

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ADOWA: PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Historians and other scholars have analyzed and discussed the significance of the battle of Adowa and the implications of the victory there for subsequent historical events, in particular, in Africa and Europe. In regard to this, certain questions come to mind, e.g., had Italy won at Adowa would Fascism have risen in Italy? One may speculate that a victorious Italy--with its prize possession, a vanquished Ethiopia--would have been content to exploit the human and natural resources of the largest and choicest portion of the Horn of Africa. She would have been in a position to hobnob with Britain and France, the greatest colonial powers of those days.

To continue with this scenario. With a dumping ground for its excess population, a cheap colonial labor force, and the unconstrained exploitation of Ethiopia's natural resources for the benefit of metropolitan Italy, the socio-economic factors that decisively contributed to the emergence of Fascism might not have existed. If such had been the case, Nazism might not have been successful in Germany; if successful, Germany would not have started a war, for it would have been confronted by the three most powerful colonial powers of Europe. If these speculations are plausible, then the victory at Adowa can be considered an event of world historical significance.

Leaving such speculations or interpretations of the global significance of Ethiopia's victory over Italy to historians, let me say a few words about some aspects of its significance from a much more limited perspective, a point of view that is necessarily subjective but quite common and very revealing. For a long time before Adowa, our history had been characterized by decentralization and a focus on local concerns to the neglect of common problems and issues, except when an external factor perceived as a threat to the whole of Ethiopia intervened.

The crossing of Mereb river by Italian forces was such an external factor. Hence, the disparate factions, some in a state of belligerence among themselves or against Menelik, others in fragile alliances, set aside their differences, united and fought against Italy. The result was the great victory at Adowa which we commemorate today. The victory was a crucial catalyst in the victory of centralisation over centrifugal tendencies that were a defining trait of our homeland for many centuries prior to Adowa.

Judging from the vantage point of my kinfolk, for example, from the perspective of one of my great-grandmothers who had never been outside the confines of Soddo Gordenna/Soddo Guraghey, and who neither spoke nor understood any other language except Kistanigna and might have never met an 'outsider' at any time in her life, the victory at Adowa created a sense of belonging to a much wider, more complex and intricately related community. Other speech communities that used to be perceived as alien were gradually seen as being linked to one's own group by profoundly similar traits that transcended geographic and lingua-cultural barriers. Localism slowly began giving way to Ethiopianism. The monarchy, in the person of the sovereign, became the symbol of this unity and its concrete manifestation.

But there were other forces lurking in the background and sowing inter-communal strife with the intention of weakening the growing sense of Ethiopian identity. Whenever our ancestors discerned such danger and/or witnessed internal strife in which "...a lot of blood was shed [and] valuable religious items were stolen, ...and the leadership of the country [behaved] like beasts of the wild..." they struggled to bring peace and harmony and to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of our homeland. They prayed "'0 Lord, save the Ethiopian people, for most of them believe in you, even though they don't see you ..."

The above concerns were expressed by our forefathers in the 15th century. Clearly, then as now, strife and disunity were encouraged by enemies from within abetted by external entities. In my view, one of Menelik's great achievements was breaking, or at least weakening the link between our internal enemies and their foreign masters. Recently, however, a seemingly democratic but insidious policy of ethnicization, a policy of segregation and bantustanization has been put in place in our country. Such exclusionism leads to ethnic cleansing as has been attempted in our country with tragic loss of lives.

Menelik's style of leadership was inclusive. It accentuated what was common. His centralization of the administration of the state and the relatively fast pace of urbanization and the consequent acceleration of the frequency and length of contact between individuals and groups from diverse linguistic backgrounds fostered the spread and internalization of an Ethiopian identity.

Fascist Italy tried to use our diversity as a means of destroying Ethiopian identity that had been spreading to all corners of the country, Eritrea included. Motivated by vengeance and the creation of a colony of marginalized communities, Italy set out to recruit native agents for its planned destruction of the lone, historically continuously independent country in Africa. She almost succeeded. We owe our unity and independence, in part, to the insatiable greed of fascism.

What Italy could not do a century ago, what she failed to implement in the first four decades of this century, i.e., the breaking up or balkanization of Ethiopia, the instigation of internecine armed conflicts, the sowing of mistrust and intolerance among our diverse but related communities are presently in full swing. The TPLF, conceived by a separatist and bantustan mentality, has a nation in its evil grip. Its active support for balkanization is an intended and necessary consequence of the basis of its initial founding and present anti-unity and ethnocratic policies.

The heirs of Italian colonialism and fascism are now eagerly and busily engaged in the spread of localism and the eradication of a common purpose, and the sense of Ethiopian identity cultivated over a span of centuries. The alien regime in Ethiopia and its external mentors and local sycophants are actively engaged in the search for distinctive characteristics in our related diverse cultures. They hope to redefine these so as to accentuate minor differences raising them to the status of incompatibility. Then they begin to try to create animosity and alienation among our communities that have coexisted and been intermingling socially, genetically and culturally for millennia. The ethnocentric leadership of the alien regime in Addis has been and is waiting to use any resulting division to maintain and stay in power. In all relevant respects, this policy is the same as the divide-and-rule principle and practice of colonialism and apartheid. What is a "killil" but a bantustan, a "homeland", a forbidden area, a confinement? For the first time in all its history, Ethiopia is indeed now becoming a prison house of communities.

Fascist Italy instituted residential zones or "killilotch" in the towns of Eritrea wherever there was a sizable Italian community. The concept of "killil" is no different from the notion of a reservation as practiced by colonial or apartheid racist rulers. It was introduced and is used to keep a people, whole groups of people, in confined spaces so that they can be easily controlled like cattle in a pen. Unless the Woyane regime is foiled and/or removed, the Ethiopian people will be required to carry passes for movement from one part of their own country to another. What is this but apartheid pure and simple? Killil means bantustan, rigid constraint. This is the implication of the political concept of "killil", a principle of segregation, divisiveness and ethnocentric nepotism. Its obverse, unless reversed by a united effort, is ethnic cleansing.

The quasi left opportunistic regime has internalized its master's, Mussolini's, techniques of divide-and-control. If controlling is not possible, "Then", says the alien regime in Addis Ababa, "divide and dismantle the creation of centuries of effort and of ultimate sacrifices by our forefathers". The Meles regime and its foreign mentors falsify our history in hopes of creating doubt and confusion that would help in suppressing the feeling and knowledge of shared cultural traits, common

historical experiences and socioeconomic and political ties engendered by millennia of linguistic, cultural and genetic transactions. The regime thus intends to bring about in the minds of the general population, as well as in those of the few ethnocentric individuals in leadership positions from other linguistic communities, a perception of being linked through the instrumentality of naked power alone and not by a common destiny or origin. The regime's aim is to minimize, and if possible, to eradicate intercommunity empathy and common purpose.

From my perspective, organizing a government based on ethnic affiliation or, equivalently, based on a policy of killil creates and sustains, at least, two problematic conditions that are afflicting some countries in the world. These are: (1) marginalization, a condition in which, some communities are either deliberately neglected or forcibly excluded from actively and freely participating in socio-political and economic activities in an equitable manner; (2) bantustanization, i.e., the introduction of killil, a condition which creates and fosters regional chauvinism resulting in intercommunal distance, hatred and violence as has happened, for example, in some Ethiopian bantustans. In some "homelands", persons whose ancestors might have, allegedly or otherwise, moved to these places long, long ago from different "homelands" and may even have been among the first inhabitants of the area, are dispossessed of their lands and other properties, harassed, tortured and even murdered as has happened, especially, to our Amharic speaking compatriots. If allowed to live they are denied of any meaningful sociopolitical and economic roles in the bantustan. These are crucial factors that help create a political climate conducive to intercommunal hatred and violence as in Burundi a few years ago.

We, Ethiopians struggling for the unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of our country, including peace, harmony, genuine democracy and the rule of law there, must resist any and all temptations to castigate a whole speech community as treacherous and a cancer in the body politic. The impulse for whole sale condemnation, although seemingly justifiable, is in fact unwarranted. For there is no speech community in our country, today, that has not produced quislings serving the narrow interests of an alien regime.

Using language as a divisive weapon is a policy formulated and practiced by imperialism from the vantage point of controlling and exploiting a subject people whose objective needs are liberty, peace, unity, food, health, education, etc. Marginalization, bantustanization and alienation are the intended results of imperialism/colonialism. This is what imperial fascist Italy tried to achieve in Ethiopia. This is what apartheid--an avowed reactionary, racist and fascistic--ideology attempted to do in South Africa. And this is what the Meles regime has planned and is implementing in our country.

Hence, in commemorating the historic victory at Adowa, we must remember that the defining traits that characterize subjugation, bantustanization, ethnochracy, etc., have been introduced by the TPLF regime. That is, for all intents and purposes, Ethiopia is under the boots of an alien regime accountable not to the Ethiopian people but to foreign entities. Consequently, there is an absolute need for a unified struggle for liberation, peace and democracy. We need a Second Adowa, i.e., the victory of unity over balkanization and that of democracy over ethnochracy. We can achieve such victories provided we set aside partisan political maneuvers, eliminate partisan hidden agendas, and unite under broad common agreed upon principles. The Diaspora is neither an appropriate occasion nor a suitable forum for partisan political campaigns. For those who love their country, only a free Ethiopia can be a market place for for competitive democratic ideas and ideals. Therefore, I propose the following slogan:

- UNITY!
- LIBERATION!
- DEMOCRATIC PARTISANSHIP!

in that order.