

## The last Ethiopian standing. By Yilma Bekele

That is exactly what I feel like now. Who died and left me with this burden is not clear to me but believe me I feel like I am all alone and it is up to me to carry the flag and sing the national anthem. This business of being an Ethiopian has never been easy but you would think with experience and practice I have gotten the hang of it. I am afraid I am hopeless in that department. I still feel the burden.

They say the environment shapes our behavior. I am not here to argue whether 'nature' or 'nurture' is the defining role in our development I will leave that to the scientists. Speaking for myself I believe the environment has played a big role in shaping who I am today. I am a transplanted Ethiopian who has been culturally shocked, mentally molded, philosophically tampered and forced to question reality on a daily basis. I have no idea how that central theme of being Ethiopian has managed to survive in all the thousands of ways my central core has been violently breached.

I have survived it all thanks to my family and that little town in Southern Ethiopia that imbued me with respect for elders, love for your neighbor and the beauty of leaving with different cultures in a mutually beneficial way. Those values are what differentiate the beast from the human. I believe that upbringing gave me an advantage when later on in life I found myself in circumstances that I have never thought I would find myself in. I have confronted moving to Addis from my small town, crossing an ocean to come to America, being the object of curiosity in small town in Oregon and coming to terms in growing old in the US with that wisdom I learnt while growing up that says 'it is not really that bad just deal with it.'

As I said I have dealt with most things in a calm collected manner. The one thing that is really causing me pain and agony is this business of defending my country Ethiopia. It feels to me, mind you I might be mistaken, or a little touchy but it feels to me that every Hagos, Ketema, Kuma, Abdella, Betiso etc. is dumping on me for crimes I have no idea I committed.

Well you my Ethiopian reader, can I call you that without offending you, any way you must be thinking why the heck am I telling you all this in the middle of summer? It is because a few things happened the last few days and I felt they were directed at me. Not personally you know but since I feel I am the last one standing it felt personal in a roundabout way.

The big momentous event was my dear friend Jawar declaring he is Oromo first and his Ethiopianess was imposed on him. I have no problem with that. In fact I believe Jawar is Oromo, Ethiopian and American. He has got choices. Which one he puts primary is all up to him. I also don't know if being an American was imposed on him or he voluntarily filled up a form and swore allegiance to the star spangled banner. With this speech he seems to dig the hole a little deeper. He was heard equating Ethiopian Oromo Moslems with those in Somalia and Djibouti claiming it to be one and the same struggle. I am afraid his next Al Jazeera appearance he is going to have to answer the question are you Muslim first or Oromo first. Good luck my friend.

The only thing I have problem is his assumption of the role of a spokesman ship for the Oromo people of Ethiopia. As far as I know he has never been elected to any office. He has never been sent as a delegate by any group in present day Ethiopia to speak for them. He has not articulated their demands in a coherent manner, written books about their glorious history, interpreted the nuances of their culture or educated the rest of us

about the Oromo condition. In other words other than others declaring him an up and coming young intellectual and him playing that role to the hilt he has not bothered to study, interpret, add on the history and role of the Oromo people in what we call Ethiopia. Of course I stand to be corrected if someone could present me with a proof showing Obbo Jawar's vast contribution to the knowledge base of Oromo history, Oromo culture and Oromo Psychology.

In the You tube video being distributed he is addressing a gathering of Oromo Muslims. I am assuming he was invited as an analyst regarding the Ethiopian Moslem confrontation with the dictatorial regime taking place in our country.

How did our political analyst approach the challenge is a good question to ask. All I could say is he did not respect the sensibilities of his audience. He was confrontational. He was dismissive, he was arrogant and he was an extremist of the highest order. That is the impression I got after watching this Duche like sermon. From what I understand the Ethiopian Moslem issue is regarding state interference in their religion. It is not about political power, it is not about demonizing the rest that don't have the same belief. Then why is the speaker turning this peaceful issue of respect into one of violent confrontation? Our Ethiopian Moslem leaders have done a splendid job of making friends with all Ethiopians regardless of religion and gone the extra mile not to antagonize anyone and succeeded beyond expectations. The rest of Ethiopia has embraced their quest for fair treatment and stood side by side with them. Why is our young intellectual turning this simple request for respect into a jihad?

Is it possible our dear friend Jawar grew up in Woyane Ethiopia thus his understanding of our common history derives from that perspective. It looks like he never bothered to scratch below the surface and learn if there is more. What is education for if not to answer vital questions in a rational and measured manner? What is the point of learning if not to pinpoint problems and look for answers that would bring not only lasting solutions but harmony? Why would anyone boast about cutting peoples necks off because they follow a different god? Caught in the heat of the moment my young friend said that.

That was a week ago. Many people wrote their opinions about that. That is the beauty of democracy. It is all about the individual's right to speak and write what he thinks and others to respond. We all learn from the diverse views and the give and take. Some we reject off hand, some gives us a pause and a some really say what we believe and we go 'I am not alone.' So that is what I was doing when I came across this audio by Ato Abdi Fite on Ze Habesha.com. It is presented in a rational manner but misses the point by a mile. It just does not seem to answer a very simple question that it itself asks. Who is us against them?

As far as I am concerned Ato Abdi Fite has locked himself into this small room and anybody outside is the enemy. Is that the way it is? What is the difference between the Oromo farmer, the Amhara peasant, the Tigrai laborer, the Adal pastoralist, the Ogaden herder, the Gambellan fisherman, the Dorze weaver etc.? Aren't they all victims of the system? Isn't this what the struggle is all about? Can one be free while the rest stay in bondage? Shouldn't we all work together to liberate them all so they could grow and prosper?

Ato Abdi was repeating himself so much I thought we were on a never ending loop. Just because something is said many times over does not make it turn out to be a factual statement. It is just false hood but told in twenty minutes instead of two. The central theme in his audio essay is to accuse the rest of Ethiopians ignoring the plight of his Oromo people. Does he have a leg to stand on?

Not really. When in the sixties the Ethiopian students confronted the Imperial regime their number one slogan was 'land to the tiller.' They did not specify Amhara, Oromo, Sidama, Tigray etc. land but their demand was all inclusive. When they went out and established EPRP and other anti-dictatorship associations they did not think in terms of ethnic affiliation but a nationwide movement. Today the Diaspora which Ato Abdi is addressing, I don't see any ethnic based successful movement working to get rid of the ethnic based TPLF that is tormenting our country and people. We have one voice that abhors ethnic division, avoids ethnic/religion divide and concentrates in uniting the many to get rid of the few troublemaker woyanes.

It is true we popularize some of the victims of the TPLF but that is a political move. We are aware there are thousands of Eskinders, Reyots, Wubshets, Bekeles, Abubakers but we mention those victims as a symbol for the many. We don't even ask what ethnic group they belong to nor do we care.

Instead of telling us where we failed him I wish he would tell us where he called on us and we ignored his cry. Instead of accusing us of not paying attention to the Oromo question I wish he would tell us what he did to popularize the Oromo issue. In today's Ethiopia the system is the problem. The solution is to unite all the victims in a democratic and equal association to smash the system and build a new one that respects their aspiration to be free, to be seen as equal and form a lasting union. Being a polarizing figure like the road taken by Meles Zenawi is not the way to go. Uniting people to work for a common solution they could all live with is the Mandela way and it is much preferable and lasting.

What I find troubling about our two Oromo operatives is their failure to see the futility of the treatment they are prescribing to resolve the ethnic divide in our country. The medicine they are ranting about has been administered by the OLF for the last forty years. What exactly has it achieved other than give a false sense of cure while the disease is causing untold damage to our people? With wisdom born from experience the present day OLF is in the process of revising their failed policy and searching for ways of working with others like them that are feeling the brunt of TPLF fire. That is what leadership is about.

Our young intellectuals seem to be gung ho about opening old wounds and reviving past mistakes. What is also surprising is their suicidal drive to offend the one friend they always have on their corner. I am referring to the progressive forces in the Diaspora that are working hard to expose the TPLF regime. The Diaspora is the most important and natural ally of the oppressed people of Ethiopia. There is not one Diaspora organization that opposes the right of the Oromo people to determine their future without undue interference from outsiders. We feel the liberation of the Oromo is the liberation of the Amhara, the Gurage, the Tigray and all Ethiopians.

Timing is very important in political struggle. Today our country seems to be entering a new stage with the death of the dictator. The political parties are making good progress in wiping out fear from their constituents. We have broken the regimes strangle on mass media thanks to ESAT. It is a shame the ranting and a childish tantrum of a few is taking our eyes away from the prize. All I can say is grow up, coming up with bizarre talk trying to garner attention lasts a few days but in the end you have to live with yourself. .

<http://www.zehabesha.com/are-you-oromo-or-ethiopian-first/>

