

Analysis by Paralysis: falling into the trap of Ethnicism

A Brief Response to the Article on “the threat of Tigrean nationalism”

On 08/16/07, Kallacha Dubbi wrote an article entitled “the threat of Tigrean nationalism”. The article is well organized though substantiated by selected data. However, what matters most is what it intends to impact. Its contribution towards creating civilized political culture in Ethiopia is of immense importance than how well it is organized. As King Martin Luther said, we need to be guided by the fiercest urgency of now, which in our case shall be reconciliation, love, unity and consolidation. Hence, Ethiopian researchers and/or writers have a vested duty in conveying professionally ethical and socially responsible contents as they are responding to the past and shaping (through acculturation process) the future in some way. This means, writers must strive at least to minimize the risk of subjectivity being slaves of their egoistic urges. Rather they shall explain existing facts by substantiating with objective realities emphasizing on our commonly shared problems that can ally us altogether to advance our common interests. Particularly, writers’ responsibility becomes crucial when the context in which they are writing is highly fragile and sensitive. The Ethiopian situation, driven by the ethnic politics-sickness is a case in point.

In the current Ethiopia, there seems a remarkable observation that there is a growing threat of mistrust and prejudice among the Ethiopian society generally and severely in the Diaspora. This can be partly explained by the series of unpopular political philosophies and undemocratic practices we have had in Ethiopia. As a result, we may have a good cause to consider it as consequentially customary. So being instigated by such context, we may not blame all citizens as guilty of this ethnic-driven syndrome. But it becomes embarrassing when the enlightened segment of the society is also contaminated by the disease in stead of searching for authenticated proactive cure. Therefore, an article that fails to gain support of any segment of our society for perceived reasons of unfairness and subjectivity is merely doing the worst by exacerbating the ethnic-driven complications. The educated is supposed to be open-minded and vividly see the full range of relevant considerations to accommodate the diversified cross-cultural values, and social and political philosophies of our societies.

Apparently, no matter how well organized the article is, it has serious misgivings in terms of its failure to treat Tigrians as Ethiopians. Thus, the article employs analysis by paralysis falling into the trap of serving the agenda of ethnic fragmentation. The article truly suffers from a great misery of encapsulation with the writer’s familiar mental tools of emotion and egoism, largely being dogmatic than dynamic. The analysis is thus fundamentally based on a concealed paralyzed premise.

Now this paper seeks to depict the concealed paralyzed premises of the writer which assumes Tigrians as Non-Ethiopians. From the article, it emerges that there is confused conspiracy and/or a deliberate ignorance of admitting Tigrians as non-Ethiopians. Actually, the article failed to substantiate its arguments with facts, as it should be.

Mistakenly, the writer seems skeptical to differentiate between TPLF and Tigrians. For fact however, we Tigreans unequivocally understand that there are countless philosophical and interest antagonisms between Tigrians and TPLF. Let alone TPLF and Tigrians, leaders of TPLF and the ordinary members of TPLF are very polarized in many respects. In fact, Tigrians may be reluctant to demonstrate prompt support to any opposition political parties unless they see their interests addressed properly. Thus, Tigrians' tendency to maintain the status quo can be explained as a rational response to the insecure circumstances, and shall not be condemned. And this can be partly due the failure of the opposing political parties to advance all inclusive and civilized political culture by undoubtedly differentiating TPLF from Tigrians.

On the other hand, as the government possesses all the power-machineries of absolute domination, it should not be surprising if Tigreans remain silent (like any other society) due to fear of possible suppression and government-sponsored violence. Because, undemocratic governments can not be dutiful to some segments of the society and not to others; a government largely is characterized by either democratic or undemocratic traits. For instance, the tyrant Dergue was not calm for the majority of Amharas by any criteria. Hence, it is unjustifiable to consider the current government to be pleasant for Tigrians as opposed to its undemocratic behavior. All of our governments have been unconditionally violating the rule of law. I think it is around this circle that we can form coalition to combat the epidemic of ethnic syndrome, which I think is a typical feature of uncivilized politics.

I would say Ethnicism is a ghost ideology that envisages and strives to survive within the cracks of our fractures. Unless we become wise enough to narrow down and eventually close this crack, whether we like it or not we are just serving the 'long live Ethnic fragmentation' motto. This is typically, what we call falling into the trap of ethnicism. And Dubbi's article explicitly or implicitly, reinforces ethnic faction by trying to label all Tigreans as TPLFs and for that matter non-Ethiopians, being benevolent advocator of Ethnic extremism. The following sections are dedicated to substantiate the above facts.

As I showed in my other writing that there has been a de-meritocracy in appointing top government officials in Ethiopia, Dubbi also showed that the leadership positions in the Ethiopian Military are dominated by Tigreans. This can be true, in fact without considering their capability and competence (which are the basis for meritocracy). Anyhow, this only shows that there is unfair distribution of power in that sector as part of the undemocratic governance in Ethiopia, which every one may agree. But, does this indicate that the Military is not an Ethiopian? Or, we can only say that power is unfairly concentrated with Tigrians? Only the second option sounds reasonable. But the writer shamelessly concluded that the Military, being dominated by Tigrians, is non-Ethiopian. This indicates that his implicit premise is "Tigrians are not Ethiopians" because the logic goes like this: If Tigrians are not Ethiopians, and if the Ethiopian Military is dominated by Tigreans, then the Military is non-Ethiopian. This conclusion can hold true only if the writer assumes the premises - "Tigrians are not Ethiopians".

However, it is senseless to deal on such worthless issues while we have a common problem against which we can unit. It should also be noted that the power network of the current government has failed miserably to have representative sample even from Tigray.

The power network is assembled from family and marriage-based ties who essentially promote their narrow group interest. What fascinates me more is while the writer assumes the Dergue Military as patriot Ethiopian; he ignored to fairly mention that the Military had been correspondingly promoting Col. Mengistu's ambition at the expense of justice and our right to live as human beings. So, applying the same logic, if the Dergue Military was dominated by Amhara or Oromo, can we say that the Military was non-Ethiopian, but Amhara's or Oromo's? Or can we say that all Amharas or Oromos are Dergue? The answer is no, but the writer's answer by transitivity holds to be yes. And this shows the outcome of Dubbi's analysis by paralysis. So, before preaching about Ethiopia, we need to have a clear and unambiguous meaning and sense of all Ethiopians.

The article also employed some misleading figures to show that Tigray is unfairly benefited from this government. It has even tried to imply there have been some hidden parliamentary appropriations made to prosper Tigray. But, the parliamentary budget allocation is I think relatively clear that does not have enough rooms for such loopholes. Anyhow, the practice in Ethiopia illustrates that the current government does not really care about Ethiopia, including Tigray. What the politicians care about is their power and glorification, period. And I showed in my previous article that the current Ethiopian government is largely explained by patrimonial form of governance where power is concentrated on the hands of few group of people who revolve around the clique of the prime minister.

One can empirically see at the growing number of destitute Tigrians in Addis to understand how Tigray is being benefited from this regime. So where is the prosperity in Tigray? Please wake up and start to watch the truth in stead of being defensive to justify own will. It is true that there are some people who gain unfairly from the prevailing rent-seeking networks with the government. But these are not only Tigrians, and obviously, there are many others, if not the majority.

Further, if it is about the companies under EEFORT, no doubt, they are the possessions of Tigrians for factual and historical reasons, and hence properties of all Ethiopians by transitivity, as Tigrians are Ethiopians. But I agree that something has to be done on their ownership status (they should not be owned by TPLF or its members). Likewise, they must be made compete fairly and survive in the free market.

To my greatest surprise, the article also paralyzed a big fact without supportive evidence. On one hand, it seems that the writer would love to enjoy unrestricted freedom for him self, on the other hand; he tends to avert individual's right for their preferred choice - paradoxically. He blindly denies the immense contribution of the indispensable person AI-Amudi, perhaps merely because of his political position. Personally, I don't have any interest with AI-Amudi. But beyond rhetoric, people shall be allowed to support any political party, including EPRDF in Ethiopia. So, AI-Amudi shall also enjoy unchallenged right to support EPRDF if he thinks that it is better. In fact, one shall also be allowed to make a point about anyone including AI-Amudi. Nevertheless, such claims shall be supported by deceit-free and tangible empirical evidences. If we do not believe by the unconditional freedom of people to have any opinions, so where is the difference between all the governments in the Ethiopian history and the current opposition movements? And how can we realize our pressing economic development challenges if

we are intimidating such crucial investors. Is it not posing a threat on our future foreign direct investment (FDI)? If the issue is about promoting hate rage, fragmentation and at best partisanship, it is so cheap that all the Ethiopian governments have been doing the same, even far better. But, does it really help? I left the answer for the reader.

In conclusion, researchers and/or writers should sensibly pay considerable attention not to analyze issues by paralyzing facts merely to entertain their egos. This may end up with serving destructive purposes, for instance, in this case extreme ethnic fragmentation. It is of immense significance to note that, at the end of the day, we all will harvest what we have been sowing, as our deeds judge our future. We are all complaining for perceived dissatisfaction on the current Ethiopian politics, and hence we should identify our commonly shared challenges and create strategic coalition to mitigate them by sowing a good seed. Let us not dwell upon the bitterness of yesterday. We need to focus on the future and on our major issues through the instrumentality of tolerance and compromise. Let us work for unity with firm passion for without unity the future Ethiopia can be terrible, or may not even exist. Only when we do so, we can create a win-win situation and a bright future in Ethiopia. Otherwise, we all will be defeated if we go the other way round by exacerbating our ethnic-driven cracks. Indeed, the epidemic of ethnic disintegration will continue to survive and even frustrate us more when we lack such wisdom to narrow down our fractures through respect, listening and mutual understanding. Listening matters largely in leadership. It is due to the absence of listening to their people that politicians often fail miserably in Ethiopia. And researchers are not supposed to replicate the past mistakes, but to intelligently fill past gaps and create a better tomorrow. And only this is the virtue of being human. The citizens' interests can not be modified to fit writers' desire, as human fingers can not be modified to fit computer keyboards, rather the keyboard should be made as to fit the human nature. Thus, writers have to carefully address the existing reality and modify their egos to fit the peoples' concern.

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