

Smear Campaign or a Genuine Concern?

By Amal

“Bilal Communication has signed a contract with Ethiopian Broadcasting Service TV (EBS TV) to deliver a two hour program – Bilal Show – a week”.

This must be news worthy of attention, but sadly it so happened that the very article that disarmed me into compromising my busiest schedules proved to be one of the saddest stories written against a proposed initiative yet to be launched. While agreeing with the author of this piece on the significance of a truly serving media outlet for Ethiopian Muslims, I cannot and shouldn't make fun of the highly esteemed name of the Radio-Bilal. This is the very name the Ethiopian slave, a true hero, and companion of our prophet (p.b.u.h) Bilal-al-Habasha (r. a. a) was called by. This name has immense religious and spiritual significance to more than a billion and half brothers and sisters in Islam. The name Bilal symbolizes Ethiopia's and Ethiopian Muslims' dedication to the cause of Allah right from the onset of the prophetic mission. Hence it is unfortunate that our “concerned” writer puts it like *‘Muslim/Islamic/Arabic names’*. This is when I began to differ with this gentleman.

The writer tells us about a certain initiative by fellow Ethiopians which in his eyes has so many problems and invites us to see as he did, the *“harvest of shames in less than two years”*. I do apologize for highlighting his ludicrous analysis of events with such junky and uncultured words. Rightly so, for some people failure in one could generate a grim picture of everything else but to succumb for failure is un-Islamic. Despite our large numbers in the Ethiopian Muslims Interfaith Dialogue for Justice paltalk room, the commitment we have shown thus far to finance and sustain this one and only Radio doesn't match expectations. Hence, we the onlookers Nejashi OJ included are also to blame for some of the failures of the Radio. His report seems a kind of smear campaign and a crafted plan (even if one excuses it to be unintentional) to discourage whoever has done something in his/her power to further this noble cause.

It is certain that some people might innocently assume his report to be a free and independent exercise in disseminating information regarding Ethiopian Muslims' endeavors, just like any

independent journalism but in essence what his article does is to tarnish the image and personality of individuals who tirelessly dedicate their time and knowledge and to eclipse their efforts to the detriment of all Ethiopian Muslims. In fact I was expecting Nejashi OJ to call upon all Ethiopians to back the initiative and galvanize people to the cause, unfortunately it is otherwise.

For some reason, the writer perfectly acknowledges the involvement of learned scholars and elders in the initiative when he says “*(we would say all the names that we know of for their various tangible contributions in the affairs of Ethiopian Muslims)*”. However, as usual he negates this important development and asserts that “*They were threatened to get involved not because they endorsed the initiative but because they feared the consequence should they stayed outside*”. How, one with the right state of mind dares to think that Ethiopian Muslim scholars who got involved in an undertaking meant to benefit fellow Muslims did that for fear of undisclosed threat?! Here it may suffice to say that the writer is a little confused on how to treat the very respectable, learned Muslim men in his paper as well as infuse some unfounded accusation of crime. Folks let’s not humiliate ourselves by incorporating such bold assertions.

We were also made to believe, if we may, the emergence of a possible divide between Muslims. I would love to see the explanation on how a supposed TV show could drive a wedge and fracture the unity of Ethiopian Muslims be they at home or in the Diaspora?!

In another point, a closer scrutiny might tell a different story but even if we agree with the writer, just for the sake of argument, and conclude that workable plans or strategies are absent, it is the duty of those careful minds who see empty adventure as a source of devastation to provide alternative formats or to designate directions in this scheme, not that they sit idle and demonize noble efforts at will. I reckon that every project and effort has to learn from its previous failings and correct its shortcomings but I don’t see it fit to abandon one’s mission just because one of its projects or undertakings has encountered an unusual rough ride.

“*The reality is not so rosy as was said in the briefing*” says the writer, nevertheless, playing twists and turns gets us nowhere. I personally attended the briefing and never heard any irrational assertions to disillusion the attendees. Given the uneasy takeoff Bilal has experienced, the person who gave the briefing has attempted to underscore the various difficulties that may surround this

new mission. But for Nejashi OJ to prejudge the performance of ‘a yet-to-be-launched’ TV Program based on an entirely different encounter (Radio Bilal) denies him objective experience and it would be like putting the cart before the horse. Let the show start and then, only then can he make objective assessments. On the issue of choosing suitable medium, in this day and age it is indeed difficult to find an entirely *halal* channel to convey one’s message; hence, how to go about it is the task of the learned Muslims to decide on or to issue *fatwas*, not for bloggers like us to scramble on.

The writer in his footnote tells us that EBS TV is a private media company, yet he questions the very business ideas of a company that is out there to make as much money as it could. What’s wrong with inviting Muslims to air their programs if similar opportunities are also extended to other Christians?! What point is the writer making when he accused the EBS TV (a Private company, not a political party or government) of securing Muslims’ representation unless he wants to see us remain underdogs as we have been for millennia! To the contrary, if we were not invited to involve in the scheme, we would have been complaining and cry foul play. It is lack of opportunities and absence of such involvement that forced us to lag behind. Luckily, today the old order where we were second class citizens has gone for good.

“Accountability, transparency, independence and professionalism are some of the other issues to be addressed if any given media or any other initiative, for that matter, is to be of real service to Ethiopians.” This sounds perfect, but unless backed by practical actions and deeds, suggesting these ideas after a barrage of criticism would be nonsense. Indeed Nejashi OJ has highlighted a legitimate concern but if he is consumed by his unwarranted skepticism and avowed promises towards discouraging the little effort other Muslim fellows are building, then you have lots of work to do.

In conclusion I would like to invite you, my reader to closely scrutinize the essence of Nejashi OJ’s approach towards Bilal Communication Inc. recent challenges. Is Nejashi OJ triumphant in reporting the obstacles Bilal has faced or expressing a legitimate concern over a feared demise of what would be a great media outlet for us Muslims?!