

Gebru Mersha and Richard Pankhurst: legacy on politics and on history

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Introduction

It is with deep sorrow that I learned the death of Dr. Gebru Mersha, a politician and of Dr. Pankhurst, an economic historian. Dr. Gebru died on Yekatit 4, 2017 and Dr. Pankhurst buried on February 16, 2017. Gebru was 76 years old whereas Pankhurst died having lived for 89 years – thirteen years difference between them.

Who were these scholars?

Gebru Mersha was one of the eleven political science students at the Haile Sellasie I University in 1963. While a student at the University he was not a Marxist as judged by his actions. He became a restorer of the status quo during the campaign for radical change of student body election. At the time of his action, college students at Law and Business colleges were considered very reactionary. It took a lot of hard work for the radical student body to infiltrate the law and business schools. It was unusual for Gebru as a student of politics to join these reactionary class of students. However, Gebru associated himself with a Marxist Walleligne Makonnen by becoming a roommate. He later joined the Road Transport Administration where progressive students dominate in the Authority. Ato Shimeles Adugna, the Administrator of the Road Transport Authority was a very accommodative manager of a different kind.

It was in this administration that the radical and progressive graduates came together head on to conduct the operations of the Authority. I remember when I used to tease, chat and drink coffee in each of the offices voluntarily set up according to friendship, language and political positions.

For instance, Ibsa Gautama and Bekele Geleta (Oromiffa speakers); Gebru Mersha and Yirga Tessema (Guragna speakers); Wallelign Makonnen and Sine (Amharic speakers); Assegid W. Amanuel and Sereke Berhan (Amharic speakers from Harrarghe) and many other ethnic juniors were employed by Ato Shimeles Adugna. The organization was very efficient because of all the cooperation and understanding of the graduate students. It was a test for challenging the Bureaucratic nature of the ancient regime. It was the best of time and place to work or visit. Customers were happy because there was no hidden agendas. The Transport Road Administration was such a healthy place to appropriately using the phrase of 'the last straw that broke the camel's back' of the Ethiopian Bureaucracy. Notice that the TPLF leaders use and abuse of "Amhara Bureaucracy". Even after the Ethiopian Revolution, they continue to claim Amhara Bureaucracy as an enemy. The TPLF leaders did not know or did not care to know what these employees of ETA have contributed to the Ethiopian Revolution. They just misquote and abuse one of them, Wallelign Makonnen.

Having worked in the Highway Authority, building and maintaining road infrastructure was highly linked to the road transport operation. For this reason, oil shippers represented by the late Hailu Shawl, Mamo Katcha representing bus operations, and many others come together to discuss issues of transport but not of communication. Communication in Ethiopia at that time was insignificant sector. The only communication that was being carried around that office was among the graduate students. The place

was a model for transformation. That kind of transformation was needed by the Melesse group not dam building transformation which is unnecessary. In today's vocabulary, software and hardware should go together. It was unfortunate that Melese did not graduate to taste the fruits of management and leadership. It is also unfortunate that the TPLF leaders abuse the integration of languages based on ethnicity. The TPLF leaders misconstrued the idea of nation and nationalities as expounded by Walleign Makonnen and practiced by the graduates of Road Transport Administration.

To go back to the story of Gebru Mersha, he was appointed by the Military Derg to become a local governor in Zuwai and Butajira Awraja. Having acclimatized with progressive bureaucracy, he went to another location known as Assimba where the Revolutionary Army of EPRP was operating. By nature (stars) Gebru did not like to be pushed and so he left EPRP with three others who are still alive claiming that there was no democracy in EPRP's leadership. The irony of that incident was that all four individuals were members of the leadership group. True again, Dr. Gebru did not realized that democracy does not reside with the leadership alone but also with the members of the party. This is the part that many Ethiopians do not grasp. EPRP has taken the high road and it is going to take it to the end. I hope Dr. Gebru and his colleagues did taste the application of DEMOCRACIA, the mantle of EPRP. There is no as such a "revolutionary democracy" propagated by the TPLF leaders to hoodwink the members of EPRDF. It was and is a hoax. EPRP believes in political democracy. Dr. Gebru was still involved in "Revolutionary struggle" not in political struggle at the time of his death.

Gebru then enrolled at the Netherland University for his Ph.D. This time, he knew that making career in politics was the choice for him. He got his education in political science but the job was back in Ethiopia. At his time of his return, there was no politics but identity politics. He thought that Tamrat Layne, then prime minister would save him. He did not know this identity politics or maybe was misled. When he joined EPRP, it was assumed that he would realize the mission and vision of EPRP would be long and tortuous with no cash reward. EPRP was about bringing a political system backed by economic markets. Gebru has missed the opportunity of instituting political system in Ethiopia. He has also missed to see the great American Political System of Checks and Balances. Dr. Gebru missed his chance even to visit America when his children invited him to join them in their graduation ceremony. It is rumored that he refused to go to America as he was fighting against America during his life struggle. If this was true, he was a naïve Marxist. In other words, he was not born leader but in the category of priests. Maybe not. Nobody knows whether he belongs to the Arbatu Ins'sat category of leaders in Ethiopia.

It was an honor to know such people in college, in work place, in arena of struggle and in real normal life. As a life planner, the corner stone for the future of Eathioopia, I want to quote Mia Angelo's book title "I know why the caged bird sings." With that I salute Gebru Mersha whose life will teach a valuable lesson for all members of EPRP. It should be remembered that Gebru was a political science student among eleven members that included Berhane Meskel Redda, Mehari Yohannes, Mesfin Araya, Shaleka Getachew, Ibsa Gutama, Paulos Yohannes, Gebru G. Wold and others. This group were supposed to lead the political struggle and they did to an extent.

Historian Pankhurst

The concept of history in Ethiopia is one and the same. No division or category. That was the Orthodox way. Now the narrative has changed. 101 history is no history. But during the Pankhurst era of teaching, I was not a political science student but a student of economics. As such, Econ 101 taught by Richard

Pankhurst was my favorite subject. His economic teachings were based on the Ethiopian students' background information and knowledge. In other words, he was a primary researcher.

Dr. Pankhurst according to many Ethiopians was an expert on Ethiopian history. What kind of history? That is the big question. History nowadays, can be classified in 1001. I believe that is one of the deep source of trouble for a lot Eritreans or Ethiopians. We don't know what we are talking about. We cannot agree on anything provided we speak of one history – the history of the political power.

Nevertheless, Dr. Pankhurst was teaching us economic history. The study of economic thought was of paramount value across the board of economics. Society and community life sustenance is based on these thoughts and values. We had many professors in economics. But the subject matter of economics of Dr. Pankhurst was based on the data of Ethiopia. It was true, at the time there was a paucity of data and information in Ethiopia. However, Dr. Pankhurst was using primary data and information of the country Ethiopia. That was why we loved him. It was not only what he taught but how he taught that mattered for a lot of us. His way of collecting data and information had authenticity.

Dr. Pankhurst was not only a professor but an admirer of all Ethiopians, past and future generations. Take for instance, he taught his son Alula Amharic language and his daughter Helen, Tigrigna language. As many people have witnessed it, Alula speaks perfect Amharic but I don't know about his daughter to whom I provided a Tigrigna teacher. That was long time ago. I also know that Dr. Pankhurst used to contact the Borana Oromo students and professionals to understand the Oromo people.

Concluding Remarks

How do we treat the death of these outstanding professors, Dr. Gebru Mersha vs Dr. Richard Pankhurst? Personally, I prefer Dr. Gebru's to that Dr. Richard. Mersha has spent all his life in searching justice through the prism of Revolution and Politics. He rejected the status quo of Haile Sellasie's government, he rejected the military Derg's revolution and he finally lost in the maze of the capitalist market of the TPLF. The history of many Ethiopians as well as Eritreans, is similar to the fate of Gebru Mersha. They all have lived in the ugly system of Feudalism, pseudo-Socialism and now in fake/rogue Capitalism. All these in one generation. There is no comparison with these two professors, one has passed through suffering whereas the other passed away through convenient luxury and longevity.

According to my new discovery of Stars, not the seven earth like stars discovered by astronomers and astrophysics', Dr. Mersha has joined the category of oxygenated ethicist whereas Dr. Pankhurst will join the energized knowledge categories. Professor Mersha did not like to be pushed whereas Professor Pankhurst did not like resistance, a testimony to their stars. More on this later on.

It is to be noted that Dr. Pankhurst has dwelt with economics and culture of Ethiopia. He did not invent or create these socio-economic systems but he organized them in books and in micro-fishes. For this job, he is rewarded with state funeral. Individuals like Berhanu Nega, who is an economist was denied to conduct his profession instead he is condemned to death in abstention. I bet he was forced to change his profession to be a fighter. I know star wise, Dr. Berhanu is aligned with Richard Pankhurst.

The saddest part is that the TPLF has given state funeral to Dr. Pankhurst but not to Dr. Gebru. What an aberration!!! At this time, Ethiopians need politicians for reform not historians. When will the TPLF leaders respect their own people? Do they respect them when alive or when they are dead? That is a big

question. This should resonate with all of us. Let us read the works of Dr. Pankhurst on Ethiopian society studies and culture. It is about time to deal with culture.

TRUTH WILL PREVAIL

For questions and concerns

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