As the title of the book clearly implies, the book is an autobiography but it is also about what the author wants to write on what he knows and believes about the Oromo, as he aptly puts it in the preface of the book. Upon reading the book, I have come to conclude that Bulcha Demeksa is honest and candid in his analysis of the Ethiopian phenomenon. At times he vents anger toward the oppressive machinery that mistreated and exploited the Oromo and other Ethiopian minority nationalities; unlike other Oromo nationalists, however, Bulcha is very much concerned about the Ethiopian nation as he is very much interested in promoting the self-determination of the Oromo people. In this sense, thus, the book is more of advocacy for the cause of the Oromo rather than solicit vision as the subtitle of the book indicates.

While the author did a superb job in delineating the condition of the Oromo throughout the chapters in the book by intermittently digressing from the central thesis of a given chapter, he actually renders his own experience in Haile Selassie’s Government. “I write so much about public service,” says Bulcha, “because it is where I served, worked, and earned my livelihood. In the course of my public service, I came across many people, some good and some not so good. Ethiopia also stands prominent in this document for the same reason.”

The book has twenty chapters that illuminate Bulcha’s early childhood life in Wellega to his final active life as a leader of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and chair of the International Awash Bank. Some of the chapters reflect the author’s professional career achievements; others depict his encounters, challenges, and frustrations; and still other chapters demonstrate controversies, some of which I endorse and some I disagree with as I shall explain in the following paragraphs. I personally like books that stir controversy than books that hide truth and obscure reality.

Chapter one is an account of the early years of Bulcha’s life, but what makes this chapter interesting is not so much how it narrates when and where the author was born, the passing of his father at an early age and the responsibility shouldered by his uncle, Gobu Senbetu, but it is because it reinforces the narration by some anthropological themes that could serve as introduction to the Oromo culture. For instance, badu is homemade cheese; goderre is cassava-like edible root; dabay means braided hair; walla is a type of skirt soaked in butter; qabdo refers to kissing; michu is a love partner; indirinya is a flute; qoro is a title of an administrator of a district; and ganda, which sounds like the Tigrigna ganta, refers to a district.
Throughout the book the author makes references to Finfinnee, the old name of Addis Ababa except on page 24 (and this is probably a slip of finger inadvertently left unedited) and I am unable to fathom the purpose of a name that is not attributable to the capital of Ethiopia and to which other non-Oromo Ethiopians and foreign nationals cannot relate to. Although it is politically correct to revive names such as Bishoftu for Debre Zeit and Adama for Nazareth, I don’t think readers will understand the replacement of Addis Ababa by Finfinnee. One meaningful option for the author would have been to interchangeably use the names Finfinnee and Addis Ababa. I believe the name ‘Addis Ababa’ is irreversible because it evokes the central locus of the African Union headquarters as well as the hub of international organizations, diplomatic missions, and global trade linkages associated with the name.

Bulcha Demeksa was first educated at the university college of Addis Ababa (UCAA) as Addis Ababa University was known when it was first founded, and then pursued his higher education at Syracuse University in New York. In fact, he was first admitted at Cornell but not knowing that the latter was an ivy league he moved on his own volition to Syracuse, where he says he “was happy to be in the company of my Ethiopian friends.” Upon completion of his studies, Bulcha goes back to Ethiopia and joins the Ministry of Finance, a place he calls ‘destiny’ and he would work under the supervision of the most professionally erudite Ethiopian Yilma Deressa.

Many Ethiopians including Emperor Haile Sellassie share Bulcha’s high regard for Yilma Deressa. Yilma Deressa, a graduate of the London School of Economics, was perhaps the only minister working in the right place attributed to his educational background. Bulcha says, “often, Yilma gathered staff to prepare them for the campaign on correct budgetary procedures. He spoke of budgetary ‘indiscipline’, which the Ministry of Finance must strenuously oppose,” and “he had the full support of the Emperor in reforming the budget.” Most important, however, is Yilma’s administration of the Ministry of Finance based on merit and not on ethnicity because as Bulcha states, “Yilma was never biased on the basis of regional connection or ethnic affiliation.”

Bulcha’s book in many ways is similar to Seyoum Haregot’s book *The Bureaucratic Empire: Serving Emperor Haile Sellassie* that I have reviewed, and this is not surprising because both authors served the same regime in similar capacities at about the same time. In both books, revelations are made with respect to outspoken ministers who were critical of Haile Selassie’s government but whose side of the story was unknown to the public. One such encounter that comes as a surprise to me personally is Abebe Retta’s disappointment in regards to some policies and practices and Bulcha captures it as follows:

“On another occasion in the Council of Ministers, in the mid-60s, Abebe Retta, the Minister of Health, who was from the province of Tigray (present “regions” were called “provinces” in those days), said to the Council of Ministers: ‘You (meaning Government, but more precisely, Aklilu Habtewold, the Prime Minister) do not want ‘them’ (people from Tigray) to go through the school system and become educated. You want them to be
gardeners, drivers, cooks, and guards. But they (Tigreans) will not accept their fate quietly.’ The background of this outburst was that, in the province of Tigray, in most districts, the primary school system was, by tradition, under the administration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Government was supposed to systematically disengage the Church from the responsibility of running public schools and bring primary school administration under the Ministry of Education which had the wherewithal to run proper schools. According to Abebe Retta, the Government was deliberately dragging its feet to change the tradition. Later on, the Government took over the Tigray elementary school system.”

Bulcha gives credit to Yilma Deressa for writing a book entitled *Sixteenth Century History of Ethiopia* because at least one chapter of the book deals with the history of the Oromo. “The book was most likely to fill a historical gap,” says Bulcha, “between what the Portuguese priests and Abba Bahrey wrote about the Oromo in the late 16th century, and the Oromo situation at the beginning of the 21st century.” Pages 71 to 79 of the book, thus, are dedicated to Yilm’a’s book and the authentic history of the Oromo.

According to Bulcha, except for Yilm’a and Mohammed Hassen, all other authors “presented the Oromo and its culture with some anxiety and apprehension.” The author’s misgivings, here, may have inadvertently ignored the positive dimension of Abba Bahrey’s account and Asmerom Legesse’s anthropological study of the Oromo. While Asmerom has a distinct advantage of writing verifiable empirical data on the Gada of the Oromo, Abba Bahrey also would have had a unique advantage of an eyewitness account of Oromo northward migration in the 16th century.

In relation to the Oromo migration, one most valuable book is Richard Pankhurst’s *The Ethiopian Borderland: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century*. Chapter 24 of the book is essentially about Abba Bahrey’s *Zenahu La Galla or History of the Gallas* written in 1553. Incidentally, Abba Bahrey was not from northern or central Ethiopia; he was a monk from Gamo, now in the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Region and his treatise is a testimony of the Oromo migration that he lived to witness. The most important contribution of Abba Bahrey is the fact he provided us with the structure and operation of the Gada. He discusses the Oromo confederation of the four (afur in Afan Oromo) clans, namely Hoko, Chalya, Gudru, and Liban. Other clans composed of three (sadaqa in Afan Oromo) clans were the Obbo, Suba, and Hakako. The Luba, who are democratically elected for eight years, in turn, lead all these clans of four or three.

According to Abba Bahrey, thus, the First Luba or Melba took place between 1522 and 1530 when the Oromo crossed the Wabi Shebelli into present-day Bale and this coincided with the Ahmed Grañ incursions against Emperor Libne Dingil and his son Emperor Galawedewos. The Second Luba (1530-1538) is also about a crossing of the Wabi Shebelli by the Oromo and their settlement into southeastern Ethiopia; the Third Luba (1538-1546) coincided with the fall of Adal; in the Fourth Luba (1546-1554), the Oromos took over the mini-states of Dawaro and Fatigar; the Fifth Luba managed to defeat the Jan Amora forces of Emperor Galawdewos; the Sixth Luba (1562-1570) confronted and
challenged Emperor Sertse Dingil; the Seventh Luba (1570-1578) was successful in occupying Shawa and also began incursions on Gojjam; the Eighth Luba (1578-1586) was more of reorganization of the Gada fighters equipped with spears and “long shields made of stiff ox-hide”; the Ninth Luba (1586-1594) raided over Gojjam and also penetrated into southern Tigray.

Abba Bahrey’s testimony is essentially about the northward movement of the Oromo, but after the Ninth Luba and early 1600s the Imperial Ethiopian army managed to contain Oromo movement and the latter also suffered internal rivalry. However, by this time, the Oromo have intermingled and intermarried with other Ethiopians; some of them have even played a vital role in Ethiopian politics during the Gondarian period. For instance, upon arrangements made by Empress Mentewab, Emperor Iyasu married Princess Wubit, who was the descendant of the Tullama clan and she gave birth to Iyoas who succeeded his father to the throne and became Emperor of Ethiopia from 1755 to 1769.

In it is in light of the above account that we must examine how and when the Oromo became part and parcel of the Ethiopian social fabric. It would also help us understand the complexity and intricacy of the relationship of the various ethnic groups with one another if we seriously consider what Gramsci once called “unique historical conditions” instead of finger pointing at this or that nationality as oppressor and simply reminisce with disappointment. We must be able to rationally assess events that are historically constituted, and what I mean by this is that we must view national oppression or domination in the context of the overall historical development that gives rise to it. When the Oromo northward migration took place in the 16th century, for instance, it is due chiefly to the nature of Gada, a politico-military system that is inherently expansionist. The majority of the Oromo were cattle breeders and out of necessity to find grazing area and water for their cattle they had to wander all over, and by doing so they would encroach on sedentary farmers’ lands as in central and northern Ethiopia and conflict thus would be inevitable. This is not unique to Ethiopia; it happened virtually everywhere in which two irreconcilable modes of productions were unable to coalesce.

The oppression that was directed against the Oromo in the 19th century, though inevitable, was not justifiable and the Habasha Ethiopians, in particular Amharas and Tigrayans, who were dominant for thousands of years, should have the courage to apologize to the Oromo and other minority nationalities of Ethiopia. On the other hand, Oromo brothers and sisters must understand that historical events are not always intentionally designed; as implied above, they are governed by circumstances that are sometimes understandable and sometimes unpredictable. Sometimes necessity can drive communities into undesired situations and make them face unintended consequences.

Bulcha should have included the above synthesis as part of his admiration of Yilma’s account of Oromo history and could have forged a solid vision for the Oromo. But, his high regard for Yilma, by itself, is interesting because most Ethiopians, especially of the present generation, don’t know much about Yilma Deressa, “a most interesting person to work with” as Bulcha tells us. Eventually, Yilma Deressa departed from the Ministry of Finance and was replaced by “a flamboyant French-educated bureaucrat who had always
been around the place,” but Bulcha does not say who this person is. “There was a mutual distrust between me and the new minister,” says Bulcha, “because the two important persons the Minister and I respectively worked for (Aklilu and Yilma), had become political rivals in the late 1960s. This situation did not help my relationship with the new Minister. I personally like Aklilu, a polished and erudite diplomat who was not arrogant, haughty or authoritarian.” Seyoum Haregot made the same evaluation of Prime Minister Aklilu in his book that I have mentioned earlier.

With the departure of Yilma Deressa and the irreconcilable differences with the new Minister, Bulcha began ‘looking toward overseas for survival’ as he puts it in Chapter Eight of the book, but some of his colleagues were not going to be happy. Reinforcing the concern of his colleagues, Bulcha put it as follows: “A few of my friends, such as Dr. Seyoum Haregot (an Eritrean but devoted to Ethiopia at the time), Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s office, thought that my departure was a loss because of my accumulated experience.”

Chapter Nine is about the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and Bulcha along with his friends in Washington DC were hoping that Oromo soldiers and officers as well as “such individuals as Baro Tumsa and Abboma Mitiku and others, would help them rise to the occasion…” May be Abboma was an Oromo nationalist (which is perfectly all right) when I knew him in campus in the early 1970s that I am not aware of, but the Abboma Mitiku I knew during the heyday of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was a colleague dedicated to a pan-Ethiopian agenda. Incidentally, I learned later that he became one of the founders of the OLF, but it is also important to acknowledge that he played a constructive role in the ESM.

In relation to Lt. General Aman Andom, Bulcha tells us a story that I never knew before. He says, Aman “refused to surrender and committed suicide after the army had surrounded his house for two days.” The story that I know does not involve suicide! First the Derg tried to negotiate with Aman so that he continues his chairmanship of the Derg that he no longer wants to pursue, and the reason for the latter decision was that Aman sought peaceful resolution to the Eritrean problem while the Derg wanted to employ force. Aman rejected the position of the Derg and the army surrounded his house where a shoot out immediately began. Aman was fighting with some of his loyalist and he was no match to the gunfire of the army, and although he managed to kill some from the Derg soldiers he was overwhelmed by them and they also overran his house by tanks and demolished it and the brave Aman was buried under the debris of his own house. After everything was over, my friends and I were curious and we went to see Aman’ house; it was within the old Princess Tsehay Memorial Hospital compound and it was completely flattened!

Chapter Ten is dedicated to Bulcha’s work experience at the United Nations/UNDP. What I found interesting in this chapter is the author’s characterization of the UN as an organization of favoritism and racism. He unlocks the bizarre and unprofessional operations within the world organization and this is how he put it:
“In the UN, the staff has to fend for themselves, and there is a great deal of favoritism and nepotism. Usually staff coming from common background support each other. For example, an Irish man would support another Irish man. This is true of friends also. African staff, in general, are consciously or otherwise treated callously in the UN, New York, where decision affecting all UN professional staff around the world are made. Africans are the most neglected group. When African staff wants to see a senior official, it would take him/her a long time, whereas when a European staff wanted to see the same official, he/she would just walk into the office and chat…blatant discrimination and color consciousness is so rampant.” I agree with Bulcha’s assessment of the UN and I am not surprised with his observations and encounters. I myself have tried to get into the UNDP two decades ago by submitting the proper application but I did not get any response. Apparently, I had one acquaintance at the UNDP and asked him to figure out about my application, but to my chagrin, instead of helping me, he facilitated the entrance of his wife into the UNDP. Likewise, I applied three times at UNESCO and no reply whatsoever; not even courtesy response as some professional organizations do. The UN is a highly politicized gargantuan international organization.

While in Tanzania, Bulcha thought Tanzania could have made “an 8% rate of growth” because “at this time Tanzania was following the World Bank/IMF adjustment program.” Unfortunately, this is a wrong assessment because the structural adjustment program (SAP) initiated by the World Bank in 1981 was a disaster. The two Bretton Woods institutions did not realize SAP’s negative impact on African nations until 1997 when they openly declared the significance of the role of institutions in markets and the state in development that was very much restricted by SAP.

Bulcha portrays Tanzania as a failure state under Nyerere and Kenya by contrast as a success story. His rationale, however, is not persuasive enough to warrant credible support. As per Bulcha, “Nyerere looks imminent internationally, but he left his country in poverty…His Arusha Declaration was never translated into a better life for most of the people, but in squalor and misery. At the same time, it was refreshing to see Kenya, its neighbor, achieve better economic growth.” Bulcha was not critical enough to examine the two neighboring east African countries in the context of the Cold War. Moreover, while there is some truth to his observations of Tanzania, his claim of “better economic growth” for Kenya is parenthetical because 1) in the 60s and 70s, Kenya and Ivory Coast were portrayed by the Western media as promising African countries because they pursued the capitalist path to development, but that was proved wrong in 80s and 90s; 2) the negligible economic growth that Kenya exhibited initially did not trickle down to the Kenyan people, and on the contrary one could visibly encounter “squalor and misery” in the slum areas of Nairobi.

Chapter Eleven is about ‘Light at the End of the Tunnel’ that the author himself considers illusory. The chapter is also about the coming to power of the EPRDF (Bulcha prefers TPLF/EPRDF). In this chapter, Bulcha boldly asserts his assessment with respect to the role of the United States in Ethiopian politics and he also provides the reader with some revelations that I myself was not aware of. Here are some of the revelations:
“It is interesting to note that the road from Bure (Godjam) to Neqamtee, Wellegga, was constructed by the World Bank with the pressure from the United States which had already been committed to TPLF’s taking power in Ethiopia…Some people know the Bure/Naqamtee road as the ‘Paul Henze road’…All along, it seems, the US intention was not to bring together all key political factions to share power, but to ensure smooth takeover of power by the TPLF-led coalition. The USA seems to have found TPLF around 1987 as the most viable group to oust Mengistu without leaving behind another mess similar to Somalia.”

Furthermore, Bulcha argues that it was Paul Henze and Herman Cohen who “have had far-reaching influence on the course of events in Ethiopia,” but he also questions, “How can the destiny of a country be entrusted to a couple of unaccountable and faceless civil servants?”

Another interesting revelation that Bulcha makes is in relation to the question of Assab and Ethiopia’s outlet to the sea. Before the EPRDF assumed power in 1991, in the London Conference chaired by Herman Cohen it was rumored that the EPRDF rejected the idea of Assab as port for Ethiopia, but Bulcha now comes up with additional information on this complicated issue that other Ethiopians (outside EPRDF) have indeed objected the idea of Assab as port of Ethiopia. During the Addis Ababa Charter conference, in which many organizations invited by the EPRDF convened to initiate the new government of Ethiopia, one of the organizations represented to which Bulcha was affiliated but not a member of was the Ethiopian National Democratic Organization (ENDO). Since Bulcha could not represent ENDO at the Charter Conference, Kifle Wadajo arrived from London to takeover the responsibility. However, some ENDO members “refused to talk to Kifle. Their most serious attack on him related to his “yes vote” regarding the relinquishing of Assab to Eritrea.”

In spite of the participation of several organizations in the Charter Conference and the assumption of the latter to establish a transitional democratic government in Ethiopia, Bulcha argues, “In retrospect, it seems that the TPLF/EPRDF had discussed the matter with Herman Cohen of the US State Department and had agreed that, during the transition period, a small manageable group, just for the image, should be formed as a Transitional Council (Parliament). The real power was to be exercised by Meles and his group, with the Americans not too far from the center. In the Conference, the Americans were intensely following the discussions, sometimes nodding when the Chairman made a remark which corresponded to the agreement reached with US negotiators in London. I was sitting next to a couple of military officers who were visibly happy when a resolution to the liking of the Americans passed.”

One other interesting remark that Bulcha makes has to do with Isaias Afewerki, the current president of Eritrea, during the Addis Ababa Charter Conference: “Before the agenda item concerning Eritrea came up, I went to the seat of Isayas Afewerki and introduced myself. He was seated in the section where observers sat. I wanted to have an impression of the man at close range, and also to try to have an idea what his view was about Assab. Before I raised any issue, he asked me what ENDO stood for as a political
party. I told him that my relationship with ENDO was tenuous and in reality, my natural sympathy was with those “people over there”, pointing to the OLF seats in the Conference. But I also told him that we had things to iron out with the OLF…In any case, I did not go far with Isayas. As there was too much going on in the Hall, my impression of Isayas was that he was cocky, and appeared unrealistically arrogant for a leader of a small African country. I could not help comparing Isayas with the many leaders of African Liberation Movements that I dealt with in the 70s and early 80s while I was in UNDP. They were not as arrogant as Isayas.”

When Bulcha went back to Dar-es-Salaam, he says he sent a document pertaining to the SAP program to Meles Zenawi but he never got any answer from the latter and in regards to the unresponsive nature of EPRDF leaders, Bulcha comments as follows: “When I served in the World Bank as an Executive Director representing Ethiopia, among others, I wrote directly to the Emperor and got replies. I still have those letters in my files. Now, who is feudal? When a citizen writes to the White House in the US, or to the Head of the State in Botswana, or anywhere else, he/she gets a reply. When I shared with some Ethiopian friends in Tanzania about my sending of World Bank/IMF documents to President Meles Zenawi and that I did not get a reply, they said to me “Good! You deserve the snub you got fro him.”

One other encounter but surprisingly curious is Bulcha’s exchange of ideas with the American ambassador in Addis Ababa, which, by and large, reinforces the author’s observations of US role in Ethiopian politics mentioned above: “The Ambassador, a blunt and razor-sharp diplomat, asked me to stay in Ethiopia for a while, and ‘help’. I said, ‘who needed my help”. He then said plainly: ‘Stay here and join OPDO, and I think the Federal Government will appoint you as Minister of Finance or Governor of the National Bank.”

Chapter Twelve is about Bulcha in New York, reading and writing but in this chapter there are some controversies that need resolution and some concepts that beg redemption. On page 171, for instance, the author says, “The phrase ‘rent seekers’ is a meaningless communist jargon and makes no sense to people.” Bulcha is correct in saying that this concept makes no sense to people and I personally doubt it very much that the people who use this phrase in Ethiopia understand its essence at all. However, it is not a communist jargon; on the contrary, it was David Ricardo who first introduced the concept into the political economy lexicon in the 19th century. The concept was utilized then in reference to ‘privilege seeking’ feudal lords in Europe but somehow it was replaced by ‘rent seeking’ because the privilege seeking lords were renting their lands in order to make gains in politics. I have clarified the problem of this concept in my new book, *Ethiopia: Democracy, Devolution of Power, & The Developmental State*.

One other remark made by Bulcha that could be controversial but to which I agree with is his commentary on the *Ethiopian Review*: “While still in New York, I continued to write in the Ethiopian Review on Ethiopian issues. The *Ethiopian Review*, at that time (in the early 90s), was a serious critic of the EPRDF, but not a narrow nationalist as it is today.” I share Bulcha’s observation because I myself, out of concern, emailed to Elias Kifle, the
editor of *Ethiopian Review*, to revive the old stance of the magazine rather than engage in narrow sentiments.

I don’t know what Bulcha means when he states, “The Oromo of Wollo, Gojam and Tigray are in the process of loosing their language and culture, replacing them with the language and culture of those who ruled them,” when it is abundantly clear that these segment of the Oromo were assimilated into the Habasha fabric as soon as they came in the 16th century and settled among the Amhara, Tigrayans, and other ethnic groups. The Raya Azebo and Raya Kobo Oromo of Tigray speak Tigrigna and they don’t speak Afan Oromo and same hard fact applies to the Oromo in Gojjam and Wollo.

What I fully endorse and accept is Bulcha’s assertion of the self-determination of the Oromo: “The Oromo are a distinct people with their own linguistic uniqueness and cultural identity. Therefore the Oromo will not accept to be assimilated into the cultures of other peoples. They will always peacefully co-exist and intermingle with the other peoples of Ethiopia, fight together any intruder into our country (Ethiopia), but they still want to be known as Oromo, with all their identifications.”

On the corruption charges made against Tamrat Layne, Bulcha states, “no legislator could dare ask the Prime Minister a single question when Meles said that Tamrat was “overcome by candies” meaning bribe. He also said that Tamrat’s moral depravity was unacceptable.” Well, when Tamrat appeared with Meles before the Parliament during this entire political theater, he did not utter a word either. He could have said something in his own defense. Now, Tamrat is a free man and he can either tell the tale or write a book and enlighten Ethiopian readers.

Two misconceptions on Tigray and Tgrayans that Bulcha by default shared with the narrow nationalist Diaspora Ethiopians are discussed in relation to ‘regional administration that I found quite surprising, and this is how he puts it: “…I noticed that lot of people from Tigray, from Canada and the United States were returning to their region. Later, I found out that, in Tigray there was consensus among the elite that they should develop Tigray to ensure that it would never again be subjected to non-Tigrean domination and starvation. By contrast, it became evident that it was not safe for people of other regions to go back to their respective regions without first becoming EPRDF members and friends.”…”That would mean that other regions will [would] lag behind in economic and social development. In other words, while in Tigray, it is possible for a person of that region to go back and contribute to the development of Tigray, it is next to impossible for a returnee from abroad to go back to his region of birth and participate in the development of his people, if he/she wants his/her political independence.” Bulcha is fundamentally wrong and he should seriously rethink his assertions of Tigray and Tigrayans that do not reflect the reality on the ground, and to help him his claim in a much broader context, I suggest to him to see the transformation and development that have taken place in Bahir Dar, Adama, Hawassa, and elsewhere in Ethiopia.
Chapter Thirteen begins with a fair and good statement in regards to self-determination of the Oromo and the unity of Ethiopia: “I also wanted to go to my own birth place, Boji Dirmaji, to dialogue with the people of my village about election of the members of the Constituent Assembly, because I believed that the Oromo nation should remain part of the Ethiopian community as an autonomous and federated state and as such, a modern, liberal, and accommodative constitution should be drawn up. In such a set up, the Oromo would play their democratic rightful role which should be welcome by all reasonable people whether they are Amharas, Tigre or others.”

What I found surprising and curious in Chapter Thirteen is Bulcha’s attempt to establish relations with the American Ambassador in order to promote his interests despite the fact that he was critical of the American involvement and scrutiny of the Charter Conference that we have seen earlier. “In February 1994, I told the American Ambassador, Mr. Mark Baas, at a social setting” says Bulcha, “that I wanted to be elected into the Constituent Assembly as an independent. I told him about my plan because if something happened to me, he would know that it was politically motivated…The US Ambassador immediately called Kinfe Gebre-Medhin, the EPRDF/TPLF security chief, who was then, deputy to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Security (Kuma Demeksa). Baas asked Kinfe to see me and Kinfe agreed. Soon after, I went and spoke to Kinfe who encouraged me to participate in the elections.”

Bulcha’s involvement in the campaign for election, however, is not going to be easy. He may have earned the support of his people in his district but his constituency and himself were intimidated by the local police as he plainly puts it: “Wherever I spoke, policemen who looked poor and in tattered uniforms, followed me everywhere, surely not to protect me, but to intimidate my supporters who followed me wherever I went…I never needed them, as the people were friendly, and it was the Government officials, including the policemen, who were unfriendly to me and my entourage.”

Bulcha continued to complain about police harassment in his campaign trail: “Police continued to follow me and openly register or pretended to register the names of the people who came to listen to me. I often repeated my own belief that the Americans largely installed EPRDF as a Government of Ethiopia and that, in my opinion, EPRDF should have held a general national election in which all parties put up candidates. …When many of the people thrown into jail sent their children to tell me what happened to them, I decided to return to Finfinnee to inform the Federal Authorities and also the American Ambassador. I say the American Ambassador because EPRDF was officially installed by US officials, such as Herman Cohen and Paul Henze in July 1991. I felt terribly bad that I had to complain to a foreign envoy in my own country because I felt that nobody in the Government was on my own side or on the side of justice and democracy.”

On pages 200 and 201 of Chapter Thirteen, Bulcha argues the Oromos must win at least 40% of the seats in the Parliament because they are 40% of the Ethiopian population; and the parliamentary system that “was being tailored to suit the Weyyane, should be dropped and replaced by a presidential system.” There are two defects in relation to these
arguments: 1) bigger populations can have an advantage only in a one-man-one-vote system but this can be guaranteed only if the given ethnic group solidly and in a unified manner votes for the candidate from its own nationality. In the Oromo case, as has been testified in at least three previous elections, the Oromo were divided between the OFDM, Bulcha’s party; the OPDO, an Oromo organization affiliated to the EPRDF; the Oromo National Congress; and others still adhere to the OLF. In this kind of political scenario, majority vote becomes meaningless. 2) In any parliamentary system whether it is in Britain, India, or Israel, it is the winning party that wins the government and elects the prime minister, and not the majority people who want to install their own ethnic government; 3) just by replacing the parliamentary system by a presidential system, one cannot solve problems associated with elections; in the US, for instance, the people vote for their presidential candidates but ultimately it is the Electoral College that determines the outcome of the electoral system. For example, if a presidential candidate wins the majority of the popular votes but not the Electoral College votes, s/he would not become the president of the United States. All democratic countries have their own unique ways in running elections and accommodating the electorate; for Ethiopia, the best system is the parliamentary system because Ethiopians would not be divided along ethnic lines as in voting for their nationality party only.

Despite the relatively weak raison d’être that Bulcha attempted to promote vis-à-vis majority electoral votes, however, he has a point when he compares Ethiopia to Botswana, Zambia, Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, South Africa and asks “When will ‘election’ work in Ethiopia?” We had indeed elections in Ethiopia since the coming of the EPRDF to power, but it is the same party that has been running the country for the last twenty-two years. By contrast, the above-mentioned African countries have witnessed several regime changes during elections in the last two decades.

Chapter Fourteen is focused on Bulcha’s role beyond politics and as founder and chair of Awash International Bank (AIB). In this chapter, Bulcha, to his credit, passes with clean conscience against tempting corrupt practices. He says, “ex-Derg officials, advised us to oil our way by giving bribe to some lower-level officials of the Government, but I categorically rejected the idea.” Also, among the many professional Ethiopians that he admires in this chapter, one that stands out is Leikun Berhanu, former Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia who later was instrumental in the making of the AIB. Bulcha furthermore tells us that Leikun was unfairly sent behind bars after he was charged falsely, and this is how he puts it: “Leikun took a big risk by joining AIB as CEO because when the Government asked him to join the EPRDF party, Leikun was reported to have refused because he was non-political in his work...individuals who hated him because he would not cooperate in corrupt practices were determined to destroy him. They succeed when they finally had the National Bank on their side. As a result, he is now serving a 13-month prison sentence.”

Chapter Fifteen is a short two-page chapter that deals with intrigue within AIB, depth of corruption, and fraud elections manipulated by “schemers”, as Bulcha taints them, in the Board of the bank. These unfavorable circumstances would compel Bulcha to “look beyond the Bank” as he explains it in Chapter Sixteen. He resigns from AIB and begins
to “devote his time for Oromo burning issues,” which is the subject of Chapter Seventeen. In Chapter Eighteen, the author discusses how the Oromo are viewed are treated in the context of elections and “mirage democracy” but the chapter simply reinforces the earlier concerns Bulcha has about the Oromo that he already dissected in the previous chapters.

In Chapter Eighteen, one intriguing idea that Bulcha talks about is his decision “to speak in Afan Oromo in Parliament” and for doing this, he was congratulated by the Oromo including women who belonged to the OPDO. I personally appreciate this kind of self-esteem and pride because the use of language is one important and vital manifestation of ones self-determination. However, Ethiopians in general and the Oromo in particular should also cleverly utilize Amharic in order to promote their objectives.

One interesting question that Bulcha forwarded to the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the Ethiopian Parliament has to do with the question of Assab that many Ethiopians, including myself, have put on the plate but was never considered. This is what Bulcha asked: “Do you ever regret that you easily gave up the Port of Assab to the Eritreans? History has recorded that Emperor Haile Selassie, with an astute and superb personal international diplomacy, brought Eritrea back to the Ethiopian family of nations.”

Chapters Nineteen and Twenty respectively deal with “the invasion of Somalia” as a wrong Ethiopian policy, and Bulcha’s decision to step aside from OFDM leadership. It looks Bulcha’s retirement is heralded by writing this interesting book that I have reviewed. As I have done for all other books that I have reviewed in the past, my job is to objectively analyze the central theses and message of the books. In the latter context, thus, while I have admired some aspects of My Life, I have also brought forth criticisms on other aspects of the book. The criticisms are intended to make input and to enrich the ever-increasing data in Ethiopian investigative discourse and do not, in any way, diminish the significance of this important book.

In conclusion, I like Ato Bulcha Demeksa to answer the following question, a question that I did not generate but a question that came from his own constituency while he was campaigning during the election: Obbo Bulcha, dubbiin kun maal isini fayyadhaa? (Brother Bulcha, what does this thing benefit you?)

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