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In Response To

Modernization: A Poisoned Chalice for Ethiopians  
By Tseggai Mebrahtu

Thank you for bringing to our attention an article by Mr. Tseggai Mebrahtu. There was no time lost before I read the article challenged and provoked by you. I stopped all other things to read the article because you wrote the following introduction:

“A while ago I shared my views about Tecola Hagos and his demagoguery towards Emperor Minilik and Shoans. Some said that Tecola Hagos is the best Ethiopian there is and defended his biases as historical grievance. Others defended what Tecola wrote was the truth and congratulated him for being forthright on his hatemongering. For the record, here is a deconstruction of Tecola's preoccupation with Minilik and Shoans. A must reading for the students of history and supporters of Tecola Hagos.”

First, I am still looking for a third group to the above that would best suits me. I find the comment about the two types of groups outlandish, and in fairness, there must be one other group to include the rest. Let us be frank; having read the above, for reasons you and me know, I come to mind. So, I read the article in one long breath thinking that I have to respond, this time, agreeing to what ever was said and written about my childhood friend in order to maintain balance to my friends on the left and right. But, I confess that I also prayed hard to God so that he may alter what has been written and said, which I suspected to be profoundly correct, to be wrong so that I would not break the sacred relationship I have with this scholar and very close friend. If there were any thing that could have done this to me, it would have been this article that was so laboriously compiled by a clever writer called Tseggai Mebrahtu. Tseggai knew what he was getting into, and he had collected the arsenal he could find that would cause the work of a scholar and philosopher to come down tumbling. But, the “thumbs up” that Ato Girma gave to the article from sunny Los Angeles has needed, I am afraid, prayers from every one in town to be saved from Seattle's storm!

First, I would like to report that the empty shell that came with a roar of an introduction, and the materials that quickly followed it did not force me to sever my relationship with my childhood friend, Prof. Tecola Hagos, after all. Second, I have to report that I was deeply disturbed that the collections of jargons not even properly and coherently assembled did not give any meaningful argument that I expected. So, here are ramblings back to Tseggai in the same manner they came. I regret that the monotonous reading had become even more monotonous because I let it keep me in the pages forever. Tseggai's thesis was like a road in the Afar region where there are quick sand ingesting materials

everywhere. Instead of ‘beating around the bush’ as I have so far, I would like to start dismantling the “deconstruction” of Tseggai and rest my case quickly.

I would like to point out to my readers that we are running dangerously low in the matters that keep us alert and afloat! There was nothing to echo and nothing to yearn for in the dramatized second-rated thesis of Tseggai Mebrahtu. The fatigue eyes and exhausted mind have discovered nothing after going through Tseggai’s thesis. I have ended my reading disappointed, to say the least, about the redundancy and repetitiveness and abundant misconceptions of the author. The quest for truth is not necessarily proving one idea wrong, but identifying what is the common good if that is the aim. For a house that has rusty and dirty walls, we may ask which is more important: “the white paint or the brush? The rush to identify the first wrong (Tecola) by discovering the second false (Tseggai) is not the right approach to enhance our enlightenment and the quest for truth. Mr. Tseggai is neither the white paint nor the brush. I would choose the painter, and in this case, the real painter would be Tecola Hagos. In order to understand what is in the mind of Tseggai and his futile attempt to describe Ethiopia’s problems, let me start with what he started:

“Ethiopia’s contemporary profound political, economic and military crisis may appear to be enigmatic.”

Here, the point of interest is the term “militaristic crisis,” but it is not the focal point yet to dwell on. But, I would not pass without associating the “militaristic crisis” with the people whom it is a huge problem to: Eritreans. Consider how Tseggai imagines and portrays the Ethiopian peoples as the culprit to the “profound political, economic and military crisis” in the following:

“Foreigners used to believe that Ethiopia could be the Japan or the Switzerland of Africa. This prophecy has not come true. And many Ethiopians have been asking the question why Ethiopia has been unable to build a nationally cohesive society as a precondition to political and economic modernization.”

It is the cohesiveness of the Ethiopia people of numerous tribes that allowed the nation to exist for centuries not only through the most trying period of the last 14 years. TPLF came to power and brought with it the most divisive system ever employed by a government against its people known for their harmonious existence and unity. The departure of Eritrea did not make Ethiopians any less cohesive. Are the pockets of resistance against the government in power perceived as wars amongst people? Even the “Ethnic” concept of TPLF has not succeeded in destroying the harmony among all people. In regard to the reference to Ethiopia's aspiration to become Africa’s Japan and Africa’s Switzerland, no opportunity is lost, and there is no reason to despair. Ethiopia's economic power will be realized on the first anniversary of the departure of EPRDF. Aren't the economic and political problems that Ethiopia has faced today caused by the failing policies of the dictatorial regime? That is not what one gets reading Tseggai’s thesis. Here is Tseggai’s point that has exerted much interest and echo:

“Ethiopians have different opinions concerning the causes of their nation's profound crisis. Some Ethiopians put the blame on the "Amhara chauvinists" in general and on what the venerable Tecola Hagos calls the "Shewa supremacists " in particular.”

This is what Tseggai loves to hammer again and again till it becomes embedded in our minds. Even after Eritrea is gone and completely separated from the colonizer, it has not stopped complaining about Ethiopia's colonialism, and it has the canals like Tseggai that transport the grievances that we want to hear no more from Eritrea. The complaint is no more complaint, but assort of wishes what Eritreans want to see in the land and people that they had left behind. Tseggai delivers the message with aim to perpetuate the ideas, as I said, we wish to hear no more:

“Other Ethiopians say that the "colonization" of a part of Ethiopia by another part of Ethiopia and the struggle between the "colonizers" and the "colonized" is responsible for the ongoing crisis.”

Tseggai’s political messages and the problems that one wishes to see in Ethiopia are all stated in the above lines. Even though Tseggai has pointed out the wishful thinking of one extreme group besides Eritrea who is still complaining about Ethiopia as its colonizer, these expressions are the result of confusion and fear that Ethiopia may claim its lands and territories. There is fear when you know you possess something that is not yours. But, that is described as “colonial ambitions.” I must admit that Tseggai Mebrahtu has made himself a unique Tigrean when he wrote the following:

“Today, many Ethiopians believe that the betrayal of Ethiopia by Tigrayans is the principal cause of Ethiopia's current profound crisis.”

Tseggai is the only Tigrean who dare put the blame on the Tigrean people rather than Seye or Meles, as do most Tigreans. Tigreans never rub the faults and sins of TPLF on to the people. They avoid implicating the innocent Tigrean people with any regional or national crises brought by the leaders. I am curious about Tseggai position:

“The interesting thing is that all of these seemingly contradictory opinions have one common denominator. Namely, they are all reflections of the Marxist-Leninist legacy of looking for a political scapegoat. Arguably, the attempt by Ethiopian Revolutionaries to understand Ethiopia's national crisis from the angle of class or national oppression might have engendered this Manichaeian approach, which has been militating against true national reconciliation.”

I have decided to leave the above statement that I found like a dense jungle. Perhaps Tseggai may revisit his jungle and clear the bush to help us see something good. Tseggai must be however guided to the current Ethiopians’ crises specifically about the repression of the dictatorial regime, the issue of integrity of its territories including Badme and Asseb and now Humera. Tseggai is beating about the bush by referring to “national

oppression” as if his purpose to raise the old issue of “nations and nationalities and their rights” is not obvious. Instead of expressing what is in his mind using Eritrea as his prime example of 'national oppression,' he has stayed away from discussing the essence of “Ethnic” politics to lead us into issues of "nations and nationalities and their rights". The aim and purposes as we see it is to bring Ethiopia to Eritrea’s size and its level in terms of its militaristic and economic power. The hope is that when Ethiopia is reduced to small sizes, Eritrea will then be able to challenge and withstand Ethiopia. So, Eritrea's long-term aim is and will be to reduce Ethiopia's incredible might of the present. Tseggai has not left his base, on this matter, and in spite of his tumbling in every idea he picks up. But, like many other ramblings, here is another typical incoherence:

“The TPLF has thus gone hammer and tongs in re-implementing the Italian fascists territorialisation of Ethiopian linguistic groups by giving it the name of revolutionary democracy the right to self determination”

Tseggai wants to discuss about issues from which the minds and hearts of Ethiopians have turned away. Wisely, Tseggai infuses notion / terms such as “linguistic groups” uncommon in our political thinking. Ethiopians think of the term “Ethnic” not “linguistic groups” when talking about the regime's “divide and rule” policies. “Linguistic groups” is not used in politics because of its irrelevance and implication to Eritreans exactly why Tseggai interjects it. The purpose, in as far as Ethiopians are concerned is to keep Eritreans out of Ethiopia's internal problems. If the attempt was to bring the people of Eritreans into the picture, Tseggai has not succeeded. Tseggai writes in the manner we never do, and thinks of issues in the manner we don't. Here are examples:

“Because of this, those who believe that Amhara national domination was the main problem of Ethiopia wish to ward off the "Amhara chauvinists" comeback in the 2005 election chimera. They add that should the 'Shewan supremacists' come back to power one day by toppling the weyane leader, they would go to the bush again to fight for a second round "liberation" of Tigray. For those who believe that northern Ethiopia has colonized southern Ethiopia, the solution lies in allowing the oppressed Ethiopian ethnic groups to exercise freely their right to self determination.”

Tseggai is a non-politician activist. I have tried to give you the picture of Tseggai, but I did not feel successful. But, many lines have given us a glimpse look into the minds of Tseggai. Here is the opportunity to prove my point.

“So, for me all the above-mentioned and other problems of mal-integration were the work of the monarchy and not that of the Amhara. And more precisely, that resulted from the personal will of kings Menelik and Haile Selassie.”

Tseggai never departs from the confusions. His own aim to quietly trash the achievements are Minilik come to life gradually. Here is another awry statement that may bring total redemption to Meles. Tseggai is begging us not to evaluate Meles based on his ethnic identity and noticing that he is half Eritrea and half Ethiopian:

“So if King Haile Selassie presided over that humiliating and exploitative policy which lasted more than fifty years, ... he did it in his capacity as the holder of an absolute political power in Ethiopia and not because he was "Amhara". My point is that it is the autocratic way that power has been exercised and not the ethnic identity of rulers which has been the main problem of Ethiopia.”

So, in the context of the “economic, political and militaristic crises of Ethiopia” it is “not the ethnic identity of rulers which has been the main problem of Ethiopia” according to Tseggai. You can see clearly see my point. There are no political ideas that Tseggai did not try to explore. Here is one I would leave to Tseggai to come back to and serve justice to it when he gets time. His ideas on the virtue of “classical” thing need a refinement:

In the revolutionary upsurge of the 1960’s and 1970’s, there was a heated debate among Ethiopian Revolutionaries on the question whether Ethiopian problem was ethnical or "classical".

The ‘class’ struggle, correctly speaking of, has not been defined or known to Tseggai as is evident in the following. The fall of ideas back to Eritrea may bother some readers as they did me. But, readers may find the quick recovery that Tseggai attempts by pulling Eritrea from the pits fascinating:

“The question now is: should the Hailselessie and the Eritreanist weyane regimes be respectively considered as Amahra and Eritreao-Western Tigrean regimes simply because the people which they appoint in key governmental posts at all levels of the state administration are loyal supporters from Shewa or Western Tigray and southern Eritrea? If the answer is affirmative, aren’t we taking the risk of confusing democrats and patriotic Ethiopians from those areas with dictators whereas in reality the former have the same dream of seeing democratic Ethiopia like any responsible, patriotic Ethiopian citizen?”

There are luring ideas as many as one wants to find in Tseggai’s writing, and so long he writes, it seems to me Tseggai will not run out of ideas looking in the old files. Tseggai cleverly replaces his new idea of “political regimes” to “ethnic regions.” "Political Regimes" do not exist in Ethiopia. If the idea is about “political regions,” then he may be safe to think in terms of “Ethnic” boundaries:

“Last year, I wrote an article in which case I rejected the theory of "Amhara national domination" and I argued that the theory emanated from the intellectual inability to tell a domination by ethnic group from a domination by political regimes. The indirect responses to my article were irrelevant and therefore bereft of intellectual value. Because, instead of trying to prove wrong my arguments based on the distinction between domination by political regimes and the domination by ethnic groups, some insinuated that I did not know Ethiopian "history" as if the issue was the existence or the non-existence of domination and oppression in Ethiopian history.”

Who ever said: “Tseggai does not know Ethiopian history” was correct and the ramblings that we read here are glowing testimonies to that. The problem is that Tseggai does not

say outright what he is begging for. The reader must understand his aim, as one should in the following:

“So, in accordance with my conviction that Ethiopia can never resurrect unless her political elites do everything possible for national reconciliation by saying that bygoners are bygoners, I believe that Tecola can contribute to the well-being of Ethiopia if he completely Dewey anises/ de-Eritreanises and de-ethnicises himself and work together with other Ethiopians in order to make Ethiopia a nation to be reckoned with in the regional and international decision making process”

Let us think for a moment about the above statement. Tseggai begged that we accept the fact that bygoners are bygoners. We accepted the fact that Eritreans have packed and left. Asseb did not. We are being asked again to accept “reconciliation.” We accept and stretched our hands. 250 refugees and a day are coming in and continuing to flow. In few years, Eritrea will be depleted of armies and we will see every one back. What else are they begging? Tseggai is also begging us to de-Woyanize, de-Eritreanize and de-militarize, ect. I am sure Tseggai is going to despair because Prof. Tecola will not stop bombarding Ethiopia’s enemies: TPLF/EPLF and their followers. No friend will attempt to influence him to stop that fight. Tseggai has not been ambiguous all the time. He has been at times very clear as you can see in the following statement:

“Could Yohannes and Alula believe their ears if they were to rise now from their tombs and learn that there are a group of individuals in Tigray who say that Eritrea is a creation of Italian colonialism.”

Also, some times, Tseggai uses extremely simplistic ideas to convey his thoughts. His reasoning in the following sentence, however would make one run away from him:

“If Menelik were a sellout, then wouldn't it imply that the Ethiopian people should stop celebrating the Adwa victory?”

The incoherence that we came through no doubt had the potential to lead us to some dramatic ending. To prove the point, here are the academic of Tseggai that should be treated with same:

If Menelik had completely humiliated the Italians by chasing them from northern Ethiopia, there is no doubt that Western colonial powers would have sent their army to colonize Ethiopia.

First, Minilik has humiliated the fascists to the max. There was nothing more to be done to humiliate them any more in the eyes of the World. Second, no humiliation could have ignited any revenge against Ethiopia. The colonialists have quickly learned a great lesson and did not want the same humiliation repeated on their solders by sending them to fight the impossible Ethiopians with more weapons of the enemies in their hands. Minilik had also severely punished the Askaris (Eritreans) who collaborated with the enemies against Ethiopia by cutting their legs and arms. Both the Askaris and the Italians have lived with

this humiliation the rest of their lives. It was a gruesome punishment that made an example of cowards, and no Askaris would ever dare to betray Ethiopia. The enemies of Ethiopia had always relied on these type of sellout and mercenaries, but the sever punishments would have discouraged new recruits to support the fascists to fight Ethiopia with out which they could not win any war against her. Those were the factors that discouraged the colonialists to join hands against Ethiopia. Yes, Minilik sent many fascist armies back to where they came from alive, but to some, going home carrying the emblems of Minilik on their bodies was a traumatic life long humiliation.

The Europeans praised Minilik for sparing their lives, but called his other actions “savage”. The fascist Italians could have never attacked Ethiopia until after fifty years when they thought they could whip Ethiopia. They got whipped again, and what a debacle to fascists. They started both wars and suffered the most in them. In regard to the British army going to Sudan and beating the hell out of the Mahdists, that should not give us the idea that they could have succeed same if they fought Ethiopia. They would have not dared going to Ethiopia even if they had no other war elsewhere in the World. But, Minilik had much bigger enemy facing his armies. Adwa had turned into hellish place. The spread of diseases that could easily wipe the rest of his exhausted army was constantly in Minilik’s mind. There was also concern about shortage of food supply and so a great concern to the King. There was also concern about enemies emerging elsewhere in the country especially in the South. He had to return to his capital city with the blessing of his victory and the rest of his country still intact. So, he advanced back to Addis Ababa leaving the rest worry to God and time. Therefore, what Tseggai deduced and attempted to reason why Minilik made the decision to return to his capital city quickly after the war was factually and academically wrong. Minilik decisions were purposeful, academic and logistical. Tseggai did not end his habit of shooting in the dark. He professed:

“I would not have been led to raise issues of history on which historians are better placed to enlighten us. On my part, I depart from the conviction that Menelik, as a King of Shewa was different from Menelik as King of Ethiopia. Regarding Ethiopia's foreign relations, Menelik as governor of Shewa had acted irresponsibly.”

Tseggai was supposedly to deconstruct Prof. Tecola’s historical analyses. Well as one can see, Tseggai has done no less if the aim is trashing the great achievements of Minilik. Tseggai did not have problem with Minilik giving away Eritrea. Prof. Tecola has condemned the action. Tseggai explains why he criticizes Minilik and for what reason:

“I may have disagreements with Menelik’s internal policies”

Then, he refutes his own criticism about Minilik’s internal problems, as did Prof. Tecola about his willingness to throw Eritrea away:

I already argued that one should evaluate 19th century problems according to the mentality and tendencies of the 19th century.” “But acting irresponsibly in the 19th century and during the first two decades of the 20th century was not the preserve of Menelik.”

Tseggai complains that Tecola has not explained why his arguments are wrong. The arguments are explained why they are wrong now and regrettably they are demolished too. Tseggai has flooded us with ideas and feelings of Eritreans towards Ethiopians. Tseggai should tell the Eritreans a number of things. What Ethiopians think about them specifically that they are “barbarians” and “war mongers”. But, it would be better if Tseggai be not the conduit of insults.

“Until now, Tecola has not demonstrated why my arguments are wrong. It would also be very foolish on his part if he were to try in vain to demolish my arguments, whose sole aim is to defend the interest of the contemporary and future generation of Ethiopians unless he chooses to follow the example of the Eritrean philosophers who try incompetently to defend to the hilt Eritrea's illegal claim against Ethiopia's legal interest while they shamelessly call Ethiopia their 'beloved country'. They express their 'love' for Ethiopia by pleading for the defense of Eritrean illegal claim and by propagandizing that Ethiopians are barbarian war mongering who should be taught about peace. Their extreme contempt of the Ethiopian people even leads them to demand that the Ethiopia honors them as her 'peace hero ' even though the peace they talk self serving about is a peace only for Eritrea and a dislocation and a suffering for Ethiopians, therefore a war as usual against Ethiopia.”

Finally, Tseggai takes us to his specialty to try on us some lab test. It is better to warn readers that reading Tseggai modern principles for a second time may be dangerous:

“This is done by relative objectivity, I mean that I take an analogy from certain modern principles of law before deciding whether Menelik was a sellout”

“In contract law, there is the modern general principle that when a judge is of the opinion that a law or a contractual clause is susceptible of two contradictory interpretations, he shall adopt the interpretation that is in favor of the debtor. Like-wise, in criminal law, there is the presumption of innocence, and if 99% of the evidence shows that the accused is guilty while 1% of the evidence shows that the accused is innocent, then the judge must declare the accused innocent. I am of the opinion that any judge sitting in any tribunal of History must be led, if they correctly use this analogy from law without fear or partiality, to declare King Menelik innocent.”

Prof. Tecola considered Minilik’s act that was done under extremely difficult circumstances “treasonous.” The remark was, in my opinion, to point out the gravity and seriousness of the actions that the present leaders of Ethiopia are considering, and the most critical moments that Ethiopia is facing today. So, the remark is to raise the national crisis to its appropriate level. The actions done and in progress that would result in great harm to the Ethiopian people and their lands cannot be made to pass without wide spread



turmoil. Such action may indeed trigger enormous upheavals unknown to history and to the Ethiopian people. Those responsible for giving away territorial lands or if they are in preparation to give without the consent of the people, being filled with arrogance and undermining the authority of the people are challenging the resolve of the Ethiopian people that will not take much to happen. The Ethiopian people are capable to carry out the maximum punishment that only its invading enemies had known, any time and against any one.

THE END