumstances of life not only in fear of the past but also of the future as if dooms day would come in the absence of its rule. Since it does not have any national interest, it uses all means and resources to stay on power. It does not have any trust on the people and has recruited millions of party members with no projects other than manipulating better means of spying domestically and overseas. Although it is known that the "Amhara supremacy" is a concept of the past and that "Naftagna" is far from being functional or is obsolete today, while it calls its murderous squad "Agazi" — freedom giver, and the Amhara folks generally are in a dire state of poverty today, Weyane keeps on preaching on the ugly image of the monarchy, Naftagna, and the Amara people since 25 years ago not only to isolate them but as a strategy of keeping dissent among the Ethiopian peoples. They used OLF when they needed it and later used a surrogate Oromo People's Democratic Organization /OPDO/ just like the Amhara National Democratic Movement /ANDM/ to counter All Amhara People's Organization, and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement to counter the genuine Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition. More proxy political organizations were created by the machinations of the ruling regime and its agents infiltrate into any organizations in the country in order to stifle genuine political organizations and defuse the trust of the people and eventually paralyze political organizations that challenge its tyranny. It allows registration of political organizations only when the ruling regime feels that they are mild and remain only in name; it does not register political organizations that challenge its oppressive authority.

Since Weyane knows that it does not have any basis of support of the people, it consistently opts to

create division and conflicts in the society; for example between Anuak and Neur in Gambella, Qimant and the rest of Gondare-ans, Wolaiyta and Kambata, Somali and Oromo, Silti and the rest of Guragae people, Christians against Muslims and even Christians against Christians and Muslims against Muslims by burrowing through small holes and manipulating things in order to widen sects among the same people to make sure that there is cleavage of suspicion and conflict that gives it secure disunity among them at any time. The government neither resolved nor revealed the [conflict between the Girri and Borana pastoralists](#). The 1994 Killings in Qabridahar, Qalaafe, Dhaqax-Madow, Gunagado, Dhagaxbuur were results of ethnic politics. In order to control any notorious contenders from within, it “honorably” retires and allows them enough booties to make sure that they do not stand against it. Such retirees also know that they got what they did not deserve and would prefer the continuation of the status-quo in order to keep their fortunes; good examples are x-generals of the regime.

The second problem that arrested the progress of the country is a significant rift that developed through time and expanded into even wider schism – the controversy on the definition of historical oppression of the Ethiopian peoples. Before the eve of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, a group of political proponents in the formerly known Haile Selassie I University held that the basic cause of poverty or backwardness originated from the oppressive regimes of the past that created exploiting classes of a few over the great majority of exploited classes. The other group held that exploitation of classes of people by other few exploiting classes was not the basic problem, but oppression of the Amhara nation over other nations/nationalities was the basic problem. Although some elements of the proclaimed causes were evident from both sides, being unable to compromise on these issues and come to terms on common national objectives by projecting the fate of the whole people in the long run, both sides kept on widening dissidence and ironically created opportune situations for the military dictatorship that ruled for 17 years up to 1991 and since then for the present power monger Weyane in turn.

The pre-1974 student movement had a pivotal role in the revolutionary change since the student body of that time had a common unwavering stand on the abolition of the monarchy, the question of “land to the tiller”, and basic democratic ideals. Although Eritrean separatists gradually infiltrated into the student body domestically, and internationally, especially since the Ethiopian Student Association leadership election that took place in Los Angeles in 1971, when the group that would establish EPRP (Berhane Meskel Reda, Dr. Tesfaye Debesay) raced against the looser of the election that would establish MEISON (Dr. Haile Fida, Dr. Senai Likae, Dr. Negede Gobeze), the student movement at that time coherently covered all parts of the country and even internationally. The people succeeded in toppling the monarchy in the 1974 revolution since their unity on common issues was at a higher

level even in the absence of organized political parties. However, this political difference benefited first the military junta that sided with MEISON that fought against EPRP and eventually paralyzed both after over a hundred thousand casualties. The contention between the two antagonizing concepts that persisted for over forty years rather became suitable for Weyane to make division based on ethnic differences and deepened the abyss of dissidence. Weyane took advantage of this schism; it orchestrated intensification of the division and escalated conflicts among the people to keep its existence for so long. The issue of self-determination of nations and up to cessation added salt to the divide-and-rule policy of Weyane by using it as a catalyst to stir disunity among the people.

On the other side, whereas people expected parties that ran in their names to advance democracy to a higher level, they could not see any fruit out of the organizations. The many political parties that mushroomed rather widened minor differences and intensified conflicts. On the reverse side if all the opposing groups could stand together, the regime could have been powerless and lifeless. Failure to reconcile the two antagonizing concepts mentioned in the previous paragraphs dwindled the solidarity of the people as more political pragmatism culminated into creating more too many political organizations without any solid [common](#) strategy and goal.

National liberation is a humble term in the sense of human rights and self-determination of nations is a democratic right. Nations should be free from all types of oppression, be it foreign or local. According to the preambles of the United Nations Organization, the concept of National Liberation was to free a nation that was colonized by another powerful nation. For example, Africa as whole except Ethiopia and Liberia was colonized. In this way, many Asian, Latin American, and African countries made separate and unified struggles to liberate themselves from colonialism. Djibouti (France), Eritrea (Italy), Somaliland (Great Britain), Somalia (Italy), Cyprus, Bahrain, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Albania, Aden, Palestine, Oman, Qatar, Iraq, Rwanda, Morocco, and many others. The same concept was to liberate colonies from colonial rules. Literally self-determination also refers to all colonies to decide on their destinies through referendum – whether they want to be independent or join former mother nations. The purpose of the UN is maintenance of international peace and security and “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples...” (Chapter 1, Article 1). The UN is clear on this. It does not support secession. Its priority interest is non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations; respect of sovereignty of people expressed in deciding their fate without intimidation or any use of force. Chapter XI, paragraph 6 states, “Any attempt aimed at the unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the principles of the charter of the United Nations.”

There was a big debate on the definition of nations and nationalities, the question of self-determination of nations and secession in 1968 in the University. This concept was more pronounced by leftist radicals that followed Marxism-Leninism behind which Eritrean separatists played their role. The important related fact was that the Marxist concept did not accept secession bluntly. It accepted nations to secede from feudal, semi-feudal or capitalist rules as a strategy of advancing proletarian internationalism. Secession was not an end in itself; it's Marxist-Leninist objective was to create solidarity among the working class throughout the world and eventually reunite under socialist democracy as a step towards building communism in the World, where it was believed that there would not be annexation of states, federation of republics, or separation of a state from another state since the theory held that there would not be any state or democratic rule at all in communism. We now know this theory remained Utopian just like the ancient Plato's ideal state. Therefore, the concept of secession has been obsolete since the theory that brought it up has been obsolete and its purpose has faded away with history.

However, power monger nationalists like Weyane do not want to take this out of their principles; because they want to take advantage of it. Weyane does not follow any ethics of state government, but uses unprincipled Machiavellian style of dictatorship; it uses much of the communist style of totalitarian rule. It uses centralism where a few polit-bureau members being on top of a central committee steer the wheel of Weyane leadership and the nominally elected rubber stamp “peoples' assembly” under it. “Land to the tiller” was not implemented but remained nationalized as Weyane applies the 1974 rural and urban land proclamations that made all land property of the state and in reality turned peasants into serfs of the state. As a totalitarian state in the symbolism of the pre-1989 USSR, Weyane today arbitrarily makes national borders wherever the polit-bureau seeks; it leases, sells or donates land to anybody including foreigners, and uses Stalinist “self-determination” concept to keep dividing the country into ethnic entities to exploit the division.

This “divide-and-rule” tactic is manifested by the fact that people in one part of the country today see a problem in isolation of a national problem in another part of the country. People could not see violation of basic human rights that could resonate in any part of the society. When Weyane annexed land from Wollo and Godar, the rest of the people were preached to dismember Amhara and any rights associated with it. When many hundreds of Amhara peoples were brutally murdered in Mezenger Zone, when women were sterilized to reduce the Amhara generation, the rest of the people did not pay any attention. We need to ask ourselves as to who stood with Wolqayt-Tsegede, Tselemt, and Armachiho people's struggle for justice. Who felt the pain of the Ogadenmassacre in September 2014? On the other side, standing monuments of hate, like the one at Anole, were erected to intensify conflicts. It worked since common people accepted what politicians told them in their language.

Narrow nationalists suffer from identity crisis while in developed countries societies concentrate on how to use technology for the social and economic progress of the people; and candidates of state leaderships race with programs of development and good governance. They accept racial identity and faith as individual affairs and language as a medium of communication. The USA uses its former colonizer's language. Western countries are developed since they are done with nation building hundreds of years ago. One can read classical military unification histories of different kingdoms that made developed countries in the world – Portugal (1249), Spain (1492), Iran (1501), Burma (1613), United Kingdom (1707), United States of America (1776), Brazil (1852), Italy (1861), Canada (1867), Germany (1871), Saudi Arabia (1932), and many more other countries. Similarly among many Ethiopian leaders, Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi (Ahmed Grag), Emperor Tewodros, and Emperor Yohannes tried to reunify Ethiopia. And 1889 was the last one of many reunification eras of Ethiopia. Whoever made it, Ethiopia remains our common country. However, we are collectively responsible for carrying different dictatorships throughout time and retarding our common progress by at least 150 to 200 hundred years back conducting tribal conflicts. Even some of our professors are preventing social progress by confusing between primitive and civilized thoughts, because formal education alone could not radically change them from the backwardness they had been brought up. Progress cannot take place as long as progressive ideas cannot prevail. A few of our professionals show individual or group efforts to advance the awareness of the people. It is time for change and nobody expects professionals to go to the bushes. Some writer and journalists try to raise the awareness of our people. A few of them are calling for unity. However, furthering their steps, they could at least organize civic and professional associations like CPA, Health Professional Associations, bar associations, trade unions, environmental conservation associations, and other independent social organizations that can influence ethical disciplines and public accountability. We cannot blame Weyane while we fail to unite under a civil community in the Diaspora. We have collective responsibility in trying to mediate among folks and try to prevent families from breaking, and children from growing wild. It is when we use the traditions that kept the bond of our society in different traditional social organizations and pass to the next generation that we can be proud of belonging to Ethiopia. It is all such added values contribute to our common cultural development that can be wombs of state leaders.

We should listen to educators like Professor Fikre Tolosa, a proud Ethiopian of Oromo origin, who tells us about our historical unity rather than others who preach and justify disintegration. One can read Nobles of Oromo Descent Who ruled Ethiopia in contrast to the old Stalinist politics of ethnicity and nationality theory that was tested on Poland and failed on Georgia before 80 years ago. We cannot progress while our educated personalities preach on past evils since we cannot live in the past. What is the use of deafening rhetoric on racial discrimination until we do not [stand together for our common freedom](#) and basic human rights and stop discrimination? Two wrongs cannot make any right. We need to leave evil deeds for history and adjust our minds to stand for corrections – from discriminatory to non-discriminatory, from prejudice to moderation, from injustice to justice, from inequality to equality, etc. We should recognize and respect our diversity in our unity; we should also realize that social progress takes place when economic and cultural development takes place freely through free social integration and interaction. The key factor to raise the standard of the people is economic and cultural advancement among which economic development is the base. Whereas religious and racial identity should have been private affairs and nation building a common affair, racial controversies and conflicts took the toll of our energy that could have otherwise built the basis of our progress.

No society can develop without the active participation of citizens at least in civic matters and no party can enshrine a lasting success to the people by running separately with any theory of separation. Therefore, we should stand for one multinational state of Ethiopia disregarding borders made on tribal lines that our enemies devised for our disunity. We should focus on economic development, civic issues, democracy, and how to better make progress. Many folks have reiterated about the need of unity. However, unity cannot be realized by ambitions only. What is expected on

the ground is to change our attitudes and compromise on other issues and stand on Common national issues. These are what we should be worried about. Such national issues are what make us a strong bond. It is such farsightedness that can take us to the status of developed nations. Whether one believes it or not Weyane lives on our division; if we could firmly stand together, we could have replaced it with genuine peoples' government and real federation. So, we need to stop playing primitive games and join hands in civic affairs let our country be a true democratic federation of a "United States Ethiopia".

Tefera Dinberu