

Political intolerance, unscrupulous private media, and religious extremism in Ethiopia

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The success of any country depends, among other things, on the strength and ingenuousness of its politicians (in the ruling party and in the opposition block) and of its actors in the private media as well as on the integrity of its various religious institutions and the legitimacy of their demands. However, I am of the opinion that the aforementioned factors that determine a country's success don't prevail in Ethiopia for the following reasons.

As everyone might agree, EPRDF is the pioneer in introducing a democratic system in Ethiopia. To this end, various institutions were set up so as to accelerate and strengthen the democratization process and transform the infant democratic system into a full-fledged one. Multi-Party System and Freedom of Organization, Freedom of Speech and Expression, Independent Legal System and the like are but few of the many things that EPRDF had brought to life and has been untiringly working towards their growth with the aim to foster and flourish democracy in the country.

Unfortunately, though there are many opposition political parties in Ethiopia, no one of them is willing and/or capable to take advantage of the conducive political atmosphere that EPRDF had created, leave alone play its part in the democratization process.

As far as EPRDF's effort in building the economy is concerned, I have decided not to write a word simply because both friends and opponents of the ruling party would certainly agree that the Ethiopian economy has been considerably mounting especially for the past 10-15 years now.

Though almost all Ethiopian Political Opposition Party Leaders are irrational and selfishly pigheaded, the ruling EPRDF lacks the patience that is expected of it to the

extent of failing to openly discuss major national issues with the opposition block. I see the ruling party as MOTHER/FATHER and the opposition political parties as its SONS and DAUGHTERS and I expect parents to be more forbearing and willing to openly discuss with their children to either convince them or get convinced by their children.

There are some important things (laws, regulations, policies, etc.) that EPRDF considers final and unalterable but are still the core areas of disagreement among politicians. For instance, there is no a broad national consensus on laws pertaining to land ownership and the right to self determination (including secession), just to mention. I know that the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia had gleefully accepted the Ethiopian Constitution. However, I believe the fact that the Ethiopian Constitution doesn't have the same meaning and value as the Bible and the Quran and, therefore, some items or articles within it might need discussion and amendment.

I personally believe that the ruling party is duty-bound to safeguard its citizens from all forms of physical and morale harassment. However, although many individuals have been overtly committing crimes against humanity and human dignity, the ruling party is too reluctant to timely take legal actions. I was a loyal reader of newspapers like *Wenchef*, *Satanaw*, *Asqual*, *Fitih*, *Seife Nebelbal*, and so on. What were all these newspapers promoting? Why were all these newspapers barred? You may collect and read some of these newspapers.

They all were advocating conflict among various ethnic groups just to make Ethiopia another Somalia, defaming government officials, disseminating fabricated and politically-motivated information, encouraging genocide against selected tribes (particularly against the people of Tigray) just to bring into Ethiopia all the misfortunes of Rwanda and so on. Though the government knows that all these are crimes, it had failed to take legal actions timely.

Those private "Independent Journalists" who are presently in jail must have been incarcerated quite several years ago. There are still many more individuals who are committing similar crimes masking themselves with "Private Press", "Political

Opposition”, and/or “Religious Institution” but the government hasn’t taken serious action.

The Multi-Party System and Freedom of Organization, which EPRDF must be credited for, had produced many opposition political parties that have been engaged in peaceful struggle within the country. While there is no a single good reason for an armed struggle, there are also few opposition political parties that have been vainly pursuing this second option as a better instrument in toppling the prevailing regime. Irrespective of the tool of struggle (peaceful or armed) that they had opted for, all opposition political parties have not been able to win public confidence and gain public support for the following reasons:

In civilized nations like the USA, the Republicans don’t simply oppose everything that the Democrats might do or propose to do. They rather put forward their opposition or support along with properly articulated GOOD REASONS. Moreover, if they happen to oppose, they present not only good reasons for their opposition but suggest BETTER ALTERNATIVES as well. Unfortunately, in our country Ethiopia, almost all opposition political parties OPPOSE EVERYTHING (the good and the bad alike) that the ruling party might do or propose to do.

To my utter dismay, when they oppose the ruling party, they either don’t present their reasons or come up with POOR REASONS and INFERIOR ALTERNATIVES. For instance, immediately after our former Prime Minister HE Meles Zenawi had officially inaugurated the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), many opposition politicians (from Medrek, Andienet, G7, and so on) had publicly expressed their opposition blindly saying that this Mega Hydro Power Project is meant for the ruling party’s political consumption.

I don’t think that any sane Ethiopian would oppose a socially desirable economic project like the GERD no matter under which regime (emperor, derg, EPRDF and so on) it might be constructed. Moreover, while a political party is supposed to effectively and efficiently utilize its time in drafting and amending its programs (political, economic, social, and the like) and discussing on them with the people,

almost all opposition political parties have been spoiling their time in groundlessly accusing and backbiting the ruling party in public gatherings.

I had personally attended three public meetings that were organized by one opposition political party and, regrettably enough, I had ended up with a good knowledge on how to denigrate individuals and their work and walked home with virtually no knowledge on its programs which, it believes, are superior to those of the ruling party.

The same is true for the printed and electronic media that are owned and run by opposition political parties in that all of them have been actively working in solely disapproving everything that the ruling party might do or propose to do and baselessly accusing and defaming the ruling party and selected high-ranking government officials. In other words, the printed and electronic media I am referring to have not been making any effort to familiarize the general public with the programs of the opposition political parties which they are owned and run by.

Ethiopia is perhaps the only country in the world where the opposition political party leaders are excellent at presenting demands that are improper and illegal. I have two best examples to substantiate my claim. First, about four years ago, I read newspapers called "Addis Admas" and "Reporter" that are published under the private press. In both these two newspapers, I read that an opposition political party called Medrek/Andienet had boycotted a major discussion with the ruling party simply because another opposition political party called EDP (lead by Lidetu Ayalew) was also present in the meeting.

Medrek/Andienet had demanded for a separate discussion with the ruling party, while the latter was willing to have major and broad discussions with all opposition political parties that are operating within the country. Was this a proper demand? I leave it to you, dear readers. Second, it is nationwide known that some individuals have been put behind bars because they were found to have been involved in criminal acts. However, in the rallies that were recently held by Andienet and Semayawe parties, we had seen slogans like "all individuals who are imprisoned must be unconditionally released".

For instance, I was a loyal reader of the newspaper named "Asqual" that was published by Serkalem Publishing PLC and was owned by Eskindir Nega, a private journalist who is currently in jail. This "Journalist" was applauding the inhuman actions that Hitler took on the innocent Jewish people and he was advocating for the same actions to be taken on the people of Tigray (north Ethiopia) whom he openly called "cancers to the nation". Is asking the release of Eskindir Nega a legal demand? I leave it to you, dear readers.

With the exception of political opposition leaders and members, almost all the Ethiopian general public accepts the fact that the prevailing ruling party is the pioneer of all excellent things (political, social, economic and so on) that we have been witnessing in Ethiopia to-date. However, those who are in the opposition block are unwilling to swallow this fact but blindly consider the ruling party as enemy of the nation.

Besides, when they fail to find appealing reasons to discredit the ruling party's good deeds, they claim that the ruling party is "Weyane" but not "EPRDF" and, therefore, no matter what excellent things the ruling party might do, all are in favor of the people of Tigray. Such stance of the opposition block emanates from two sources: unfounded and blind hatred towards the people of Tigray and denial of the fact that, under EPRDF's regime, Ethiopia has been lead by the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia.

It is high time for the opposition block to recognize the fact that the domination by one tribe had become obsolete since when EPRDF took state power. Moreover, the opposition block must underscore the fact that it is wise to give due recognition and admiration to the people of Tigray for the simple reason that these are the very people who had fought more than their share to emancipate Ethiopia from the yoke of the brutal derg regime. This doesn't mean, however, that the people of Tigray are superior to any other tribe. In today's Ethiopia, all tribes are EQUAL.

Almost all political opposition parties in Ethiopia are composed of individuals who have diametrically divergent views, positions, and programs. There are those who

are odds and ends of the defunct emperor regime and, therefore, they want to have a regime in Ethiopia that is facsimile of the Emperor Haileselassie Regime.

There are those who were affiliated to the derg regime and, therefore, they want to have a regime in Ethiopia that somehow resembles to Mengistu Hailemariam Regime. There are still those that were dismissed from the ruling EPRDF, who don't want to have the emperor and derg types of regimes but wish to see a new regime in Ethiopia that puts in place all the things that they believe their former party (EPRDF) fails to do so.

Moreover, there are many individuals within the political opposition parties in Ethiopia that have some personal grievances against the ruling party (such as fired civil servants and confiscated business and property owners) but don't have their own political, social, and economic views and positions.

This last group of individuals simply swings among the first three groups of party members after carefully observing the environment around them. Therefore, the many conflicts within the same political opposition party that we frequently encounter emanate from poor and fragile party composition.

How many times did Professor Mesfin punch his party leaders or get punched by them, just to mention? Why are Professor Beyene Petros and Girma Seifu publicly insulting each other? Have you read a newspaper and a magazine on which a series of articles that were contributed by Professor Beyene Petros and Girma Seifu were published whereby one insults the other?

Assuming we give our votes (during the upcoming national election) to such political opposition parties, do you think that they could lead Ethiopia in a unified manner? Don't you believe that, if such irresponsible opposition politicians become the leaders of Ethiopia, the fight among them could spillover the entire country and generate multifaceted national calamities? I leave it to you, dear readers.

Undermining and defaming another opposition political party and its leaders is the common denominator of all political opposition parties in Ethiopia. Why was CUD defaming EDP and its leader Lidetu Ayalew during the post-1997 EC election

turmoil? Why was Semayawé Party's leader repeatedly boasting that his party is the best opposition political party in Ethiopia while dubbing other opposition political parties "trash and useless"? Why are Medrek/Andienet leaders still underestimating Semayawé Party and downgrading its leaders? I leave it to you, dear readers. It seems that the Ethiopian political opposition parties are not able to visualize the simple fact that cooperation, rather than confrontation, among them is crucial to their success.

The presence of many different political opposition parties in Ethiopia, which operate in isolation from one another, makes each political opposition party powerless to separately challenge the ruling party. Ethiopia must be, as I believe, the only country on earth that has the largest number (more than 90, if I am not mistaken) of political opposition parties.

Had there been wise and rational political opposition in Ethiopia, those political opposition parties that have trifling differences in their programs (political, social, economic and the like) would have opted for amalgamation with the aim to join their effort and pose fruitful challenge on ruling party.

For instance, there are many political opposition parties in the regional state where I reside and belong to (Oromiya) claiming that they represent the entire people of Oromoo. I believe that the many political opposition parties in the Oromiya regional state are meant and expected to address the major questions and demands of the entire people of Oromoo rather than those of a particular individual Oromoo and/or a specific area within Oromiya.

Therefore, what is the need to have many political opposition parties in the Oromiya regional state, which all boast to represent the entire people of Oromoo? Why can't they unite themselves and form one strong political opposition party? I leave it to you, dear readers.

Since political opposition parties receive financial assistance from such sources as the ruling party, their members, international agencies, and governments of developed nations and that there are individuals within the parties who misappropriate the parties' financial resources and build up their personal affluence,

the establishment of an opposition political party has almost become a lucrative business in Ethiopia. This perhaps is the fundamental factor that deters two or more political opposition parties, which have nearly similar programs, from merging and forming one strong opposition political party.

Some media have always been praising and calling for the release of some individuals who have been jailed for their criminal acts. They do so not because they are certain that those in prison did not commit crime of any type but merely to obtain cheap popularity (among the families, relatives, and friends of those in prison) and nurture unfounded public outrage against the ruling party. This is an insult to the general public which exactly knows why some are imprisoned.

In their endeavor to assist a specific political opposition party unconstitutionally assume state power, most such printed and/or electronic media have always been advocating chaos (like what has been happening in the Arab World) and encouraging conflict among tribes.

Most such printed and/or electronic media have not been willing to refrain from violating ethical and legal standards simply because they have undue trust and confidence on such international organizations as the Human Rights Watch and CPJ as well as on governments of developed nations. As for me, members of these printed and/or electronic media must have been intentionally committing crimes with the aim to flee to developed countries and ask for a political asylum there where they would certainly have better lives.

On Addis Admas newspaper that was circulated on Saturday Meskerem 18/2006 EC, I read (page 3-4) an article on the conflicts among Dekeka Elias, Mahbere Kudus, and Tahadso followers (all Christians) and the disagreements among Wehabiya, Selefia, and Ahbash followers (all Muslims).

Such conflicts among followers of the same religion have still persisted irrespective of the fact that there is only one Bible and one Quran. Therefore, why have followers of one and the same religion been conflicting? The following, which

represent the flaws of religious institutions and of believers of a particular religion, might be among the many reasons for such conflicts:

Believers of one and the same religion, who have grouped themselves in many different ways, strongly want the group they belong to dominate the other groups in the religion. For instance, those in Dekeka Elias may want Dekeka Elias dominate the other groups within the Christian Religion in terms of, say, leadership roles.

Likewise, those in Wehabiya may want Wehabiya dominate the other groups within the Muslim Religion in many ways. Such group mentality and lack of religious harmony may cause a national disaster, if it is not properly controlled and cautiously dealt with before it goes out of hand.

This is particularly relevant to the conflicts among the various groups within the Muslim religion, which we have been observing for quite many years now. Such conflicts are always instigated by few of our Muslim brothers and sisters who adamantly demand for the introduction of some traditionally alien beliefs into the Ethiopian Muslim society and unlawfully impose the same.

Many petro-dollar Arab countries have been spending large sum of money with the aim to introduce their own religious beliefs, laws, and regulations in various countries around the world. There certainly are some Ethiopian Muslims who continuously receive financial incentives from Arab countries so that they could help them successfully export their religious beliefs into Ethiopia.

Given the fact that the Ethiopian government is secular, I don't believe that it unduly intervenes in religious affairs. In contrast, followers of a particular religion might make use of their unsatisfied religious demands and questions with the aim to fulfill their disguised political agenda. Moreover, as I had seen in the recent opposition rallies, there is a very big room for the opposition block to make use of some religious demands and questions and gain political benefits out of them.