

War and Peace in Tigray

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It is hard to describe the mood Tegarū all over the world are in as the “peace-process” unfolds. While the “peace-process” is dragging its feet Tegarū have strangely stopped walking! One way to describe the vibes Tegarū find themselves these days is similar to that of the football fans in the World Cup. The latter empty their pockets to be in the Qatar stadiums or conveniently locate themselves in the front seat to watch live broadcast of the matches. The fans support one or the other team, jump, yell, curse, cry, fist-fight, and empty bottle after bottle of beer or soda, as the ball rolls across the field, players struggle, and skillfully try to get it into the net. Ninety plus minutes are spent with tense nerves; and then the end of the match comes suddenly like a bolt from the blues. The adrenalin which reached its peak during the noisy drama, for 90 minutes, plunges down leaving the fans exhausted and unable to talk or walk. Is this situation of the fans acceptable? Yes, of course. After all, football is just a kind of entertainment; which could exhaust you though pleasantly. The goal of football match is just the match; it is not a means but an end in itself.

War has never been or could never be a form of entertainment; the Tigray War is not far from this truth. I don't deny that rulers and ordinary Romans were enjoying the fighting and mutual murder of gladiators to cheer their depressions away. Like football matches the combat-to-kill in the Colosseum was an end in itself. As the clouds of war were gathering in the clear skies of Tigray Alula Solomon is quoted to have said (I am not sure he said it) “War is a traditional game in Tigray”. If these were really his words he may have said them out of good intentions to tell the enemies that Tigray is ready to defend itself if attacked. Otherwise, the denotative meaning of his statement puts Tigray in an awkward position as to the reason why Tigray fights wars. The derogatory adjective-“warlike”- may be applied by those who would like to belittle the freedom struggle of the people of Tigray through the ages. In fact, such remarks were rife in the anti-Tigray media during and before the war: “TPLF/Tigray cannot live without fighting” etc.

I prefer to think that the Tigray wars have always been means to an end rather than ends in themselves. Tigrayans are essentially peace loving people. However, here is something in that society that perplexes even the casual observer. Every time a war comes to an end in Tigray, the general mood returns to status quo ante in such a way as if nothing of significance has happened. In wars men and women of all ages die or are injured; livelihoods are destroyed. This is the most unfortunate part of life on this Planet. People are destined to die a natural death. God has forbidden death of men and women in the hands of other men and women. Internal and external wars throughout the centuries have degraded the natural and human resources of Tigray to the extent that it is reduced to a minority in spite of its ancient origin. Here are a couple of questions to ponder: Is it out of love for war or out of love for peace that one very easily and completely replaces the other in Tigray? Is it possible to get used to alternating war and peace so much that a clean break from one and the other becomes so easy?

All the wars in Tigray of the past have not been the same in terms of intensity and loss of life and property: the Egyptian-Tigrayan wars, the Mahdi-Tigrayan wars, the Italo-Tigrayan wars, the feudal internecine wars, the Derg-Tigrayan wars, and the Eri-Tigrayan wars. However, the sum total has devastated Tigray and deeply impoverished it. In spite of what generations of Tigrayans went through all these wars have just become too distant memories few Tigrayans would like to talk and/or write about. It's a paradox that Tigray is full of history but lacks a corresponding historiography. This is not

by accident; it is the logical outcome of the propensity of Tigrayans to very easily make a clean break with the immediate as much as with the distant past. Erasing memories of tragic wars from the mind may sound like a healthy attitude. However, forgiving and forgetting without attending to whether or not the key causes of previous wars have died out is a cordial invitation of another deadly surprise. Such pervasive laxity in the Tigrayan cultural value system has been fueling the relapse of wars in Tigray after an interval of a generation or less. <http://aigaforum.com/article2021/Four-Campaigns-against-Tigray.htm>

Dr. Haile of Dedebit Media is the most perceptive of all Tigrayan media leaders in this regard. For several month now he never failed to mention and stress what he considers to be the most glaring weakness of Tigrayans that has been exposing them to repeated attacks and invasions by the rulers from Arat-Kilo. Laxity, which Haile refers to as “*Sheleltenet*” has brought Tigrayans the mother of all wars in Tigray in the last two years. He is worried as much as I am that the laxity among Tigrayans inside and outside Tigray is reappearing as the semblance of peace prevails after the devastating war in Tigray. Tigrayans seem to have become voluntarily stuck in the century old vicious cycle of peace-laxity-war. Haile did not stop at combatting laxity in the aftermath of war as a chronic Tigrayan ailment; he is repeatedly proposing comprehensive documentation of the details of the war, in print and electronic media, by Tigrayan scholars for the generations of Tigrayan to come.

As a matter of fact many other media men and women and the guests they hosted have been sharing their worries about (*mzehehal*) the rapidly receding wave of enthusiasm that had engulfed the world before the peace deal. One of the mothers of Tigray Mama Ajebnesh was interviewed on Stalin Gebreselassie’s Zara Media. She was unequivocal when she stated: “We have to make sure that none of our children pay such sacrifices after us”. In Tigray, this is something which is more easily said than done. Documentation for the next generation about what happened and how it happened, how it started and how it ended is helpful but not as much as deeds. The defense of the next generation starts in this generation. A proactive current generation facilitates for the effective self-preservation and the successful realization of the aspirations of the next generation. That is why Mama Ajebnesh has hammered the point home by focusing on what we have to do now rather than what the following generation needs to do to sustain itself.

For me, who has been spending several hours a day, in front of Tigrayan YouTube channels for the last two years, the situation is unmistakable. Since the signing of the peace deal there is a sudden and precipitous decline in the number, frequency, and robustness of the news and analyses on the Tigrayan-friendly media. Some have surprisingly gone wild with their reporting of the events related to the peace process as if it is the aftermath of a wedding party. Others have become too fervid with the bits of things happening here and there related to the deliberately slowed down implementation of the peace deal. Cheering one or two trucks arriving in several days or weeks, rushing to report that a very weak telephone signal has started in the areas controlled by the ENDF, breaking the news in several channels of a power-on that turns into a power-off the next day. They keep us busy with trivialities and watch us with disdain as we rejoice childishly for the resumption of basic services as a privilege or favor rather than as a constitutional right.

The Tigray War was (is) a means to an end for all sides in the war. None of them have been fighting just for the sake of it. Out of frustration and failure to explain why Eritrea is so deeply involved in the Tigray War some Tigrayan analysts as well as ordinary people attribute it to the warlike predisposition of the ruling party in Eritrea. This does not hold much water. Closer to the war as a means to an end

thesis is the perpetuation of the dictatorship in Eritrea by deliberately keeping able bodied Eritreans very busy in the Tigray War. Isaias's personal vendetta on the TPLF is another goal of the Eritrean leader. Isaias's goal to destroy TPLF and weaken Tigray has brought Eritrea into an alliance with the Amhara Forces who have occupied Western Tigray blocking access for Tigray to the Sudan. Isaias's ambition to reign supreme over Ethiopia's economy has been obstructed for three decades by the TPLF. This is motive enough for Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea to desire the destruction of the TPLF. The latter had succeeded to isolate Eritrea from the World and turn it into a global pariah. Most of these reasons for involvement in the war from the Eritrean side last as long as Isaias stays in power.

The most intractable reason for the involvement of Eritrea in the Tigray War has a much broader political and social base than the mere perpetuation of Isaias in the Asmara palace. Eritrean nationalism as opposed to Tigray nationalism has more sinister and deep seated long term objective. The attainment of the goal of exterminating and displacing Tigrayans, annex and incorporate their land into Eritrea and Amhara, is thought to be best done through the use of violence at a massive scale. Eritrea is a prime mover of the triple-alliance which includes Prosperity Party-ENDF and the Amhara irregulars. The pact of the three is a marriage of convenience the only thing it has in common is the bitter hate for TPLF and by extension the people of Tigray. The PP-ENDF has a political agenda which could not be resolved by peaceful means. The leader of the PP and commander in chief of the ENDF has insatiable appetite for power as a dictator, which is challenged most strongly by TPLF. Hence, the main reason for the PP-ENDF to wage a war in Tigray is more straightforward than the other two.

The Amhara militia is the military wing of a broad-based confederation of notable individuals and Amhara nationalist groups who have vowed to restore the unitary administrative geography of Ethiopia and the imperial system by changing the Federal constitution and ending the Federal administrative arrangement. Since restoring unitary system in the Ethiopian multi-ethnic context means resorting the tyranny of the center over the rest of the peoples of Ethiopia it is not acceptable to the majority who are already enjoying a degree of self-rule enabling them to manage their own regional and local affairs. That is why this political creed resorts to violence than peaceful political discourse. The militant creed for the restoration of the defunct imperial system, which considers the Amhara to be the melting pot of the rest of 80 nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, has at least two strategic fronts to attain its goal. One is to hit Federalism at its heart. TPLF and Tigray are considered to be the bastions of Federalism and if destroyed would trigger a domino effect of defeat and surrender by the rest of the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia.

The second front is more of a Plan-B but is being run alongside Plan-A. If restoring the Amhara-led imperial system is not restored to its fullest extent expected, the Amhara regional state claims and expands to adjacent territories in Tigray (Western and Southern Tigray), Oromia (Wellega) and Benishangul (Metekel). In both Plan-A and Plan-B Tigray is a target. Reinforcing Amhara ambitions in Plan-A and Plan-B is taking the status of the Amhara to the pinnacles of history, religion, and culture. Ethiopia is wrongly presented to the world as if it is 3000 years old in its current geographic extent. Although historical evidences abound that Ethiopia evolved as a loose amalgamation of formerly independent Adal and Harar Sultanates in the East and Northeast; the Kingdom of Abyssinia in the north, central and northwest; Oromos ruled by the Gada system in the south, west, central, and east; and multitudes of large and small communities in the south and southwest.

This historical fact is obscured by the partisan historiography, which centers on the supremacy of the Amhara culture and history as the Ethiopian mainstream others are obliged to melt into. Promotion for

tourism in Ethiopia has played a damaging role in the process of introducing Ethiopia and its natural and cultural treasures to the world. It has systematically and imperceptibly been building on the centrality of the Amhara in Ethiopian tourism so much that few tourists know what belong to who else. The Amhara-led quest for restoration of the imperial system has since a long time ago opened another front of confiscation of historical, cultural, and religious treasures in which the Amhara claim of 3000 years of long history, hub of Christianity and Islam, and origin of the ancient Geez alphabet. All these are located in Tigray. This has not enabled Amhara to fully control the historical and cultural “proofs” of its supremacy. Without them Amhara can trace its history only to the “restoration of the Solomonic dynasty” and the tumultuous 800 years that followed. In desperation resulting from the feeling of loss the Amhara elite is determined to take the bull by the horns and destroy Tigray in order to disown it of its historical upper hand.

For Tigray, war is a means to an end in the sense that it wages war only with the lofty and time-honored goal of defending itself. For the allied invaders war is a means to an end to deny Tigray the ownership of a rich and long history, to obstruct its quest for a more elevated level of self-rule, and to degrade its status as a center of influence and experience for freedom loving people throughout Ethiopia. I am not going to describe the two-year Tigray War because I can't manage to cover even a single episode of it in this article. Those of you who have been following it closely know its magnitude and intensity. To cut a long story short, Tigray has effectively defended itself. It may have lost some battles but it has won the war. Tigray is hurt severely; it has lost about ten percent of its civilian population not to mention the destruction of its economy and socio-cultural life. Since the goal of the enemy was to destroy Tigray 100 percent it can be concluded with a high level of certainty that the war of aggression has aborted. Some PP- and PFDJ-friendly media have been lauding the peace agreement as the outcome of the victory of the allied invaders and the surrender of Tigray. They are entitled to their opinion, but that is not the whole truth. Behind the noisy claim of victory lies the reality about how the war ended.

It is not only the war but also the “peace-process” that is used as Plan-B to continue pushing for the ultimate goals by other less costly means. Is peace a better way of attaining goals? There is no doubt about it! However, the success of one side over the other depends on which side is using peace as an end and which is using it a means. Let's do some serious screening here. The members of the tripartite-unholy-alliance are divided on the peace process. Eritrean and Amhara forces have abandoned the PP-ENDF because they wanted to pursue Plan-A (war) regardless of the disastrous failure they may face in the end. They are on a suicidal mission determined to destroy Tigray as a social and political unit. For PP-ENDF war has become a rocky path though not a dead end. As PP-ENDF is celebrating the peace plan it should be sheer nativity to believe that it has abandoned its core objectives in this war. It has opened a new front where gun-fire and airstrikes can't help as much.

In war the defending side will respond to gun-fire with gun-fire; but in peace, if the defending side is enjoying the peace for its own sake, it is likely to be manipulated by the side which is using peace as a cost effective means towards the predetermined end. When the war ends for the defending side and is replaced by peace as an end in itself everything that happened during the war is most likely to be wiped out from memories. The living victims live happily or sadly ever after; the dead will be remembered as martyrs, grand monuments built for them; of course only when the victors allow it. The goals of the defenders and the offenders are both short-term and long-term. When tactics switch from war to peace defenders who take peace for its own sake may gain in the short-term but face destructive losses in their long-term goals. The reverse is true for the offenders who take peace as a means not as an end.

They may compromise the short-term goals but win the long-term. The million dollar question at this point is: **Is the peace deal an end in itself for Tigray?**

My answer to this question is based on my perception of how the peace deal is being received by the people of Tigray in general and the Tigray elite in particular. My keen observation on a wide array of media outlets led me to the unfavorable conclusion that the peace seems to have been taken as an end in itself in Tigray and outside Tigray. Let me explain my highly debatable conclusion. The alternative and desirable scenario is that the people of Tigray in general and the Tigray elite in particular are vigilant about their long-term goals and they are using the peace as means to that end, but also reaping the short-term benefits from the peace process. It would be a consolation for all Tigrayans that stand for peace as a means to an end and expect the current peace deal to fit the realization of the long-term goals. It is not certain for how long the ceasefire will hold; and the shaky peace will stagger.

Tigray is the receiving end of the war and the peace. It in no way has a decisive role in the realization and continuity of both. The PP-Government unpredictably juggles the peace and war to the utter confusion of the Tigray side of the peace deal. In the last two years before the Pretoria agreement there were unilateral or bilateral ceasefires which were abused by the PP-Government to prolong the deadly siege on Tigray as a silent extermination scheme which has become a cost-effective killing machine. That is why I say any proposal for peace from the PP side is just another declaration of war devoid of cannon fire. Every air strike may kill 19 to 20, but in every passing day under the siege hundreds and thousands may die for lack of food and health care.

The peacetime is used for the same end as war; but it is also used as an opportunity to rearm and train for the next cycle of violent extermination following the series of defeats and losses it suffered in the hands of the TDF. During peace it is only the siege that kills; but during war it is the synergy of both armed conflict and the siege that become doubly destructive. In addition, with every passing day under the siege Tigray forces are most likely to be weakened as food reserves run out putting them in militarily disadvantaged position vis-a-vis the adequately supplied allied forces. This far, in the last two years, alternating peace and war, is the same in practice as alternating war and war. It is not only the recharge in terms of arming and training that puts the PP-Government in a better position during the peacetime.

Why is Tigray so euphoric about the peace this time? Why has it become so intensely enthusiastic to the point that the reaction is interpreted or misunderstood as peace taken as an end in itself? The answer is straight forward. Previous ceasefires or peace were more deadly than the violent wars that customarily followed them. Thousands were dying under the increasingly tightening siege. So for the people of Tigray in the last two years peace happened to be more horrifying than the death from gunfire. This time the peace deal has come with the promise of lifting the siege and allowing unfettered access to humanitarian aid and the resumption of basic services. For people who have seen power and communication blackout, unable to withdraw savings, and starving to death in an unprecedented siege for two years until this very day the passion for peace that is accompanied by the decision to lift the siege is understandable.

Keep in mind that access to humanitarian assistance and basic services is a citizenship right protected by law and cannot be abused as a bargaining chip. During war, particular internal ones, it is a fact of life proved by ample experience around the globe that governments are the first to break their own laws to the misery of defenseless citizens. The world watches with stupor as thousands of victims of

war are gunned down and starved to death anaesthetized by diplomatic protocols lacking human face. That was how a tenth of the population of Tigray perished while The UN chief and the White House bosses were concerned for the dying but at the same time protected the murderous incumbents from the fury of the dying and starving millions in Tigray. Who would dare to blame brutalized ordinary Tigrayans and their leaders for wearing a cheerful grin in the company of those who legalized, financed, blessed, facilitated, and even directly participated in the genocidal war and silent killing fields.

I thanked God for not putting me in the shoes of Tsadkan, Tadesse, Getachew, Debretsion, Wendimu, and Lady Monjorino. The lethal concert of the rattles of machinegun fire, the roars of tank cannons, the deafening explosions from the blues, the hunger and thirst, the weather and the lack of sleep, all are more likely to be endured than the sick drama in Pretoria, in Nairobi, and in Mekelle, of smiling, embracing, and thanking those the people and the leaders of Tigray consider as mortal enemies. Is it too much to say this? In view of the doomsday scenario public officials and religious leaders helped to build in Tigray these are the most merciful of the words in the dictionary. It was a treasure for face reading research the focuses of the camera lenses recoded for the history books on the Tigray War. If that is the only cost the leaders have to pay to please the delegates of the PP on three or more occasions it is worth paying given the greater agenda of the starving and ailing millions suffering for no crime at all.

Smiles no smiles, embraces no embraces, thanks no thanks, complaints no complaints the attitudes of those who designed and realized the Tigray War on the people of Tigray and their leaders remains unaltered. Habitual killers kiss you on the forehead, smile like a lovely child before they put a bullet hole on your forehead. The only reason Tigray could trust the allied forces and their enigmatic leaders is if and only if the peace process is more important for them than it is for Tigray. For nearly two months since the signing of the Pretoria agreement the behavior of PP-officials remotely looks like a genuine interest in the peace process. My hypothesis is that they are sniffing for an opportunity in the peace process to that can help them to attain their goals on TPLF and Tigray without being caught red-handed by the international community. They kept on fooling the international community by the deceptive news about the resumption of services.

They open banks without a coin in their safes and expect the people of Tigray to replenish them. As if the weaponized hunger and the blockade on services is not enough the callous officials seem to be having fun with the starving and ailing people Tigray. They have nothing to fear. For one thing they are Godless! The international community has become cruel enough to choose Tigray as a sacrificial lamb to save Ethiopia. They are using the licensed impunity to do what their hearts desire. Is this game called “peace-deal” going to transform from a ghost to bone and flesh? For how long are the people of Tigray going to continue to be humiliated by mediocre who turned seniors in the wilderness of Ethiopian politics? I heard the archbishop of Tigray attributing all the disaster to the undue distance kept by the faithful with the almighty God. Face to face with those who turned Tigray into an economic and social ruin the archbishop has felt intimidated by the thought of openly incriminating the perpetrators.

A closer look at the way the implementation of the peace deal is being run reveals that at its kernel is not the resumption of basic services or unfettered humanitarian assistance or the restoration of the territorial integrity of the state of Tigray or the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Tigray, but disarming the TDF! This could be the whole truth about the peace deal. This may be what the

superpowers whispered to Ethiopian officials. If the international community fears to mention the name of Eritrea in spite of the fact that Eritrea has been committing widespread crimes against humanity in Tigray to this very minute, if euphemism has become not for the “passed away” but for the criminals how is the human species expecting to last into the next century without devouring itself? When it is becoming increasingly obvious that disarming the TDF, indoctrinating the troops and render them irrelevant, and leaving Tigray defenseless is the central goal of the peace-deal it is unmistakable that the peace deal is hitting at the belly of the cherished ideals of Tigray to be protected for posterity. This is why I stress the people of Tigray and the political elite seem to be compromising the long-term goals of Tigray for the short-term or immediate needs.

I can consider the peace deal as a perfect and permanent end of hostilities only if long-term dreams and aspirations of the Tigray Nation are harmonized with the solutions to the acute social, economic, and political problems Tigray got stuck in over the short-term. By the peace deal is Tigray is going to be like Croatia and Slovenia which have joined the community of European states with vibrant economies; or like Catalonia, Quebec, and Scotland distinguished political, social, economic and administrative units within Spain, Canada, and the United Kingdom respectively; or is Tigray destined to be like Biafra as the great man of literature Chinua Achebe lamented about in his book entitled: “There was a Country”. Is Tigray going to be another test tube in Obasanjo’s African laboratory for political chemistry testifying to the failure of self-determination in the hands of tyranny?

Is the fate of Tigray going to be similar to that of the great nation of the Vikings who conquered Europe but perished in the big and small kingdoms of the time? Are we aspiring to be like Israel, which after the loss of six million miraculously rose to the status of a de facto world power? We can also willingly go down on the path of insignificance taken by Somaliland if we are too hot blooded about what we need to do to shape out future. It is the historical responsibility of the current generation of the Tigrayan economic, academic, and political elite to shape the future of Tigray without succumbing to “temporariness personality disorder”. I would choose to adopt the hydrological analogy of flash-flood and base-flow to hammer my big point home.

Anyone who has been to a desert would notice that Wadis are everywhere. They are wide and very shallow water courses without water flowing in them permanently. Every time the characteristically brief and torrential rainfall in desert areas occurs there will be a lot of flood in the valleys. That is known as flash-flood. The flow of water is so strong that it rolls large rocks along its course and is impassible for the locals; though this lasts only for a few minutes to an hour. The flash-flood disappears and not even a drop of water is visible in the valley bottom. In the more humid areas or in dry areas where rivers flow from more humid upper courses the flow of water in the valleys is more or less stable throughout the year including in the dry seasons. Such a flow is known as base-flow. A river draws its base-flow from the reservoir of groundwater which is endlessly recharged and discharged probably for eternity. Which one of the two is Tigrayan society more like? I heard you; you have answered the question: Flash-flood of course!

What I notice around these days, in which the peace deal has become like a bombshell blasting the unity of Tigrayans, is the lack of wisdom in the wise; the lack of energy in the strong, and the lack of the future in the prophets. Who can believe that the Tigrayan tsunami in the last two years, which had engulfed the entire world has just been reduced into a ripple? What was driving us? Just sheer adrenalin or sustainable political objective? The quest for Hagere-Tigray and the innovative cultural expressions accompanying it have reached a zenith in the last two years. The bravery of the Tigrayan Church, the

songs about our aspirations and dreams of a prosperous Hagere-Tigray became thrilling and nostalgic. This is not to mention the emergence of the TDF, disarmed or not, has become a tradition of self-defense in the Tigrayan culture. No one imagined that Tigrayans will be scattered so easily like the seemingly sturdy billiard balls by a single hit. There is a strange paralysis which can be used by the ever-alert enemy to push us apart and render our beloved homeland into a shell of its former self. I don't mean to insult my dear countrymen and women but it does not harm to admit that Tigrayans are not marching forward methodically. Actions seem to be driven by herd mentality in which the crowd jointly decides the fight or the flight. There is a need to create a creed of ideological leadership which is permanently shapes and reshapes our destiny as a nation which evolved from a great civilization.

Beware of vultures waiting to snatch your gains which they worked hard to destroy. Now the battle lines seem to have been drawn. Tigray is messed up by invading forces who have vowed to destroy it; by the central authority which is interested in submission and control; by political parties in Tigray and in Addis Ababa who are prepared to fish in the troubled waters of Tigray politics. The old ways are over. Tigray has to move along a paradigm shift befitting its stormy path in the last two years. We should never attempt to put our new wine in old bottles. Things have changed in a way they have never been before. It does not matter where we may find ourselves. Whether circumstances would force us to stay not remain in Ethiopia; or we go stark free joining the community of world states; or the Red Sea would be our future is immaterial.

Regardless of where or what we would be the Tigray Nation State should first be created in our hearts. This should be followed by building a robust economy and society that is resilient and sustainable. This is how we can avoid any possibility of a repeat of what happened to us in the last two years. For the last two years we complained and lamented and sought attention and sympathy for what we think are our significant contributions to the history, economy and society of Ethiopia. We are begging without being listened to be recognized for building Ethiopia into what it is now. This has to stop and stop for good. We must seek our reward not from Ethiopia but from Tigray if we build it to the level of a world class state. This requires hard work and perseverance, which honestly speaking Tigrayans have a great weakness with.

No nation rises and prospers without sacrifice. I don't mean losing your life for it. Tigray has had more than its share of that kind of sacrifice; but it was used for the service of others. What Tigray needs is much more of economic and technological heroes and less and less of military heroes. The dependence of nations on military power is not sustainable; economic and technological power is. This complex and difficult transition must be passed with great deal of patience and wisdom. We Tigrayans find ourselves at a critical juncture in history which will test us all for success or failure.