

The selling of Ethiopia. By Yilma Bekele

Actually that statement might not be true. We do know our country is being sold but we have no idea if the bidding has been open or closed. We have sold almost all of Gambella, we have leased half of Afar and Oromia has been parceled out bit by bit. Our Beer factories are under new owners, our gold mines belong to the fake Ethiopian sheik, Telephone is under the Chinese and our Airlines is looking for a suitor. Have we always looked for outsiders to own us?

Not really when you consider that we celebrated the victory at the battle of Adwa a few weeks back and that was the mother of all wars that made it clear this African country is not for sale. We might not have contributed much to the industrial revolution but we did manage to rely on our own ingenuity to follow along and do things our own way. You might not believe this but there was a time when Ethiopians actually used to be involved in making stuff from scratch. You think I am making things up don't you? I don't blame you because today you cannot even come up with one name that stands out as an Ethiopian entrepreneur, go getter or someone that shines like the north star based solely on his own sweat and blood.

The things that were accomplished by earlier Ethiopians are all around us but we don't see them. All the things the current government brags about have their roots in the yester years they so much condemn and brush off. I don't know where to start but here we go. Let us start with hospitals. Bella Haile Selassie (Bella), Leelt Tshay (armed Forces), Paulos, Haile Selassie Hospital (Yekati 12), Balcha, Ghandi, Tikur Anbessa, Ras Desta, Minilik etc. The vast majority of the doctors were Ethiopians, the hospitals were clean, well equipped and you don't even have to take your own sheets and blankets.

How about Hotels? Ethiopia, Ghion, Wabi Shebele, Ras, Bekele Molla were the premier destinations. They were owned and operated by Ethiopians. When it comes to Ethiopian Airlines the Pilots were proud Ethiopians and the technicians were the envy of Africa. The Imperial government built the Airlines from scratch. Trans World Airlines (TWA) was a partner until we were able to train and staff our own and we did manage to do that.

If we talk about agriculture we did manage to establish the Sugar estates of Metehara and Wonji not to mention Setit Humera, the wheat and corn fields of Arsi, the fiber plants of Sidama and the cotton fields of Awash Valley are testimonial to our ingenuity. The sixties saw the emergence of the new educated Ethiopians that raised the bar of excellence.

The establishment of Africa Hall was how Africans showed respect to our Emperor and our old history when they choose Addis Abeba as the head quarter for the continent. The University at sadist Kilo was a gift to his people by the Emperor and it was a spectacular success. All the teachers were highly educated Ethiopians and the graduates were the pride of our country.

Why am I discussing such subject today? It is because two items reported by the media caught my eye a few days back. Both are an assault on our sovereignty and our ability to grow our own economy by Ethiopians for Ethiopians. Heineken a Dutch conglomerate is building the biggest brewery in Ethiopia and Guangdong Chuan Hui Group from China is given 41,000 Sq. meter of land to construct hotel and industrial complex. The way the story is being reported we should be jumping with joy. What could be better than those two benevolent multi nationals investing so much in our poor destitute country?

Is that how we should look at it? Is there another aspect to this story? In order to see the pros and con of the question posed In front of us it would have been nice if there has been a nationwide discussion to see if the plan makes sense when it comes to our homeland. That is how smart decisions are made. Open and vibrant nationwide discussion regarding such important issues that impact our national economy and our people's well-being assures a better outcome.

That usually is not the case in our country. There are no checks and balances. There is no independent legislative body and the judiciary is a government tool. A single party the TPLF controls all and everything in the country. Our political leaders have no faith in the ability of the people to know what is good for them. That is why they approach their job as being a 'baby sitter' and are constantly fretting about what the people hear and read. Decisions are made by a few TPLF politburo members to be approved by the rubber stamp Parliament. Anyone that questions such a decision is branded as enemy of the people and dealt with.

Let us start with our beer story. You know beer is nothing but European Tella. It is bottled fancy and costs a little bit more. How long ago do you think we acquired the idea of brewing for a larger crowd? Eighty years ago my friend! St George brewery was started in 1922. Meta Abo Brewery was founded in 1963. Meta Abo was a partnership between government and private capital and started with a base capital of 2million Birr. The military junta nationalized both and the current TPLF Woyane regime inherited them with the rest of Ethiopia. What do you think these successive regimes did with our own old industry and land? Did they build on what was started? Did they reinvest the profit to make the enterprises bigger and better? Did they run our industries, enterprises and farms in a responsible and judicious manner?

Both St. George and Meta Abo are no more Ethiopian enterprises. BGI (an internationally acclaimed Brewing Company that operates in many countries.??) bought St George in 1998 for US 10 million 'through foreign direct investment'(??) Meta Ambo was sold to Diego Industries- a British congalmorate for US 225 million. Heineken a Dutch multi-national acquired 18% of Bedele and Harar breweries for US 163 million in 2011. Raya Brewery an idea that has not materialized yet but promoted by Lt. General Tsadkan W.Tensai and investors such as Yemane (Jamaica) Kidane and other TPLF officials sold 25% interest to BGI for 650 million Br and invited Brewtech a German company as a partner.

As you can see the TPLF regime collected close to US 400 million from the sale of our home grown breweries. By all imagination that is chump change when you consider the ownership is lost and the profit for eternity belongs to the foreigners. Is this a good way to grow a national economy? Has it been done before or is this another of that failed 'revolutionary democracy' pipe dream?

BGI, Diego or Heineken are investing in our country to realize profit for their shareholders. What is our country getting out of this? The beer manufacturing business is a highly automated enterprise so it is not about job creation. Most if not all of the high paying managerial jobs will be occupied by the parent company. The malt, barley and other ingredients are imported and are considered a trade secret. We all know about creative accounting thus I am sure our country does not even benefit from the profit because the bookkeeping is rigged to minimize taxes.

Let us not even think of technology transfer since we cannot learn what we have already mastered. Remember we have been brewing beer since 1922. I will tell you what we got out of this unequal relationship. We as a people got royally screwed. The TPLF party officials got paid plenty for their pimping effort. The regime in its insatiable appetite for foreign currency bought a few months of respite to purchase oil, wheat, cooking oil etc. to postpone its inevitable collapse.

There are certain things we know how a growing economy with a nationalist government operates. We have seen how China, India, Malaysia, Brazil and other emerging economies handled their growth potential. They use what is known as subsidy to protect their infant industries from foreign predators. They allowed investment where technology transfer will bring benefit to their people but shielded their home grown industries from foreign competition.

Why do you think the TPLF bosses are interested in selling our sovereignty? I doubt it is because they are anti-Ethiopian even though the late evil PM used to suffer from inferiority complex when it comes to central highlanders. I believe it is because of their 'get rich quick' philosophy. They are in a hurry to accumulate before their Ponzi scheme comes crashing down. According to the UN billions of dollars are leaving our country. They are buying properties in the US and Europe, sending their children to expensive schools abroad and vacationing in exotic places with the money they steal from our country.

What are we the victims doing about this rape and pillage of our resources and the degradation of our national pride? I am afraid other than insistently talking there is nothing more most of us are doing about it. Why do you think that is so? I could think of a few things but ignorance comes to mind first and foremost. Our ignorance prevents us from connecting the dots and

looking at the bigger picture. Our misplaced pride does not allow us to listen to others and learn to be able to formulate better solutions to our problems.

Today we have a population that is not familiar with its history. Sixty four percent (64%) of our people are under twenty five years old while twenty nine percent (29%) are under the age of 54 years. We have a toxic population on our hands. Those under twenty five grew up under the Woyane regime where being an Ethiopian is taken as a liability. While those under fifty four are the result of the Derge era of undermining religion, family, and stability. Ninety three (93%) of our population is a fertile ground for evil Woyane to plant shame, doubt and insecurity about being Ethiopian.

It is this population that is sitting on the side and cheering the selling of their country. For most people what bothers them is not what is lost but they spend endless energy to get a piece of the action. In Ethiopia stealing, lying, being part of a criminal enterprise is encouraged by the regime. When the recently dead Meles Zenawi said 'even being a thief requires being smart' he was giving a green light to his cadres and the population at large. The so called Diaspora is the number one enabler of the criminal Woyane machine. They use their new found riches to bribe Woyane so they could acquire stolen land to build their flimsy unsustainable condominiums and spend endless nights worrying if the next highest bidder will in turn take it away in broad day light.

This is exactly the reason we are having a problem forming a united front to get rid of this cancerous body in our midst. This is the reason even in exile we are unable to form a democratic, inclusive and worthy association that will benefit the many. The ninety three percent are in need of education in civic affairs and a dose of what it means to love your neighbor as you would love yourself.

May be it is the lords way of teaching us little humility and humbleness as he did with the children of Israel when he left them to wonder for forty years in the wilderness so they know what is in their heart. It is a choice we have-to be humble or perish due to pride.

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