

## How About Then?

Written by Dragan Todorovic

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Awate

By Aklilu Zere

Unmasking a Confidence Trickster: By Franz Kafka

...And my companion subscribed to it in his own name and-with a smile-in mine too, stretched his right arm up along the wall and leaned his cheek upon it, shutting his eyes.

But I did not wait to see the end of that smile, for shame suddenly caught hold of me. It had needed that smile to let me know that the man was a confidence trickster, nothing else. And yet I had been months in the town and thought I knew all about confidence tricksters, how they came slinking out of side streets by night to meet us with outstretched hands like tavern keepers, how they haunted the advertisement pillars we stood beside, sliding around them as if playing hide-and-seek and spying on us with at least one eye, how they suddenly appeared on the curb of the pavement at cross-streets when we were hesitating! I understood them so well they were the first acquaintances I had made in the town's taverns, and to them I owed my first inkling of a ruthless hardness which I was now so conscious of, everywhere on earth, that I was even beginning to feel it in myself.

How persistently they blocked our way, even when we had long shaken ourselves free, even when, that is, they had nothing more to hope for! How they refused to give up, to admit defeat, but kept shooting glances at us that even from a distance were still compelling! And the means they employed were always the same: they planted themselves before us, looking as large as possible, tried to hinder us from going where we purposed, offered us instead a habitation in their bosoms, and when at last all our balked feelings rose in revolt they welcomed that like a embrace into which they threw themselves face foremost.

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And it had taken me such a long time in their company to recognize that same old game. I rubbed my finger tips together to wipe away the disgrace.

“Caught in the act!” said I, tapping the trickster on his shoulder and with deep breath of relief , I straightened myself to my full height and entered

Question to you the reader:

In the absence of A Supreme Arbiter, who do you think will learn his or her lessons well: The bully or the victim?

The National Conference for Democratic Change (I call it The National Conference for The Redemption of Victims) is history now or aptly to say a seed in a soil ready to germinate, grow, mature, yield in abundance and be harvested by its Rightful owners: The Eritrean Victims. It was done in the age of technology thus in open so nothing was hidden. It was there for all to see and for all to participate. One can find the details in our websites (excluding those which sided with the bully) so I will not dwell on it.

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But there was similar event years ago with a disastrous result that needs to be told so history could not be repeated and Thanks God Almighty it was not repeated.

So if you have time please the reader sit down and read my artistic rendering of the events that happened Forty years ago.

...While things were leaning hopeful for the struggle and strugglers, an insidious rumor, whose source unknown, engulfed the strugglers like the rare but scary sandstorm that sometimes engulfed the region. It was rumored that twenty new strugglers who joined the struggle from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia were murdered in the hands of senior strugglers. It was told those who were murdered were all from the highland which meant Christians and those supposed killers from the lowlands which meant Moslems.

The rumor, like a newly evolved organism that starts its life weak, disorganized, unknown and scary soon reached every corner of the land where the strugglers roamed. On its way, the Rumor enlarged, twisted, fattened, chiseled and refined itself and in short period of time became a Real menace that posed ultimate test to the character and resilience of the struggle and the strugglers.

The environment was so tense the choices were limited to either fight or flight.

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The accusation was general like a dimension without tolerance; territory without boundary. No specific name was given of those who were rumored murdered and the rumored killers. The only clue given was their origin- the killed as highlanders, the killers as lowlanders. Who? When? Where? and why? questions were not qualified thus created favorable conditions for metamorphoses of the anti-hope entity.

At that time the momentum was building up for unity conference thus everyone was caught unaware by the rumor. Before the rumor, everyone was drunk with the elixir of unity. A drunken spirit is as drunken mind. It warbles its domain by disrupting its equilibrium. The leaders were as confused as the led. The senior strugglers did not have answers as the junior strugglers did not have questions. In the absence of right questions, no correct answers were able to satisfy.

If relevant and right questions were in short supply, reactions came raining quick and in assertion. The strugglers from the 4th regional front led by their leadership condemned the supposed killing and citing conspiracy all two thousands of them left Eritrea and fled to Port Sudan.

The 5th regional front represented the highland and it was the only front whose ranks were mostly Christians. As soon as they heard the news some strugglers without thinking or wasting time run away in hiding. They followed the woman's advice "Zihadm Nediw Yiatwa", meaning "Only those who run away from trouble return home safely." Some out of panic handed themselves to the Ethiopian authorities. Many just waited for someone to tell them what to do.

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Nsu was actively fanning the rumor and he was advising any struggler who approached him to not only run away and stay in hiding but if possible to go to villages and agitate villagers of the alleged atrocities committed over Christian strugglers by the hand of their Moslem brothers. He must have been good at it because those who approached him left impressed and emboldened. All their suspicions and hatred over him were gone like the dark cloud that scatters away with no rain. "He is the man" was commonly heard them say.

No one knew what his plans were or why he wanted them run away while he himself did not. No one asked him why he opted to stay while preaching danger and calamity to others. Was he immune from danger? If so why was he the only one immune?

The boys lacked directness and sophistication. The lack of these essential characteristics rendered them easily confused and unable to ask relevant questions. Nsu said and they accepted his advice without argument. They took Nsu as a prophet with extraordinary vision and supernatural courage who was sent to lead and protect them. Those who run away made his name legendary. They forgot his secretiveness and greed. They forgot his asocial and sometimes violent disposition. They forgot his divisive tactics and grudge stuffed soul. They created a new Nsu in their mind from a wish hidden in the depth of their isolation. He filled the vacuum left by their fathers who left all the responsibilities of raising them to their mothers. Nsu became the surrogate father [Aya] they wished they had.

The boys always had assuring, loving and caring fathers. The fathers never left them alone but they were supremely stoic and only interacted if asked by the mothers which they rarely did. Lack of meaningful interaction between father and son made the fathers look wooden and inaccessible. The children, as all children, had insatiable longings to be touched and hugged by their fathers but custom stood between them. At the end the children revered and respected their fathers and all village men but they never developed close relationships.

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The strugglers who fled from the supposed danger were committed to the struggle and were not going to abandon it. It was a temporary setback and one day they would continue the journey for they were the products of the woman who never left any task she started unfinished. They just found themselves in a confusing transition beyond their capacity to endure and grasp. But at least on their anticipated long and tortuous journey they prematurely believed they discovered a perfect substitute to the father they so longed in their childhood and who could also supplement the wise woman, the humble priest, the mercurial monk and the wise sheik in a mysterious and inexperienced young ex-university student and China trained hard headed dreamer who not only gaily volunteered to shoulder the enormous responsibilities but also flagrantly willed to lead them.

The king of Ethiopia could not believe his luck which he attributed to the spirits which protected and guided his predecessors. It also made him believe he was mightily right. What his strong army could not achieve, the strugglers brought it upon themselves and this time he was not going to squander the opportunities which were greater and sweeter than the sum total of all the help and assistance he received from the US and its allies. He had similar chance once before but he disastrously erred in his reactions by trying to accelerate the falling house which instead of imploding settled well onto its foundation.

The king was not Idiot. He knew what he did in Ona and the resultant unity of the Eritrean people. Without wasting time and in unambiguous term he ordered the army to temporarily suspend all military missions against the strugglers and also to treat runaway Christian strugglers with respect and kindness. The army obeyed their king for his personal tactics also meshed well with their frustrations and his orders brought them respite from their hectic and deadly missions. They were dying in droves in battles against an invisible enemy who was strengthening proportional to their weakening.

Nsu had comfortable upbringing. He was born and raised in a villa unlike many kids his age that

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lived in slums, tin roofed shacks and huts. His father was well paid and well connected government employee. His uncle was the king's viceroy in Wollo province in Ethiopia. But all these favorable conditions could not satisfy his childhood yearning for purity.

Nsu was not a distinguished student in his school years and had only one friend. He was well dressed and well fed and always kept things to himself. Others were jealous of his relative advantages. His schoolmates remembered him as quiet but not utterly shy; less talker and asocial. But some keen observers also said "He looked ready to burst"; "He looked he carried hidden burden"; "He looked like he was anticipating something"; "He looked like he wanted to runaway from something". But all who clearly or foggily remembered him said "He was difficult student to approach".

Nsu could not continue living in limbo. He was determined to live. He mapped out his journey in his mind without telling no one or sharing with no one. Except in his physical presence he completely detached himself from his social and physical surroundings. He started developing a one man world only he could understand and control. He became possessed with an idea.

The leadership of the struggle did not abandon the unity conference. They were aware of the turmoil but took the situation as something that happens in a journey. They were level headed village grown men with bottomless optimism and hope.

When the set time arrived all delegates were notified to meet at a set location and from there all

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went to the secret place that only few knew. Among them were refugee representatives from The Sudan, rehabilitated members of the foreign bureau and Eritrean student activists from some Arab universities. The place was selected for its bareness but it had one well in a vast area that only the nomadic inhabitants knew and fiercely defended. The area was secure. The nomads also volunteered to guard the conference as fiercely as they guarded their families, well and their herd.

Adobha was the name of the place.

Nsu was one of the very few highlanders and Christian by birth among the delegates. The leadership knew what he had done to inflame the turmoil but allowed him to participate. The conference took one week and important decisions were formulated. The university students put everything in writing by refining and editing the historical document. In ten years since the inception of the struggle, important decisions were reached by consensus, understood but not documented. The senior strugglers were gracious for what the students did.

Many of their decisions had village value contents. They declared that Eritrea could only support one unified organization led by democratically elected body. They declared that unity, tolerance, respect, equality and freedom should not be compromised. They declared to free Eritrea from colonialism (a first time used term) by peaceful means if achievable. They declared their enemy to be the colonial system and not the people of Ethiopia that included the very soldiers who chased and hunted them. They declared that the Ethiopian soldiers were innocent poor men who were forced to do what their heart abhorred to do. They took firm stand against revenge and mistreatment of captured soldiers. They declared not to harm Ethiopian civilians in Eritrea or elsewhere. They declared that no power should be vested in individuals and agreed on collective leadership. They elected a transitional leadership and called it general command (teklalit merihnet in Tigrina, Kiada Al-ama in Arabic) and decided to call congress within one year in which delegates should be democratically elected by the rank and file strugglers.



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Nsu was elected to the leadership and was charged with the department of news and propaganda. They also encouraged him to travel to the highland and disseminate the good news to the runaway strugglers and the people.

As always he did not say much during the conference and with his new assignment he left the conference and headed to the highland.

By seniority, experience, skill and age, Nsu did not deserve his position. The senior leadership, albeit their education, were highly experienced and very wise men. They unanimously elected Nsu to the leadership for diversity and inclusion. They also acknowledged his lingual ability and keenness to learn new things. They had their reservations and suspicions on his character but they believed with their village heart that he would eventually change and become a good struggler and a good leader.

Even though Nsu was furious he did not show it and left Adobha determined to translate his idea into action. He had flashbacks from his demons. He hated the senior strugglers for standing on his way and took their gesture as insult. He took the students from abroad as his competitors and was disgusted by their civil and refined manners. He took the nomads who guarded his safety as beasts after his well preserved body.

His mind was made up. He was reassured by his demons and the results of the conference enforced the urgency to try his ideas. He was no more capable of seeing goodness. Everything

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looked bad to him. Only he was capable of bringing goodness, first to himself and the leftover for others. What was good for others was not good for him. What was good for many was not good for him. He firmly believed that only he could engineer and design goodness.

A new god was to be born in the land of One God, a man god who was upset with God as he was upset with his creation, the people who believed in the One God. If this man god was capable of hating children and women there was no reason why he would not hate and thus compete with their creator. War was imminent and enemies would be classified according to their strengths and affiliations. If the man god defeats the strongest it was easy to take care of the weak. He knew the village woman was the strongest followed by the kids who she nurtured to become men women of strong characters. Women and kids became his main targets (the men were trash in his eyes) so he had to defeat them. To defeat the woman he had to prove to her that he was better god than God because equality would not convince her. The man god assuredly knew the woman believed her children as gifts from God and she would do anything including giving up her life on their behalf. So he decided to start with her children. If he controlled her children she would either follow suit or give up. If the direct and fearless village woman gave up the war would be over and the god man would rule as he see fit.

Nsu hoped for executive position in the conference, a position to assume power and control, a far fetched hope only people who sold their soul to power envisioned. He was egoistic and asocial thus incapable of assessing his social position and social skills. He was devoid of civility and consideration for others. He was twenty three years old first year university student with unresolved childhood traumas and contradictions. He was also new to the struggle albeit his six month training in China which he considered the best school in the universe.

Nsu was determined and he firmly believed that fate was with him. Encouraged by demonic ambition; guided by fate as his compass and supported by dream for power as his cane he reached the highland.

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On his way to the highland he avoided all nomadic settlements and villages because he did not want to see people. He was upset with Eritrean people, all people.

Had he passed through a nomadic settlement, the nomadic women would have broken the custom and uncovered their veil to see him with their beautiful bare eyes, welcomed their son and treat him with dry camel meat, sweet cold butter milk and blessed his journey.

Not Nsu. He had no interest in them. His plan was not to be welcomed in his present state. He had an idea.

Had he passed through a Blen village the beautiful women with chiseled body (they dance a lot) and colorful dresses and finely and artistically braided hair would have sang and welcomed him and treated him with millet bread, fresh goat milk, roasted peanuts and blessed his journey.

Not Nsu. He had no interest in them, in their gifts or blessings.

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Had he passed through a highland Kuset the direct and loving women would have thrown their shawl, spread their arm and welcomed him with ululation and would have treated him with cold water, barley bread and boiled fresh potatoes.

Not Nsu. He had no interest in them. His plan was not to be welcomed in his present state. He had an idea.

The lone and long walk from the arid plains of the lowland to the high plateau gave him time and space to consolidate his plans. Long and lonely travel provided him with ample time for contemplation and meditation. It also enabled him to survey the landscape for future plans and uses. He survived his journey on dry bread, sugar and honey he carried in metal containers. He also took with him an Olivetti typewriter, the only typewriter the strugglers had.

He chose two locations where tough people lived in tough terrains not far from the big city, Asmara, one on the north side the other on the south side. The villagers inhabited an escarpment that provided almost nothing except hardships. The two locations and their inhabitants were separated by valleys and gorges and the only sign left that once it was undivided land was the abundance of prickly pears (Beles) on both locations that one would not find abundant anywhere in Eritrea. Prickly pear was the gift of nature without which no humans would have settled. There were seven villages on either side of the escarpment whose inhabitants were known for their hard work and child-like innocence.

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Both people of the escarpment were united by prickly pear, the fruit of nature but divided by religion, the fruit of men. It was also from those inhabitants the Israeli trained commandoes to please the king of Ethiopia so that brothers would kill brothers.

Nsu was a good student of history. His plan was to form an organization that bettered and eventually obliterate the existing one. To change Eritrea and its annoying people he needed to create an organization in his own image. To teach lessons to the down-to-earth men, direct women, chattering kids and the strict monks and wise sheiks required novel organization. To fight and change trenched village values demands tough Anti-village organization. The time was right and the locations he chose was also right. Power always needed right time, right location and right person. Nsu was willing to serve power and power needed him to fulfill its mission. Power admired Nsu for his grudge inspired ambition. Grudge, the foundation of power does not know limits and Nsu did not love limitations.

He went back to his hiding and started recruiting volunteer fighters. He did not want to use the word strugglers for it signified a village value. Instead he called them Cheguar Danga and Gebbar. There were many who wanted to join his organization but his plan was to select few and train them to become his safeguards. After them anyone could join. He meticulously chose young, fit and strong shepherds and peasants in their late teens from the villages on both sides of the escarpment. He also assessed them for their malleability and mold ability, two important ingredients for zealotry. He stopped at sixty, took them to the north side of the escarpment and chose a hard place to train the youngsters.

The youngsters were the product of the hard place and were used to hardships. He trained them in guerilla warfare using the best practices he learnt in China and indoctrinated them with his philosophy. The youngsters liked him and saw him as their Aya and leader. Nsu knew the Israeli trainers were impressed with the commandoes they trained. Nsu wanted to better the Israeli for he also added Israel, the friend of America in his long list of grudges.

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Power loves grudges, the basis for enmity. Without real or imagined enemies power cannot sustain. Power requires its holder to fatten his grudges. Nsu had many enemies which were growing in quantity and quality with time. Grudge fuelled his energy.

He introduced the youngsters to new enemies which at first they could not grasp because they never knew enemies in their life. They were also grudgeless for to have grudge was prohibited in village values. Nsu understood the cause and took it as a dot in the long line of his journey. That particular dot was easy to erase ones a physical distance by moving away was achieved; mental distance by indoctrination were enacted and a wall erected between the youngsters and the village woman.

The rest is history as many historians say.