

Ethiopia/Eritrea-Anatomy of love/hate relationship. Yilma Bekele

This issue of Eritrea has been with us for more than I can remember. In fact it is fair to say like most of you I have lived all my life being affected by the problem with our relatives to the North. Considering the life expectancy in our ancient land it would not be farfetched to conclude for the vast majority of our people the Eritrean question has been like an albatross hanging our neck stopping us from thinking in a straight and rational manner.

I am not a historian by training thus I would not attempt to explain what exactly happened a thousand years back not even as recent as a hundred year ago. Today I felt we should strive to be equipped with some knowledge however rudimentary so we could have a little appreciation of a problem that has vexed our people and country for quite a while. My attempt is not to go on some intellectual fishing expedition but rather to put the current issue in perspective for us ordinary people to come to grips with.

I beg my esteemed reader's forgiveness if I have broached a subject which most of us seem to be expert in and have no qualms throwing opinions left and right no matter the merit. Mine might be considered as one but I felt I have to say it and let you be the judge. I will by no means consider it the last word on the subject. I normally try to present my case in two pages or less. I am afraid this time that task became impossible due to the very importance of the subject matter. I have done all I could to edit a very long article to what it is now. I again ask for your patience and implore you to read it all with care. I worked very hard at it.

Anyway I wanted to present another aspect of the issue due to the successive articles being presented by my good friend the editor of Ethiopian Review News and Information Web site impacting our current relationship with Eritrea. My intention is not to prove or disprove my colleague's argument but rather to give a different perspective on the subject.

Going back to my point, I apologize it took long but one has to create a starting point to tell a story and that is what I was trying to do. I have chosen 1951- the aftermath of World War II as day one of my analysis (the Europeans are the ones that fought most but what the heck they include all of us as usual). The British defeated the Italians in 1942 and Eritrea was placed under their military administration until 1951. In 1952 the UN voted for Eritrea to be federated with Ethiopia. In 1962 Emperor Haile Selassie dissolved the Eritrean Parliament making it a province of Ethiopia.

The Eritreans did not appreciate being another province under Imperial rule thus organized under the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front) and started their long struggle for self-determination. The ELF gave way to EPLF with the Isaias Afwerki as the new leader in the 1970's and the Liberation movement entered a new phase. The fall of the Derg in 1991 was the culmination of almost forty years of war and destruction. Eritrea became an independent nation on May 24 1993.

There is no question that the referendum that was carried out in April of 1993 that led to the declaration of independence was a hastily arranged divorce that contained lots of ambiguities, left many questions unanswered and ignored plenty of vital issues that have come to haunt both nations years after the resolution of the issue. This was definitely a perfect example of 'haste makes waste' syndrome. (ሲሮጡ የታጠቁት ሲሮጡ ይፈታል)

Here we are twenty years later and it is clear that we Ethiopians have not been able to reconcile our objections and accept the new situation staring us in our face. The love hate relationship

with our cousins is something that is eating us from the inside and a cause of many heated arguments including fist fights that clouds our thinking and creates a stressful situations between family, friends and acquaintances.

It is not unreasonable to expect twenty years to be enough time to come to terms with a situation that for all practical reason could not be reversed. The fact of the matter is that there is a country called Eritrea with an internationally recognized borders and a membership in all International institutions as an independent Nation State. That fact cannot be changed without the consent of the people Eritrea or some out of the world calamity that no one wishes nor likely to happen at all.

The problem most definitely lies with us Ethiopians that are refusing to let go, accept reality and move on. There are many reasons for our dilemma but having an excuse is not considered a valid point for our sometimes irrational and overboard behavior. The main cause of this unfortunate situation that is causing untold problems is the TPLF regime that holds absolute power in Ethiopia and is so adept at knowing where to poke our inner feeling to stoke fear and hate.

Although the EPLF was the primary organizer, cultivator, trainer and all around baby sitter of the TPLF (አዝዳሮ ወያኔ ሓርነት ትግራይ) the love affair came to an end not long after the TPLF was able to get its feet firmly planted in Addis Abeba. True to their nature the Woyane's showed no qualms betraying their close friend and sponsor. Like any dictatorial regimes that survives by creating division and dissent they found Eritrea a convenient target to use as an enemy that is poised to destabilize and dead set in trying to control Ethiopia. Like their predecessors the Imperial regime and the Derg it was not hard to for Woyane to fan the flames of war and destruction that is always poised to strike from the north.

Eritrea is a country with six million people limited resources and is one of the youngest nations in the process of rebuilding its economy after years of war. Ethiopia is a country with ninety million people with plenty of resources but due to the succession of autocratic and military regime has failed to use its God given potential to escape recurring famine and poverty. Thus it was the most absurd moment in history when the two nations went back to war between May of 1998 to June of 2000 using modern airplanes and tanks. The conflict caused the death of over seventy thousand lives and millions of dollars - a resources both poor nations are ill equipped to handle.

Today there are thousands of soldiers on both sides of the boarder waiting for an excuse to start the conflict over again. The Woyane regime in Ethiopia spends millions of dollars to maintain one of the largest armed forces in Africa, uses scarce foreign exchange to purchase military hardware from East Europe and large sums of money on propaganda to keep the level of anxiety high, use it as a wedge issue to divide the population and is constantly beating the drums of war to create fear and uncertainty.

We Ethiopians welcomed Woyane into our capital without a single shot being fired in anger. The Derg was despised by all sector of society and its downfall was celebrated and a cause for hope and a new beginning. Except for a few remnants of Derg and its Party members no one mourned the demise of Megistu and his comrades. Unbeknown to us and most unfortunate for our nation the new liberators did not come equipped with open heart, hope for the future and love for anything Ethiopia. We should have known at the outset that things do not bode well for our people and country when the midget warlord first words of wisdom was to trample our flag

and question our unity. We are harvesting this evil and petty mentality for the last twenty one years and the death of the evil kingpin does not seem to have made any difference.

Where we stand today is what this paper is all about and not to hash ancient history, shift blame and find a scapegoat for our failure to build a just and democratic Ethiopia. By all indications it has become clear the Woyane warlords in power are not interested in peace, harmony and respect for fellow citizens to be involved in the rebuilding of our country.

Independent parties are demonized to no end and abused to the extent that being elected a leader of the opposition is the most dangerous job in our country. The media is controlled by the party and there is not even the semblance of a fine line between the State and the TPLF party. The Woyane group has made it clear on many occasions and dared the opposition to pick up arms if they really want to share power. Anybody that is advocating a peaceful means to get rid of Woyane is only either burying their head in the sand or completely overtaken by delusion and wishful thinking.

We are forced to fight to be free and regain a sense of dignity to be able build a peaceful and harmonious society where our children could live in peace, our people can taste liberty and our mountains and streams can be utilized to sustain our growing population. No one chooses war over peace but there comes a time when one has to stand up stiffen the spine and do what is necessary to protect life and liberty. We have produced many groups that have resolved to do just that.

Like everything in life the only way to prove ones theory is to put it to practice. There is no guarantee success will be achieved fast, harmony will reign at a drop of a hat and the road will be easy. Experience have shown it to be a tortuous journey with plenty of pitfalls. Our country has sacrificed many sons and daughters that have stood for what they believe and given their life to bring freedom and dignity to all of the children of Ethiopia. Every one of us have lost a loved one, a close friend a relative or a neighbor in one of the many patriotic organizations such as EPRP, OLF, TPDM, ONLF, ALF, Kinijit, Andenet, Semayawi and plenty other beautiful freedom loving groupings that dared to stand up on our behalf.

Today the geopolitical situation in our neighborhood has become very complicated for one easy answer. The rise of Islamic militarism, the breakdown of Somalia the international isolation of Sudan, the demonizing of Eritrea by the West have created a very difficult and a challenging state of affairs to traverse for our political leaders. Compared to the situation we are in today fighting the Imperial regime and the Derg can be considered a walk in the park. There were many places to catch ones breath and regroup to fight another day.

Where do we Ethiopians prepare, get the training and organize to confront the ethnic thugs lording it over us is a very important and vital question. Fortunate for us there is Eritrea that due to circumstances we have come to forge a common ground. Today fate and our God have forced us to help each other overcome adversity. One can say we are very lucky. ***The job has to be done with or without Eritrea but the cooperation with our cousins has the benefit of reducing our sacrifice and hasten the day of our liberation.***

This is exactly the reason we find all Ethiopian liberation fronts and opposition groups welcomed in Eritrea. To be sure the Eritrean government have its own interest in mind for helping us get rid of Woyane warlords. As they say all nations act out of selfish interest. There is no such animal called selfless act. The Eritreans have their own axe to grind when it comes to their old Woyane friends. We Ethiopians have our own interest in mind when we impose on our family from the

north to accommodate us while working for our freedom. Both of us have come to realize that we have a confluence of interest at this particular point in time. It is no different than the US working with its arch enemy Iran to destroy and degrade what is called the ISIS threat. Conflict creates strange bed fellows and that is the nature of geo politics.

What we have at the moment is various Ethiopian organizations using setting up offices and training centers in Eritrea to confront degrade and destroy the cancerous growth called Woyane. It is not a simple task by any stretch of the imagination. TPLF controls a country with unlimited resources that can be used to preserve the power of a few at the expense of the many. We are fighting an enemy that is using our own people and financed by our own money. Furthermore due to narrow interest and mistaken policy the rich west and China have aligned themselves with our enemy making our task a little bit more difficult.

More difficult does not mean impossible. We just have to work harder and smarter. We have to show Woyane that we are capable of defending ourselves, prove to their enablers that their long term is better served allying with us and convince our people the future will be darker and more bleak if Woyane is allowed to stay around one more day than necessary. It is a tall order but no one said achieving independence and determining ones future is an easy matter. We witnessed the sacrifice paid by the Eritreans to reach the goal of standing tall on ones two feet. Yes we do not have to go far to site an example.

To quote President Kennedy we Ethiopians ‘..shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.’ That is what our combatants are doing from the deserts of Eritrea. They are paying the price so our children will live in peace. We honor, celebrate and are proud of those that have decided to pay the ultimate price in the quest for liberty. We are most grateful to the government and people of Eritrea that have under difficult circumstances opened their doors and wallets so we can do the job that could only be done by us the stake holders. We have a debt to pay if not today but hopefully by our children tomorrow whose life would be made easier due to the good will of our family from the north.

I am sure some of you would think that I have gone overboard with my praise of Eritrea. A few would object that I have not raised the issue of Democracy and good governance in Eritrea. I plead guilty on both points. I really believe both objections are not valid at all. When someone invites you to their home and share the limited resource of the family to finish the job you set up to do I do not think it is good manners not to thank your host and show appreciation. As for the second issue I felt it should be left to the Eritreans to work on whatever problem they currently have. For a tenacious people that sacrificed so much in pursuit of Independence and self-determination I believe they are up to the job of righting what they believe wrong.

My hands are currently full dealing with a varmint that is sucking my blood and causing me untold misery and pain. I have no inclination not do I have the moral authority to rant about other people’s business. I do not stress about Sudan, I never stay up nights thinking about Somalia nor do I make Kenya a Starbucks discussion why as an Ethiopian I would want to editorialize regarding the Eritrean condition is not clear at all.

Finally I would not attempt to try answer the questions raised by Ethiopian Review. It would not solve the problem we are having and unfortunately there is not an alternative being offered to offset what is alleged to be Eritrea’s attempt to muzzle the Fronts operating from their country. I find the charges leveled to be without merit and go against all logic. I would consider it to be self-

destructive policy for the Eritrean Government that has not shown any love to the Woyane regime. Why they would kill, torture and abuse the forces that are attempting to overthrow their common enemy does not seem to make sense for a rational thinking mind. Why would they allow them to set camp in their country and turn around weaken them is not a logical argument nor a sound and reasonable proposition.

In my humble opinion ER failed to make a solid case and relied on half-truth, innuendos and second hand stories that seem to serve the speakers interest rather than the group. The so called 'audio' presentations being doled out in small clips are nothing but a marketing ploy to increase google ads. It is a sad day for professional Journalism when even if true the musings of disgruntled individuals is taken as factual truth and presented as news. Hate and negativity has some times the effect being the cause of what is called the inability not to see the forest for the trees. That is what is afflicting the ER editors.

There is one more issue I would like to raise in tandem with this question we are trying to come to terms with. It is an important lesson that we should be familiar with since we now have a negative experience we went thru to learn from. The issue is self-determination and the most appropriate way to handle such an important concept. The late Woyane warlord has left us with a time bomb ticking.

In order to govern for a short time and amass money using criminal means TPLF have used what is called Nations and Nationalities concept to divide and conquer. For twenty years TPLF has managed to distort, bastardize and define it to suit their nihilistic purpose. Today how we deal with this burning issue is a very important matter and have to be careful not to drop the ball like the last time around and leave our children with another vexing problem.

May I suggest we closely study the manner the issue was discussed and the civilized way the opposing sides presented their case in the recent referendum carried out in Scotland. I urge you my friends to see how no one was demonized, old history dug from the grave and used to attack the integrity of one's opponent. We owe our people that much. I am also aware the issue I have raised would invite Woyane supporters and their minority but loud puppies to cry foul, call me names and try to confuse the issue. Settle down and present your argument in a rational manner, we are capable of listening to both sides and making up our mind with the interest of all of Ethiopia in our heart. I say to all cadres -Amor Vincit Omnia-Love Conquers All!