

For my Advanced History Choice Project, I chose to create a traditional Ethiopian dinner platter displaying a variety of traditional and culturally significant foods typically found on a dinner plate. In Ethiopian culture, the meal platter is communal, and the enjoyers usually all eat off of the plate using their hands or injera (the traditional spongy flatbread). My painting depicts Doro Wat in the center, a traditional, rich, spiced chicken stew that is a national dish of Ethiopia and is often reserved for special occasions and shared meals. Directly below it, I painted Beef tibs, a common sautéed meat dish that varies by region and is often served during gatherings. To the right, I painted two different types of lentils, brown and yellow. Lentils are a traditional vegetarian staple in Ethiopian food. Different types of lentils are often split by color and spice level, so I included four different types: the brown lentils, the yellow lentils, the red lentils, and a second brown, creamy lentil dish. To the right of the yellow lentils, I depicted spicy greens (gomen) stewed with garlic, onions, and spices, symbolizing both nourishment and tradition. Next, I depicted cooked beets. These are usually served cold and pickled or dressed. Next is the red lentils I previously mentioned, followed by a green salad with tomatoes, and lastly, the creamy brown lentils. I chose these dishes specifically because of what they represent: community gathering and tradition. I chose these specific dishes because they reflect the rhythms of daily life and celebration in Ethiopia—doro wot at the center marks tradition, while the lentils, greens, beef, and salad represent the balance of routine, survival, and care. Each item is something real people still cook and share, even amidst the aftermath of war. I chose to depict a traditional platter because of its inherent communal nature. It symbolizes the importance of unity and community in Ethiopian culture. I chose to paint this platter in its entirety because it stands as a testament to what is threatened by the conflict: not just lives, but the continuation of culture, identity, and togetherness. Initially, I contemplated portraying the effects of the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia through cracks and division on the platter, but in the end, I decided to keep the plate intact. By keeping the plate whole, my goal was to have viewers consider and to question the deep cultural significance and pain that hides beneath the surface of this dinner platter. Though beautiful, the platter holds deep and invisible wounds caused by the destruction of civil conflict. I wanted to highlight the evident contrast between the painting and the current Ethiopian reality, and in doing so, my goal was to evoke reflection and mourning, while still honoring the strength and resilience of Ethiopian culture. The Tigray conflict, beginning in November 2020 and persisting until the signing of the peace accords in 2022, was a civil war that broke out between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (or the TPLF), a political group from the northern Tigray region. The war started after years of rising tensions, namely after President Abiy came into power in 2018 and reorganized the government, leaving the TPLF to feel sidelined. This caused Tigray to hold its own regional election in 2020, in direct defiance of a federal postponement due to COVID. Shortly after, in November 2020, the Ethiopian government accused the TPLF of attacking a federal military base and launched a military offensive. The confluence of these two events pushed the rising tensions to a breaking point, and the Tigray conflict ensued. The conflict turned to full-scale war and caused airstrikes, massacres, sexual violence, and intense famine that were caused by blockades and restricted food and aid. Eventually, the conflict grew to the point of the involvement of Eritrean troops, who allied with the Ethiopian government, to then committed further atrocities. By the signing of the peace agreement two years after the outbreak of the war, hundreds of thousands were killed,

and millions were displaced. The conflict not only cost thousands of lives, it disrupted cultural rituals, caused famine, and ripped families apart, breaking apart the very communities that this platter would traditionally bring together.

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