

Close Letter to Mr. Obang Metho

From Selamawit Asefa July 26□ 2008

Recently I read your impressive article entitled “ Living in unreality –the disconnected world of Ethiopians”. I really appreciate your genuine descriptive and narrative writing about the real event of the annual Ethiopian sport festival ESP in DC.

I am one of the young Ethiopians who attend the ESF. But your description of the scene impressed me to run through your article as if I was not there. But what I would not like to pass without saying is that you said very little about the music festival.

But lets come to my main point for writing this letter. Your article touches upon many important points and issues. I strongly agreed with most of your points and explanations. You also raised many key questions. To tell you frankly, by this letter, I would not attempt to give an answer for any of them.

But the bone marrow of this letter is only to express my feeling on the title itself and say a few words about the reasons for the important concept you discussed - the concept of “the disconnected world of Ethiopians” and “Living in Unreality”. Please, allow me to borrow a few words from your article. You said,

“ Ninety percent of the people at the stadium were young, meaning under the age of 35. They were showing their patronage of anything Ethiopian-buying Ethiopian flags, T-shirts with Ethiopian images and words, CDs with Ethiopian music.... On the Ethiopian Day 30 to 40 thousand Ethiopians packed in the stadium to watch the Ethiopian cultural celebration. Those at the stadium all seemed to be so in love with Ethiopia: yet there was something missing. The entire week, I rarely saw any young people at the political meetings. Everyone at the political meeting was over forty years of age. I saw no young people giving input or becoming involved. Those making the decisions of the future Ethiopia were all older.

I strongly agreed with all the above-mentioned points because it is based on factual observation.

But the question is why the young Ethiopians have hardly seen at the political meetings. As a young Ethiopian, with all due respect, I have a little bit different understanding for the reason why the young Ethiopians have less interest at the political meeting. I believe that it is not a matter of living in unreality for the young Ethiopians. I also think that it is not a matter of disconnected realities held by the young Ethiopians. I also feel that it is also nothing to do with lack of information and understanding of the realities at home. Thanks to modern technology, we are living in a time where the every corner of the world is connected and is becoming a small village. We too are connected to our root. We read, watch, and listen every thing about our home country from the grand millennium festival to street children and beggars in the city of Addis. As you already said it, “we have not forgotten our Ethiopian roots.” So, it is not a matter of living in two different countries and nothing to do with the notion that the young people are detached from the realities of the real life in Ethiopia.

So, all the reasons discussed in your article have very little to do with the young-old dichotomy that we have witnessed at political meetings at this historical time in DC. It seems to me because of something else. Lets start my points by quoting one renowned personality.

Change your thoughts and you change your world. Ignorance never settles a question.
There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered to settles the question. Nelson Mandela.

For me it is something to do with the lack of change in our action and thinking on the way to bring the change that we need. It is some thing to do with the continuity or discontinuity in the politics of the sixties and politics of the twenty first century. So, for me the matter is the old and the young Ethiopians are living in two different political and psychological worlds while living in the same physical world. This is nothing to do with time, what we call generation gap. Rather it is something related to differences in the mentality and thinking of people of different times. To say specifically, some Ethiopians, mainly the old, are still living in the political world of the sixty's and detached themselves from the realities of the twenty-century's world political situation. So, for me, it is not the young people that are living in unreality. To be honest, rather it is the reverse. For instance, it is possible to say that the old Ethiopians, regardless of the Socio-political environment in which they are living, are still live in the era revolutionary politics while the young peoples are living in the world of liberal democracy. There are differences in the mean and trajectory to achieve the social, political objective between the old and the young Ethiopians. So, there is dichotomy between pro revolutionary versus pro democracy, pro war vs. pro peace, pro hate vs. pro love, pro conservative vs. pro progressive, pro affiliation vs. pro freethinking, pro enmity vs. pro friendly, pro monarchy vs. pro liberalism...etc.

So, the young Ethiopians and the old Ethiopians are completely in different path, the path of the 21thC and the path the 60s politics, to bring change. For instance, the old people are still talking about politics of movement and politics of social revolution. But the young generation are thinking about progressive politics under the framework of liberal democracy.

I would say it is the old generation that permanently, not to say temporarily as you said, disconnected from the realities of the 21thC. Boldly speaking, the old Ethiopians have reserved themselves from the modern political culture of the 21thC, while the young people keeping themselves away from the political culture of the 60s. This is also the reason for the creation of the disconnected world of Ethiopians. I think we have to recognize this to make a difference in the future.

I also imagine, there are two problems or reasons for the creation of "the disconnected world of Ethiopians". On one hand the young Ethiopians that are living in the modern political world and the do not want to slip back from the political system the 21thC and join the politics of the

60s. This is the impossible one. On the other hand, the old Ethiopians are failed to integrate/assimilate them with political life of the 21thC world. Here I would like to quote what Professor Mesfin Woldemariam has said at one of the political meeting that I incidentally attended. He said

“በውጭ የሚኖሩ ኢትዮጵያውያን በሀገራቸው የዲሞክራሲና ህጋዊ ስርአት ባለመኖሩ ይቆጫሉ፡፡ ከአብዛኛው በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ከሚኖሩ ወገኖቻችን በውጭ ያለው ለመማር ፤ የሰለጠነ ህዝብን ልምድ ለመቅሰም፤ የሰለጠነ የፖለቲካ ትግልን በመገናኛ ብዙሀን ለመከታተልና ለመማር የተሻለ እድል አላቸው፡፡ እድሉ እያለ ግን አሁን ድረስ ከ20 አመታት በፊት የያዙት እንደያዙ ቁጭ ያሉ አሉ፡፡ እንዳንድ ጊዜ የት እንዳለን ይቆጫኛል፡፡ ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ጨለማ ውስጥ የምንኖር እንክዋን እንደዚህ አናደርግም፡፡”

This is what he said.

So, the problem is the old generation prefer to live in the political life of the 60s while standing in the middle of the 21thC and demand the young people to think, act or behave in the same way. This seems impractical. Because there is difference of laws that govern the politics and the action of people of the two worlds, the world of the 60s and 21thC.

From history, we have seen the outcome of the law that governs the politics of the 60s. For instance, Che Gueverra tried to reproduce the Cuba revolution in Bolivia but was absolutely a disaster. The Americans tried to reproduce the Entebbe raid by the Israelis in Entebbe, Uganda, and the outcome was again a complete disaster.

Even the written historical accounts of ancient and modern Ethiopia tells us the political journey that the old Ethiopians travel - the revolutionary, political movements- have been concluded without any tangible success except causing damage to human life and property. So far the relentless efforts of young Ethiopians all along with the old Ethiopians political line have not paid off to the chagrin and dissatisfaction of many generations including the 20thC youths. So it is time to close our eye and think for a second the future journey and not to repeat our previous failures again. This is not only because of time have changed but also because of all the efforts so far were out of touch with the basic principle which bring about a fundamental political change Ethiopia. Most of, of course all act of physical force had threatened the live of innocent young people, which was mostly counter productive. In one Amharic historical book, it has been written that

“...ሁሉም ፖለቲከኛ በ1966 የወለዳቸውን አስተሳሰቦችና ድርጊቶች አንግቦ ለለውጥ ሀዋሪያነት የተነሳውን ወጣት የፖለቲካ ድርጅት ቀኝና ግራ ተሳሳቡና ቀይ ሽብር፤ ነጭ ሽብር፤ ጥቁር

ሽብር፣ ውጥኔ ሽብር፣ የሰታሊን በትር፣ የማኦ ከዘራ፣ የሌኒን አርጩሜ፣ የማርክስ ለበቅ፣ የኤንግልስ ብረት ቦክስ፣ የፔኩቨራ ስቴኪኒ፣ የኬሚሶን ጠገራ፣ የሆፕኒ ዘነዘና.... ወግቱን አጨደች፣ ቀጠፈች፣ ቀረጠፈች፣ ሰለቀጠች፡፡፡”

So, there is no fundamental change form the past in the political pattern of the old Ethiopians today. Even there is no attempt to change that political path for the young Ethiopians to get involved. There is no unity, the type of unity we observe at the stadium, among the old politicians; there is bitter sense enmity between politicians and supporters, even among those who claim themselves as democrats.... So, We need change in all the political lines, we need unity of idea and purpose, we need one democratic party, not many democrats or many Democratic Party, we need peaceful and friendly atmosphere in the political campaign....in order to get involved. If we all are working to bring democracy in a democratic ways, we all have to be democrats first. If we are democrats, democrats never fight, so we become one. If we become one and united no one left behind and get involved in everyway. Unless it seems difficult for the youths

They always say time changes things, but humans actually have to change things for themselves. The reasonable man does not persist in trying to adapts the world to himself rather adapts himself to the world. George Bernard Shaw

The young people do not want to be governed by the outdated political laws of the 60s, this may be one of the reason that keep them away from those political meetings. The young people need new political fashion in the political market, politics with love, politics with respect and tolerance, politics in a friendly manner like Obama and Clinton.... to get involved in politics. Just as there were new T-shirts with new Ethiopian images or new CDs with new Ethiopian music, we need new politics with new and modern political fashion in the political market too for us to buy like the T-shirts and CDs. But the old Ethiopians were trying to sale old fashion politics for us in the liberal market of the 20thC, where choices are free. So where is the problem if the buyers refuse to buy the old fashion product of the sellers?

For me, this is the time for young Ethiopians both at home and abroad to take time to think and come up with fresh ideas to bring political change in Ethiopia. And within the prevailing old political environment, it is better if we are never connected with the status quo.

To conclude;

“The path to our destination is not always a right and a straight one. We go down the wrong road, we get lost, we turn back to look for other path. In the laboratory of politics, the ingredients or variables used in political experiments are in a constant change, making reproduction of a previous combination is impossible.”

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