

Moral Crises of a Self-proclaimed "anti-racist" activist in Norway

I am writing this article in response to a "witness account" written by Rune Berglund Steen of the Norwegian Anti-Racist Center (ARS) on the national news broadcaster NRK, aired on 11.10.2012 (<http://freepdfhosting.com/c33631e4ca.pdf>) concerning the people of Tigrai in Ethiopia. The esteemed national broadcaster NRK has posted such an inflammatory statement without getting a balancing view from those accused/alleged Norwegians and Ethiopians of Tigrai origin, contrary to the principles of a responsible media.

According to Berglund Steen, the 6% Tigrean people of Ethiopia are all rulers over the rest 94% of the people in the east African country. Berglund Steen continues to argue that the 5 million people of Tigrai could not have managed to rule the rest of the 85 million Ethiopians without making use of a complex network of spies operating actively both in Ethiopia and abroad. This kind of assertion is not only far from the truth but also a political immaturity that, in the first place, should not have deserved media coverage by this news outlet.

Berglund Steen's wild statement disgraces the proud Tigrean people of Ethiopia as a new brand of 21st century internal colonizers. He undermines the rest of the heroic Ethiopian people for being submissively enslaved by their own fellow Ethiopians from the north. Ethiopians are respected and patriotic people that successfully repulsed the repeated colonization attempts by Italy, Turkey and Egypt, let alone to succumb to being ruled by their kinds from Tigrai, the way Berglund Steen has tried to put. In fact, Berglund Steen's statement is tantamount to describing the peasant-majority people of Tigrai to have a supernatural power capable of manipulating their Ethiopian brothers and sisters, who outnumber them by at least fifteen times. On the other hand, his statement underestimates the historically proven intelligence and patriotism of the Ethiopian majority, implying them as sub humans who get ruled by their minority kinds. With what better example can racism be explained than with such a description by Berglund Steen?

The writer of this piece believes that one has the right to criticize or praise a personality, ruling party, opposition party, government or any type of association the way one feels. However, to label an entire ethnic group of Tigrai as mere colonizers is none other than trying to consciously or unconsciously instigate hatred and racism.

Being an opposition alone does not warrant a group or an individual to be a democratic one. This writer believes that most of those at the helm of the Ethiopian Diaspora opposition, including those in Norway, do criticize and oppose the Ethiopian government from undemocratic perspectives. I strongly believe that such individuals, whom Berglund Steen has frequent contacts with, are directly or indirectly linked to the ex-military dictatorial regime, remnants of the former defunct armed movements, deposed or laid off bureaucrats of the government or incompetent dropouts of the present ruling party at an early stage of the guerilla movement. Such groups are, understandably, charged with either hate or revenge attitude toward the people of Tigrai, who, regardless of all odds, emerged victorious in the all-out war in May 1991. Such personalities do exhibit limitless hatred and an incessant campaign of provocation against Diaspora Tigrayans who refuse to collaborate with them in their politico-business activities. I believe Berglund Steen must have fallen prey to the agitation of such disgruntled groups. Instead, he should have relied on his conscience and critically distinguish and refine what to take and what not to.

For quite a long time, the people of Tigrai were subjected to untold maltreatment, misrule and genocide by the then brutal military regime of Mengistu Hailemariam and his predecessors. They were categorically bombed and killed in mass during Mengistu's tenure. The hostile regime had a swarm of about 180,000 Soviet Union and East European supported mechanized, infantry, police and militia forces that were stationed in the small Tigrai region of around 80,000 km². This amounts to almost three soldiers per km² and one soldier for four households!

The dictatorial regime bombarded nearly all towns and villages in the region by jet fighters and military helicopters. For example, Chilla and Samre towns were hit 45 and 34 times respectively by the internationally prohibited cluster and napalm bombs. The flush point of Hawzen town was widely known simply by the high number of people massacred in a few hours. That is, 2500 adults and children were killed in three hours of air bombardment in broad daylight. Otherwise, burning and bombing of towns and villages was customary for that regime in that part of Ethiopia.

The fascist military regime did this with the strong involvement of its party cadres, the army, security officials and other back-door supporting elites. The remnants of these (and their family members) are dispersed all over the world including Norway after the people of Tigray decisively won the 17 years long war they waged along with their brothers and sisters from other parts of Ethiopia. The remnants of the defunct dictatorial regime and other escapees of justice always cry foul in the name of democracy and human rights in order to gain sympathy from the west and from the Norwegian public on misguided grounds. When I see their pretention to be seen as stars of democracy and human rights, I recall the Ethiopian proverb "A hyena requests a leather mattress in a place it is not known for eating that". I think Berglund Steen "swallowed" all he was "fed" by his anti-Tigray associates without chewing and feeling it, as the Ethiopian metaphor puts it.

Had our self-proclaimed anti-racist activist dug a little deeper, he could have discovered that the current Ethiopian political system would not allow the colonization of a majority by a minority. The structure of the Ethiopian government has three branches, namely, the parliament, the executive and the judiciary. The number of Tigreans in the 547 member parliament is only 36 (based on the size of population). The corresponding number of ministers from Tigray in the 30 member cabinet is three, which is about 10% of the whole. The proportion of the same in the judiciary is also likewise.

Regarding the composition of the ruling party, the EPRDF, it should be clear that it is a coalition of four region and ethnic based organizations; namely, the TPLF from the Tigray region, the ANDM from the Amhara region, the OPDO, from the Oromo constituency and the SEPDM, from the south where 50+ ethnic groups exist. Each organization represents 9 and 45 to the executive and council of the EPRDF respectively. The EPRDF congress is also summoned by the same proportion.

In such a state/ruling party structure and set up, how would it be possible for the 6% Tigray people to be rulers and the rest majority (94%) to be the ruled ones as Berglund Steen is trying to preach us in exactly the same way he was lobbied? In my view, Berglund Steen is trying to misuse NRK like the Belgian Georges Ruggiu used Radio Collins in fanning the genocide in Rwanda that targeted the Tutsis. In connection with this, I sincerely encourage the Norwegian Anti-racist Center to first clean up its mess around its own leadership before it ventures to launch its noble mission of fighting racism in the much broader society.

Finally, I recommend the NRK media to balance views of such sorts with those of the targeted. I would also urge Berglund Steen to refrain from spreading such factually erroneous, socially malicious and politically dangerous statements. Such skewed inflammatory statement would only aggravate hate among Ethiopian Norwegian children who do not have access to understand the complex fabric of Ethiopian politics except to take everything the respected NRK broadcasts, which in this case is unwarranted and harmful.

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