

PART I

The Dubious Path of the Resistance: Can the Ethiopian Diaspora Contribute to Future Political Stability and the Development of Democratic Institutions in Ethiopia?

By Maru Gubena

It would certainly not be wrong to argue boldly that the current Ethiopian Diaspora resistance has been made more and more complicated, or even entangled to the point that it has become for most of us difficult, if not impossible, to explain as effectively as possible – and in a fashion that are acceptable and palatable to the majority of the Ethiopian community – what exactly went wrong with us. It would also not be wrong to insist that it is of little or no use, and can even be senseless, to discuss or debate about who have been and are still partly or fully responsible for the dashing of our hopes – hopes that most of us had expected would soon be flourishing in our minds and hearts, and hopes that if realized could have led to an increasing role and contribution for us in the political stabilization and democratization process, including the cultivation and development of democratic institutions and the improvement of living conditions for our people at home. This is especially true since the Ethiopian Diaspora community lacks the organizational and accommodative tools, legal mechanisms and rights to punish or even question those who might possibly have been responsible for clouding the path of the Ethiopian resistance. It is also undeniably true that due to the exceptional growth in divisions and animosities and the persistent sectarianism and parochialism among opposing groups, particularly among their disorganized supporters who engage so incoherently and so aimlessly in daily incriminations and counter-incriminations against each other, confusion and chaos have continued to dominate and disgust the entire Ethiopian Diaspora community.

Because much too much had already been said and written, mostly irrational, unsubstantiated words and statements, just intended to offend, hurt and isolate critical individuals from the Ethiopian community and from the resistance. In the process, a disproportionate number of knowledgeable and skilful Ethiopians who could have played an indispensable role in the politics of the Ethiopian Diaspora have been appalled, and have distanced themselves from the struggle. The damage inflicted upon the unity and the future of the Ethiopian Diaspora resistance by Ethiopians themselves, especially those permanent participants in Paltalk Discussion Forums who consider themselves staunch supporters of certain political activists, has been and continues to be incalculable, to a point that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to repair. It is indeed most unfortunate to witness that these resentful and most vicious individuals who spend their days and nights behind computers, tirelessly sending out strange, uncivilized and distasteful words and statements directed at many innocent Ethiopian intellectuals, are succeeding not only in clouding the path of the Ethiopian Diaspora resistance, but tragically, they have also been able to impose upon the rest of us a period of complete confusion and mistrust, to the point that the members of the community become unable to distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. This period has been marked by illogical arguments and falsely invented charges and counter charges, which has forced a good number of Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia to be alert and suspicious about everything we hear or otherwise receive, looking with doubts and suspicious eyes at news and developments, whether transmitted through the Ethiopian Diaspora media or posted on Ethiopian web sites. Most don't take in this information, don't accept it as based on fact, without double checking or verifying it with the help of additional information from other media outlets.

It is also true that many of my compatriots, especially those who are permanently and incurably addicted to yelling at their own countrymen through their Paltalk rooms, appear to have little or no interest at all in logic and facts. What they require is information that fits their ideas and views. For them, it does not matter whether the information comes from a staunch enemy of Ethiopians, such as the unelected TPLF leadership, or from the Aiga Forum – the right hand of the TPLF – as long as Mr. Meles Zenawi and his cadres acknowledge the existence of the EPPF or AFD. This is what the patriots

of the Ethiopian Current Affairs Discussion Forum, who call themselves not ignorant and parochial but “true sons of Ethiopia,” love so much to hear, not just once but repeatedly and tirelessly.

It is indeed most tragic that we are in a period in which the politics of the Ethiopian Diaspora are ruled not by the essence of reason and logic – verifiable arguments – but rather, by personal emotions, family and group interests and by parochialism. Yes, this is a remarkable period we are today – in which we seem to have lost our minds.

A great number of Ethiopians, including myself, bother themselves with questions such as how on earth is it possible that we find ourselves in such a remarkable period, in which we all seem to have lost our way? How can it be that while we are all convinced that we are products of our Ethiopian forefathers, we have not kept even a trace of their sense of wisdom or judiciousness? How do we explain the sources for the rapid spread of the disease of animosity within the Ethiopian Diaspora community? More importantly, given the worsening socio-political relations among us in the Ethiopian Diaspora, can we contribute to future political stability and the development of democratic institutions in Ethiopia? Isn't the current path of the resistance, which I see as dubious and unlikely to succeed, in that it determined by a small group, without consulting the individuals concerned – the presumed backbone of the political organization to be established – partly or fully responsible for the growing feuds and hostilities among opposing groups and their supporters within the Ethiopian Diaspora community?

What about the Ethiopian Diaspora media outlets, especially those who see themselves as belonging to one or another political group and who insist on highlighting not only views critical of the unelected regime of Meles Zenawi, but also positive aspects regarding the activities of certain opposition groups – even if these views are extremely remote from the reality on the ground? This is despite the continuous turmoil within the Diaspora community itself – the very foundation of the Diaspora opposition groups. The question then becomes: is it really the time, is it desirable and helpful for us to entertain ourselves by considering only the so-called “positive news and positive thinking” about the activities of the opposition groups, at a time when we are confronted by a series of internal and insurmountable crises? Do we really believe this is the right track to travel? Can't the current Ethiopian Diaspora political path be characterized not only as dubious but also as putting the cart before the horse? Don't the Ethiopian Diaspora media outlets have a shared responsibility for the heated and deteriorating socio-political condition of the Ethiopian Diaspora community?

The Dubious Path of the Ethiopian Diaspora Resistance: Does the Ethiopian Diaspora have a Meaningful Role in Ethiopian politics?

Even though it is at present extremely difficult to put together one's thoughts and reach a state of mind conducive to speaking or writing anything meaningful having to do with the politics of the Ethiopian Diaspora and its future roles and contributions to the process of political stabilization and the development of democratic institutions in our country, it is, however, worthwhile to attempt to briefly recapitulate some of the sources that in my view have been paramount in fashioning and disseminating the winds of socio-political turmoil and chaos within the Ethiopian Diaspora community.

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- This article is part one of my contribution to the current discussion. The second part will be published as soon as it is ready.