

Dedebit: A Treasure Revered By Progressives and Belittled By Reactionaries

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As the saying goes, “Those who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.” Likewise, people who write and post on Ethiomedia mustn’t throw stones first for they really don’t know themselves and much less their targets. Take, for example, the way they reference Dedebit, the birthplace of the freedom we all enjoy today thanks to the selfless individuals who sacrificed their lives for us.

Counter to their claim to know it all, these hate mongers often mistake Dedebit for “dedeb” and are quick to label their critics as “graduates of Dedebit University.” By doing so, they hopelessly think--in their little minds—that they can silence the voice of progressive people such as Engineer Girma and others. For His greatness, when Jesus Christ encountered such people He asked His Father for forgiveness on their behalves, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Consistent with the Bible reference, forgiveness is in order for these people too, but, unlike the people referenced in the Bible, I would like to give them the benefit of the doubt: Hence, this 101 on Dedebit.

On February 22, 1975, Dedebit Practical University was opened for business with only five dedicated students. Unlike traditional learning institutions, Dedebit didn’t have lecture rooms, dormitories, formal libraries, and designated lectures. At Dedebit University, the sky was the class room; the bush was the dormitory; the local people were the library; the portable blackboard was the exercise book; and the students themselves were the lecturers. The admission criteria were not merely good grades, but perseverance, self-control, dedication, motivation, and, more importantly, self-sacrifice.

Grading was tough: there was no chance for failure, because the stakes were so high. Self-evaluation was a very common practice in the teaching and learning process, yet amazingly unbiased. Due to the shortage of personnel, there was no specified field of study per se: Students were expected and trained to be all rounded professionals who can handle an array of problems.

Though certain, at Dedebit University, graduation day was not known—with an open-ended number of credit hours. There were no semesters and no summer breaks for the students. School was on 24/7. This very nature of the students earned them the powerful name in struggle for freedom, “Tegadelti.” On the basis of rigorous course work and the contribution of their efforts to the improvement of humanity, justice and equality, all “Tegadelti” are candidates for doctorate in philosophy (CPh.Ds). I would also further argue that all of them could win the Nobel Prize for their outstanding contributions to peace and stability in our country. And, if this is what Ethiomedia means when it says “graduates of Dedebit University”; so be it.

Yes, there was also a tuition fee for attending Dedebit University, but the currency was not money: It was life itself. Contrary to your typical university loans, however, there was no option taking advantage of the grace period after graduation, nor was there a payment deferment option during difficult times. Students were ready to pay the required payments from the time they joined the school and never complained of the high cost of education.

From those humble beginnings, and tough circumstances, present day democratic Ethiopia was born. On May 28, 1991, Dede-bit University laid a cornerstone for the proliferation of governmental and private universities throughout our country. Consequently, our country is home to about two dozen universities, and counting. If this is the weakness of Dede-bit University; so be it.

In August 1994 a constitution that guaranteed the rights (up to secession) and equality of all nations and nationalities was ratified with the help of the “Dede-bit University graduates” for the first time in the history of our country. If this is what Ethiomedia calls one of the shortcomings of Dede-bit University; so be it.

Ethiopia, for the first time in its entire history, has held three consecutive national elections that were hailed as free and fair by world renowned election observers such as the former U.S. president Jimmy Carter thanks to the sacrifices of the Dede-bit University graduates and others. If this is what Ethiomedia labels as a drawback; so be it.

Ethiopia is blessed to have leaders with high caliber and resilience. I am happy to announce that most of these talented leaders are graduates of Dede-bit University. Due to good governance and sound economic strategies, Ethiopia’s economic growth is now in the double digits. Not to mention, the quality of leadership is a testimony in itself that the educational quality at Dede-bit University may surpass that of some Western Universities—certainly the on-line ones. If this is what can be achieved by a graduate from Dede-bit University, I would be the first to apply for admission to the school. Who wouldn’t, if it were not a little bit too late?

Finally, if the act of making sure the “derg” and the born-again “dergists” are not going to come to power is synonymous with the word “Dede-bit”; so be it. After all, this was the goal “Dede-bit” was set to achieve in the first place some 32 years ago. If this turns out to be a nightmare to some reactionaries, that is too bad. They have to live with it, because it is here to stay for generations to come.

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