

The Illusive Amhara

by Imru Zelleke

10 June 2001

If he doesn't exist, the Amhara should be invented, because who else is there to blame for all the ills in Ethiopia? For some he is used as a smoke screen for their own inadequacies, because being an Amhara seems to dispense oneself from all failings and sins. For others it is a source of all their ills, because, were it not for the Amhara oppressor they would have reached Nirvana on their own.

Therefore, the Bogus man for all! Indeed, a most enviable role.

Being an Amhara myself with a mixture of different ethnic lineage in my system, I had a hard time finding this Amhara fellow who is everything to everybody. So, angry and frustrated I went in search of this fellow to tell him to stop confusing and pushing all Ethiopians about and around. So, I took my Range Rover and journeyed to the Amhara land. Via Shewa, Wello, Amhara Saynt, Begemdr, Goggiam etc. It was also a rare occasion to visit my own relatives. Guess what I found? My Amhara is as poor and destitute as everybody else in Ethiopia, if not worst in most cases. None of the regimes past or present had done anything to help him. A far cry from the oppressor and exploiter that he is supposed to be.

Even more confused than when I started my journey, I returned to Addis in search of this Amhara fellow. I went to the anthropological department of the AAU, read papers, discussed with experts, consulted professor and pundits alike and found that this Amhara character is much more complex than I first thought. It seems that there are many versions and many aspects of the Amhara, depending to whom you talk to and in what political sphere. The Amhara fellowship was becoming even more abstract.

Then I said it must be the ruling class. When I examined the ruling elite, I found out that starting from the Imperial house, the balabats and down to all classes under, they were all of mixed ethnic and cultural background. In fact the big majority of Ethiopians are of mixed racial/ethnic background, and that such thing as racial or ethnic purity was a lot bunkum! Whatever abuse occurred must be shared by all that ruled in one form or another, for the simple reason that at any given historical time the ethnic group who had the upper hand committed abuses to foster its rule. The paradigm of those periods being conquer and rule, it would be pointless to view the past with contemporary notions of governance.

Discussing language, aside of the Geez alphabet, as languages Amharic, Oromigna, Tigrigna and all the others, have interacted with each other for centuries and assimilated words and expressions. As to the Geez alphabet, some experts say that it has better universal applications than the Latin alphabet and that it would eliminate the problem of spelling once for all. Examples: in English the word 'thorough' is written with eight letters in Geez it needs only two 'To-Ro', in French 'beaucoup' is written with seven words in Geez with two 'Bo-Ku', and so forth. The Amhara was still illusive.

The Illusive Amhara

by Imru Zelleke

10 June 2001

A bit wary, I decided to go to Addisu Gebeya, where I hoped to get better answers to my queries. You know the Gebeya? It is a boiling pot of human energy and enterprising spirit. There I found people from all over Ethiopia, plus Somalis, Sudanese, Kenyans, Indians, Arabs. People from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, from Gambela to Assab. They were trading, buying and selling to each other, they prayed in the same Church or Mosque, they shared and thrived in the same Edirs, Ekubs, Mehabers wakes and weddings. No animosity beyond the usual competition, no ethnic fight, no language problem. Actually some of them protested when their Eritrean neighbors were expelled from Ethiopia.

Then I realized why the politicians needed a Bogus man, and that the Amhara they talk about is a chimera, and that culturally the Amhara context was as complex as the Ethiopian spectrum. The sad part is the bloodshed and misery incurred because of this Bogus man, who might have existed a long time ago but is now invisible.

For my part I have concluded my queries by remaining, what I always was, an Ethiopian. I don't need a Bogus man to make my case. I hope that all my compatriots will respect and cherish all cultures in Ethiopia, which are a marvelous and rich heritage that make the singularity of Ethiopia. We must have the moral and intellectual courage to admit our faults as well as our achievements. We must transcend the past and look at the future, and remain Ethiopians in the broader context of the Ethiopian nationhood and ethos..

What I have discovered instead is that all Ethiopians have a very mature perception of their plight. What preoccupies them most, are some **serious common problems** that threaten their daily life and their future survival, such as:

- **abject poverty**
- **disease**
- **education**
- **environmental degradation**
- **under-development**
- **hunger and famine**
- **farmers and urban poor**
- **unemployment**
- **bad governance and endemic corruption**
- **and countless other real problems.**

These vital problems, and how to solve them is rarely discussed by politicians or would-be leaders alike. What is offered to us Ethiopians is a litany of past abuses, a serialized mystification of a defunct Bogus Man and inopportune political shadow boxing.

What the Ethiopian people want is not historical rhetoric's, they have no time for running around chasing the ghosts of past kings and potentates. They want clean water to drink and wash with;

2/3

The Illusive Amhara

by Imru Zelleke

10 June 2001

they want proper food to alleviate their hunger; they want schools for their children; they want hospitals and medicines for their health; they want work and jobs to gain their livelihood and their self respect; they want freedom and justice; they want to be free from the yoke of corrupt and inept bureaucrats and cadre who terrorize their lives and siphon their meager possessions; they want to be safe from hunger and food deficiency; they want to pursue their lives in freedom, peace and human dignity under the Rule of Law. They want leaders that respect and protect their rights and aspirations, and whom they can respect in return. They want a democratic system of government that will lead them to their rightful place amongst the nations of the world, instead of being amongst the last poor.

This is 2001, the beginning of a new millennium. To secure our survival as a people, we must start building for the future. There is no way of advancing forward, looking backward. The common bonds that join us geographically, socially, economically, culturally and historically, endow us with a fabulously wealthy foundation, upon which to build a bright and prosperous future for all Ethiopians. Let's do it.

Ethiopia Lezelalem Tenour.
Imru Zelleke

(Former Ambassador of Ethiopia, Ret.)
