

## The Oromo issue on Al Jazeera. By Yilma Bekele

There was a half hour discussion on the Oromo issue in Ethiopia on Al Jazeera Television Network. It was one of those situations where you go 'what just happened' after an experience that leaves you confused and dumbfounded when it is over. As an Ethiopian I am familiar with the issue and as someone who was born and raised in Sidama I certainly have enough real experience to have a handle on the matter. Furthermore as an Ethiopian that has been exposed to the opinions presented by the OLF and other Oromo groups I thought this program will give me further insight to the grievances by the party's concerned.

I am sad to say the discussion did not shine any new light on the issue, was not able to define the problem in a coherent manner and failed to present a solution that is well thought of and acceptable to all the parties involved. What is the point of appearing on a discussion program if the net result is to not being able to teach some, respond to difficult questions with rational and verifiable argument and show the world why your position is just and convince all peace loving people to support your cause.

I would like to say that the hosts of 'The Stream' show were very gracious and asked very important and probing questions and gave the participants plenty of opportunity to state their case. You can tell the interviewers were as confused as we the viewers based on the trend of their questions which was asking for specifics and some kind of solution as the program was coming to an end. In fact one of the hosts brought out her own experience belonging to a majority tribe in Nigeria trying to make sense of the confusing analysis made by the guests.

One thing for sure is that the subject is not an easy one to define and explain. What exactly is the Oromo question in our country is a good place to start. Some see it as a question of democracy and human right within the Ethiopian context. Others define it as a self-determination issue up to and including secession. We are talking about a new country with international boundary a flag and a seat in the UN.

I am not really well equipped to discuss the historical question as I have not versed myself in the issue to be able to give an in-depth analysis. I will leave that to historians. As a layman I am just interested by the arguments presented on this show and the end result achieved by the participation of my esteemed Ethiopian brethren whether they accept me as such or not.

What troubled me most was the wanton way statistics was thrown around, facts distorted to fit the argument and reality on the ground completely and absolutely ignored to make a feeble point. I am familiar with the way we Ethiopians use statistics. No one equals our current government with absolute disregard and unrivaled contempt to the science of statistics. It is with a straight face and somber look that they tell the whole world our economy is growing

double digits and is the envy of every developing country. It is their cooked number and they are proud of it.

I was a little appalled when the same argument was brought out on 'The Stream' presentation. Here are some examples of the plethora of statistics thrown during the discussion - *'there are twenty five thousand to thirty thousand Oromo political prisoners, nine out of ten political prisoners are Oromos jailed for speaking their language, in 2012 ninety thousand out of one hundred ten thousand (82%) refugees into Yemen were Oromos, Oromos contribute sixty to sixty five percent of Ethiopia's GDP'* All I ask is credible citations for this pronouncements.

I am afraid I do not have direct experience under Meles/TPLF administration but most of the stuff that was said about our country during the Imperial era and the Derg regime does not seem to reflect the facts on the ground. We all agree there was national oppression in our country. We all understand the vast majority were marginalized and did not participate fully in the governance of their nation. On the other hand what we had was an old fashioned Imperial Kingdom that drew its legitimacy from tradition and the 'will of God'. Logic says democracy and rule of law cannot be expected from such arrangement.

The military regime that followed with all credit due tried to right what was wrong in its own way. But due to its nature it did not succeed. Remember the Imperial regime failed by the sheer will and determination of the masses of people. The Derg circumvented the will of the people. Both systems failed because they did not fulfill the aspirations of their people. But we got to admit things did not stay the same as they were before. Claiming otherwise is a futile attempt to deny reality. The change brought about has not yet fulfilled our hopes. That is exactly why there is so much dissatisfaction in our country today. Our people deserve better is our general sentiment.

That is exactly why the host asked a very intelligent and deep question. She said *'How do you see Ethiopia, how do you see Oromos reconciling so you all want Ethiopia rather than this major group, major ethnic group felling they have a lot of grievances –where do you go to now, what is the way forward?'* This was the perfect opportunity for the guests to shine. To rise above the rhetoric, the blame game, the victim syndrome and use the program to be a teachable moment for their Oromo constituents and for the rest of Ethiopians. They failed miserably. Their purpose was to insistently talk about the past instead of what could be achieved in the future together with the rest of the oppressed masses of Ethiopia. They failed to recognize their dream is our dream, their liberation is our liberation and the future belongs to all of us together. It was a missed opportunity to help our people see beyond victimhood and paint a bright future in bold colors.

Our Ethiopian/Oromo guests were reluctant or unable to state what exactly they want but instead deluded the hosts with horror stories by traveling back in time and drawing a nightmarish Ethiopia of conquests, slavery and dark moments. You see the problem with that analysis is no country or nation on planet earth can claim immune from the untold horror stories that accompany nation building. China, Russia, France, England, USA, Brazil, Bolivia, South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, Canada etc. etc. were all the outcome of conquest. It is not unique to our country. Just because the current Woyane regime intensifies the contradiction for its own narrow aims, just because they preach hate, just because they feed on our ignorance there is no reason we should repeat after them and take our country to hell.

Except for our northern cousins most of us in the south, center, east and west of our country are a very mixed blood people. We have lived together for eons, intermarried, and lived in harmony for a very long time. I remember when discussing lineage was frowned upon. The TPLF came and said everybody to your Kilil and a lot were unable to define themselves. Our Woyane masters were totally confused with this phenomenon. Twenty years into this game it is sad to see people singing the same old song.

Our guests seem to conveniently forget a certain part of history where the OLF leadership partnered with TPLF. The OLF was used by TPLF thugs to commit untold atrocity in certain parts of Ethiopia. The OLF leadership disarmed and abandoned their troops to be humiliated and massacred. We understand. We are the victims of TPLF policy too. We are familiar with ANDM that is betraying our people. We certainly recognize Bene Shangul Gumuz and SNNP that is carrying out ethnic cleansing fueled by TPLF, we are familiar with Afar and Gambela hired puppets that are displacing our brethren from their ancestral lands, we feel the pain of our Somali Ethiopians that are going thru hell on earth. All atrocities are committed by TPLF using local people as a front.

Well my friends, the Amhara and Tigrai peasant, the Oromo herder, the Afar pastoralist, the Sidama farmer, the Gambelan fisherman have one thing in common, they are all victims of a policy by the Tigrai based so called Ethiopian regime. It is only when these dispersed groups unite and challenge the heavily armed minority regime that real change can happen. This idea of confronting the enemy as bands of warriors is not going to work. This idea of going on a television program and reciting atrocities from hundred years back is a no brainer. It gives the speaker some tiny ego massage but it does the cause they stand for no good. It is a disservice to our people and a complete joke on our intelligence. We have come a long way, we have seen so much, we have experienced a lot and we should be treated with a little bit more respect.

On a recent lecture on crisis leadership, Nancy Koehn a Harvard Business school historian said what we need is wisdom, because *'information ...does not equal knowledge, and knowledge does not equal understanding, and understanding does not equal wisdom.'* It is not a good thing

when some of our learned friends prey on the ignorance and weakness of our people to reduce grave problems into simplistic formulas of us against them. That road has been tried and it has not taken us anywhere. Leadership requires making the hard choices no matter unpopular. In the same lecture Professor Koehn quoted the novelist David Foster Wallace and his definition of leadership-*'effective leaders are individuals who help us overcome the limitations of our own selfishness and weakness and fears and get us to do harder, better, and more important things than we can get ourselves to do on our own'*.

It is a beautiful definition and that is what is needed of those that aspire to be future leaders. Work hard to enhance our strength rather than magnify our weakness, strive to bring the best in us instead of catering to our worst instinct, show us the road to the Promised Land not dwell on what we left behind. It is never too late to change. We pray for change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idvJozrs284>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhhnoK8yd3g&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfOYjG80JWTSIkRjsSHVAeTT&index=4>

<http://ecadforum.com/2013/06/26/an-ethiopian-walking-on-eggshells/>