

‘The Developmental State and Secularism’ in Ethiopia’s Context’

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Prelude

I have been observing that the agenda ‘secularism’ has recently been on the Ethiopian skies attracting both scholarly and grassroots attentions. As a matter of common trend in academic dialogue, responses producing and reproducing more responses, I have come also across several criticisms and opinions doubting the genuineness or the capacities of the developmental state to attain irreversible stages of secularism. Almost all criticisms revolve around the logics and grammars of the ‘developmental state’ at theory level and its practical applications in Ethiopia from differing standpoints ranging from democracy, inflation, educational quality to many others. I have learned a lot from all criticisms as much as I have wondered about some unexpected correspondences and reflections.

One friend from Addis Ababa University emphasizes what he underlines as ‘the jumbled conception of the developmental state’ in my arguments at some of my notes and makes a generalization that the developmental state was and is nothing but a ‘nebulous theoretical construct’ for simply covering up embedded authoritarian appetites. By this, this friend rejects totally my stress on ‘development’ as an ultimate justification for the developmental state thesis. He mentioned two presidential names of the 1970s and 80s in South Korea, two in Indonesia, and the existing Russian president, Vladimir Putin, as *prima facie* evidences supporting his views. Advising me to read Messay Kebede, he goes much further in negating the notion of the developmental state as ‘Post-Cold war smokescreen of totalitarianism beatified by ‘polite terminologies.’

Well, I tried already to access Messay’s writings on this specific topic and learned that my friend shares not only general ideas but also terms and phrases with him. I also found out that Messay has erected a big wall of ‘conspiracy theory’ as an established consciousness and research methodology by shutting his mind up apparently until death. To my confusion, Messay, at one point, appears comically to tower himself high above the ‘Ethiopian mind’ by his die-hard but poorly systematized prattle about ‘Ethiopia’s uniqueness.’ From this, he progresses to purport an equal felt-need for ‘epistemological purity’ of Ethiopian studies. At another point, however, soon, he swerves to deny that ‘ethnic identities and ethnicity or ethnic articulations’ were and are inescapable challenges intrinsic to the physiological set up of the Ethiopian state, liked or not. Once Messay finds himself in this shackle, technically speaking, he cannot help but push ahead to conspiratorially libel the ‘developmental state’ as an ethnocratic political project. He paints the notion of the ‘developmental state’ as a leeway for dictatorship in a world where neo-liberalism failed to address problems of developing states, and Marxism being a defunct option. Ohh..., by this, he blocked all venues to a constructive dialogue.

Back to my friend in Addis, probably a Muslim from his name, my surprise, however, followed when I read his criticism of what he calls ‘misguided and partisan views of the developmental state on the specific agenda of state secularism’. He says ‘almost all states in the so called “the developmental coat’ from the giant China to minuscule Singapore share one uniform policy dress, that is, deeper and restless siege mentality’ in face of new and progressive ideas and religious assertiveness, as threats to their lust for power.’ This friend soon brings Ethiopia into this category of states, which swear in secularism but do

not feel safety when seeing it enjoyed specifically by Muslims, and mentions the 'authoritarian response of the government to the recent Muslim agitation across the country'. I thank this friend for his restraint that he did not call the Ethiopian state behavior as one of 'Islamophobic' dispositions.

On the side of the government, I happened by some chance to have been tuned to an explanation by one high-ranking government official, Mulugeta Wureta, State Minister of Federal Affairs. Mulugeta, in his interview with Radio Fana, conceptualized 'secularism' in Ethiopia, as a political condition in which the government never succumbs to any religious rules, prescriptions, or scriptures other than the constitution, which I have readily agreed. However, he soon proceeded to make a serious definitional and application error when he asserted that the duty of secularism does not concern the Ethiopian peoples, who are, in his words, of strict religious beliefs and codes. Mulugeta concluded by citing Article 11 of the Constitution that only government and its institutions are duty bound to the principle of secularism.

Well, Mulugeta in this interview made two mistakes: firstly, he knowingly or unknowingly confused 'secularism' with 'irreligiosity', or in the words of some scholars, 'disbelief in any God or gods'; secondly, he wrongly reduced the concept of the 'state' to mean just simply a 'government.' In the first case, secularism never refers to being completely free from, if not against, religious matters at individual level and public institutions, in some specific circumstances. City Administrations, for example, provide places of prayer during religious holidays for all religions equally and guard congregations from insecurities. This has nothing to do with religious interventions. Moreover, secularism never implies that government leaders have no religions while the Ethiopian peoples have them. Leaders can also worship any God of their own choice privately but never derive their rationales and foundations of public decisions from them. By same token, the Ethiopian people have their own religions still privately but never demand for government services based on religious codes and duties of their own.

As such, not only government leaders but also the entire people are duty bound to establish and manage vertically oriented civic and political relations with the government free from religious prescriptions. By this, Ethiopia as a state is secular, and never the government or the people separately from each other. Mulugeta should note that the Ethiopian constitution recognizes the right of the individual to both 'religiosity and irreligiously' but imposes 'secularism' when it comes to the political management of the Ethiopian state as a duty. Forcing citizens to serve the duty of both religiosity and irreligiosity however is against secularism. Emperor Haileselassie imposed 'religiosity' for example, while Derg imposed 'irreligiosity' on its party members and private restaurants as showcases of violating secularism. The Ethiopian state by the constitution currently never encourages or discourages either 'religiosity' or 'irreligiosity' as they are exclusive domains of the private sphere, which is beyond the scope of Mulugeta as a public official.

Back to the theme of this paper, 'the developmental state and secularism', I remember I wrote another article last year on same topic and alluded shortly in my monograph generally about the developmental state thesis in relation to secularism. Nevertheless, I found the criticisms of my friend on secularism and government response to the recent Muslim arousal as well as many other issues highly captivating urgencies calling my attentions anew. I, in this paper, focus on these points and will resort on the others, in general, some other time.

Nevertheless, I found the criticisms of my friend on secularism, the developmental state and government response to the recent Muslim arousal as well as many other issues highly captivating urgencies calling my attentions anew. Before I deal with the theme of this paper, I must parcel minimum baselines of the debate with regard to the developmental state before I delve into Ethiopia.

1. What is secularism to the developmental state?

In addition to the above, I received also other comments and some questions, which tended generally to challenge the theoretical and practical consistencies between the liberal principles of secularism and government handling of Muslim's demands as well as the current pattern of power successions by the ruling party. I may summarize the key questions and challenges as follows:

- ❖ How do you explain the developmental state from the angle of secularism and what is its philosophy about the issue elsewhere?
- ❖ How do you evaluate the behavior of the Ethiopian government in relation to the recent agitations of Muslims, articulated as 'let our voice be heard'?
- ❖ How do you see the coming to offices of new EPRDF officials into traditionally ideology-free institutions like universities?

First, I should recapitulate my previous arguments anew and in brief, as they are the causative agents of the dialogue. I wrote the following:

The developmental state does not stand necessarily in stark contrast to its liberal counterpart, the neoliberal state, in every thing and every ideal. There are specific areas of interest where the two brands of the state overlap. Both are, in principle, at least, for instance, politico-legal institutions. Politically, the developmental state is as much an authoritative and pronouncedly secular agency as the liberal state in many of the states in the developmental category. Both never surrender power monopoly to sectional, if not splinter, others, and to their bordered interests in any way. The philosophical undercurrent behind the concept 'secular' here, I feel, demands a serious concern. 'Secularism' as a liberal value legacy of the West requires the state and its agencies of transcending the 'high jacking hands' of specialized social interests craving just for their exclusive satisfactions.

I should here add some explanations on a few but most important issues in the discourse. By this, I mean one should emphasize, at least, five parcels distinguishing the developmental state from within and without as compared to other forms of the modern states particularly in the global South.

Firstly, the cardinal justifications and rationales for the developmental state to become 'developmental, and not liberal or any other form of the state, are found only in the need to urgently bridge the unbelievable wide growth gap between poor states in the South and prosperous ones in the North. The Developmental State differs structurally from other states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America under modernist neo-liberal grip on this life-or-death issue. On the specific concern of secularism, however, it out rightly agrees and shares many values, including several other organizing principles of the modern state, even more than the Euro-American liberal states, the natural and mainstream

sanctuaries of liberalism. Except a few developmental states for other internally unique and pragmatic policy factors, most other developmental states have proved friendly, successful and comfortable with the principle and practice of secularism as the best way to attain their ambitious development goals;

Secondly, as an extension of the above, the developmental state under the realities of wide religious diversities, on the specific question of 'secularism', is therefore a corollary counterpart of the liberal state rather than, contrary to the doubts of some readers, a Marxist regime. It is wrong to characterize any state-religion misunderstanding as a show of surviving Marxist views and traditions. The developmental state, deserving the nomenclature or calling itself so, is sure to break with Marxism and the Marxist state or any former philosophy or practice of state religion or state ideology that excludes others. The developmental state is different from the Marxist state in that it is never an antithesis to sectional interests founded up on their eliminations. It does so however by being never part of any one of them. Contrarily, sectional interests are part of the developmental state but never its creators and masters in their own right.

Thirdly, from the above point, one should appreciate that the liberal 'secular' or 'in-secular' agenda does not fundamentally constitute the foundational essence of the Developmental State for being developmental, and not another. What matters for the Developmental State is which best arrangement of state-citizen coalition could furnish the fertile ground for the massive uplift of the poor majority out of poverty and move toward rapid growth. The urgency with the Developmental State is never whether a citizen is a Muslim or a Christian but whether the state has won the good majority of citizens to side with the priority of growth from inside. The basic criterion of this coalition is quite social, economic and political, and never religious in the fashion of including some groups by excluding of others;

Fourthly, the Developmental State essentially is a strategic reliance on its human capital than on an exogenous source of national development. In light of this, under conditions of religious diversity, the Developmental State embraces 'secularism', for example, not simply because liberalism prescribes it as a standard state behavior but because it understands religion and religious differences against its grim and nonnegotiable partisanship to human dignity, and not to the worship of money or technology. In addition, the best way for the Developmental State within this cultural framework, unlike the unique cultural constitution of Indonesia and Malaysia, is to uphold the lofty principle of secularism defined as state neutrality in matters of religion. The Developmental State is sure to gear all into developmental effort and benefit all not by being a guardian of a particular religion against others or vice versa but by being secular and equally protector of all;

Fifthly, the Developmental State on matters of religions is a declared breakaway with both communism and the liberal approach of *modernization*, which argue that religions, more often than not, are liabilities of growth. As seats of strong biases in favor of industrialism and scientism, Marxists and Liberals equally share that religious traditions are structural impediments to the triumph of modernity in poor states. For modernist neoliberals, religions including Islam and Christianity inherently bear within themselves strong pressures of conservatism and traditionalism, as a most likely explanation for the persistence of poverty. Contrarily, the developmental state never accepts this line of argument, which supplies one of the constituent elements of its strong nationalism paradoxically in the era of globalization. The counter argument at the background is that

no modernization in the world started its evolutionary growth from a vacuum but from some kind of traditional basement. While the developmental state sets out to combat blind traditionalism, it is never at loggerheads against existing traditions including long surviving religions. Growth, for the developmental state, is largely tradition neutral because human nature across any tradition is positively correlated with inner drives for development.

This might seem a naïve conception of a complex political controversy. I understand that a developmental state is never a heavenly regime in which there are no disputes among specialized interests. My argument here is that a functioning developmental state is a system, which, in the words of the philosopher Joan Rawls, constitutes the basic structure (the state) that furnishes what he calls 'the primary goods' for all social and cultural groups as per their demands. The 'primary goods' demanded may vary from group to group where the vast majority usually tend to press for two or three meals a day, jobs, religious, cultural, linguistic and economic freedoms and equality. Conversely, other groups and mostly economically self-sufficient individuals in capital cities and major towns may prioritize press freedom, abortion rights, unrestricted market freedom, and other demands.

The developmental state is a broad based social coalition forged with the former social groups and the supplier of generous provisions, which is, enabling conditions, to satisfy their demands for their primary goods while it equally recognizes the demands of the latter. A problem comes when the latter group considers itself as the central structure in behalf of the former for the apparent justification that the majority is ignorant, submissive, and easily satisfied by state handouts. That is the main reason for me to argue that bottom-up complaints and arousals could never assume a structural or systemic level social conflict in a well functioning developmental state. It is against this background that I studied the Muslim arousal in Ethiopia in recent days.

2. The Ethiopian State and Secularism

The developmental state, as a totality of existing policy priorities and a good number of controversial practices thereof, has grown its Ethiopia's context. This state aligns itself primarily with social groupings based on socio-economic criteria than religious identity. The underlining organizing principle is that this state cultivates social empowerment among the rural agrarian as well as pastoralist and urban poor majority regardless of whether an Ethiopian household is Muslim or Christian or even non-religious at all. Socio-economic identity creates the basis for the state to work out a policy of preferential treatment, which it can never derive from religious prescriptions. Does it mean, however, that Ethiopia has attained a fully secular statehood? I admit that this is not a simple project to accomplish overnight in a country with a long history of state favoritism toward one religion at the expense of another. So,

I. Secularization in Ethiopia is not a point but a process

Experiences in Ethiopia's state formation and nation building projects show that bottom up state policies were never similar, if not uniform, but share one thing: they left deep-rooted hangovers of state-led in-secularism. The incessant process of state formation up to the 20th century saw a reciprocal hug between Orthodox Christianity and the state—

the Altar and the Sword. The Orthodox Church enjoyed a preferential treatment as an official state religion and institution. Islam and Orthodox Christianity had had the most complex and closest associations with the very state formation process for two handy reasons. The first is that both have had appreciable longevity, (without contradictions with the first point above) in which the latter obviously stood as the cultural right arm hand of the state while the former was at edges of political priorities and the embraces of ruling circles. Second, both religions grew historically to overlap with the mainstream socio-cultural basis of the Ethiopian society as agrarian, rural dweller and pastoralist majority in their own right, to these days.

This explained the imperial past of the country. The advent of Derg brought with itself three contradictory policy orientations. Derg appeared to uphold secular principles reflected in its 1989 Constitution, too, but, in practice, stepped into serious ambivalence. On the other hand, Derg imposed the duty of 'irreligious identity' specifically on its party members to have embraced Marxism-Leninism, in stead. This measure had a spillover effect on the people where officials ordered for religious marks of restaurants and other service firms to be erased and become empty. Derg also persecuted actively Protestantism, Wuhabbism, Jehovah Witness, and other denominations as 'strange imports' infringing upon the cultural and political integrity of the Ethiopian state. Thirdly, Derg, for political and ideological reasons, confiscated rural land, which the Orthodox Church used to own but began and continued paying monthly remunerations for the priests evicted as compensation until well up to its downfall.

As such, the developmental state is never a magic vaccine to stamp out all vestiges of past discrimination within a year or two. Therefore, if state secularism is the ultimate solution, then, the developmental state is nothing but a secularization process. I must make mention of a substantive argument by a Hosene as to what these mean:

Secular states become secular either upon establishment of the state (e.g. United States of America or India) or upon secularization of the state (e.g. France or Nepal). Movements for laïcité in France and for the separation of church and state in the United States defined modern concepts of secularism. Historically, the process of secularizing states typically involves granting religious freedom, disestablishing state religions, stopping public funds to be used for a religion, freeing the legal system from religious control, freeing up the education system, tolerating citizens who change religion or abstain from religion, and allowing political leadership to come to power regardless of religious beliefs.

Seen against this background, one may be sure that secularism in Ethiopia's context is appreciably a positive process for this and other justifications of principle and practice since the 1990s.

II. Secularism in Ethiopia is a 'Corrective Project'

Despite the poor considerations of some critics, I explained repeatedly in my consecutive notes that religions and secularism in the Ethiopian state have a set of distinguished patterns in their historical and political evolutions. One may iron out four points as showcases that make secularism in Ethiopia largely a corrective project through reforming the state and insuring all-rounded social advancement.

Firstly, all religions in Ethiopia (Orthodox Christianity, Islam or any other brands of religion) are, by their origins, imports from external civilizations but with remarkable adaptive processes to suite domestic social and cultural set-ups. No existing religious

institution or faith precedes the formation of the ancient state from Axumite times. Christianity arrived at the 4th century while Islam followed by the 7th century. Other religions have been recent introductions and developments. The point here is however that any variation in the time sequences of religious advents into Ethiopia can by no means serve as an excuse to pursue or promote unequal, discriminatory, and preferential treatments, at least, now under present situations. On the other hand, no religious group or institution in present Ethiopia is an artificial appendage or a stranger to the soil. It is rather an organic outgrowth inseparable from the evolutionary growth of the Ethiopian identity. As such, 'ours is first or second' argument, commonly heard among a good number of believers, is absolutely short of justifications to claim special privileges at the expenses of other religious groupings;

Secondly, one should make clear distinctions between Ethiopian citizenship, doctrinaire matters, and religious identities. Citizenship is subject to rationality and rigid rules of the state while religion is a faith of one's free choice. Doctrinaire matters are religious concerns as to what a particular faith or ordinance means to two believers of same or different faiths. When two Muslims or two Christians debate divergently from each other on what a specific Koranic or biblical verse means, it is a matter of doctrinaire differences beyond government concern. Still, when a group of believers or institutions diverges and debate on internal matters within the group, it is a religious matter attracting little or no government attentions. Nevertheless, let us assume that a Muslim and a Muslim or a Christian and a Christian could not agree to settle their differences. As the result, one threatens the security of the other by use of force or defamation. Then now, this becomes a civic matter between two Ethiopian citizens, which automatically invites government intervention. Criminal attempt or its commission in any form by either a Muslim or a Christian for any doctrinaire or religious or civil conflicts is surely the corrective domain of the Ethiopian state;

Thirdly, one should remember also that the formation of the Ethiopian state was never simply and only a political project. As a common historical trend, state leaders in the past of Ethiopia used both the Church and the Mosque as cultural unifiers to their political advantages at many points of the process. Unavoidably, this left a cultural tradition in which many continue to date to regard Orthodox Christianity for reasons of recently as a cultural arm of the Ethiopian state. On the opposite pole, some people including academics, authors, and the media as well as school curriculums continue knowingly or unknowingly to portray past interreligious conflicts, wars and their aftermaths as either 'holy or satanic' by associating them with the Ethiopian state. Explicitly speaking, some tend to monopolize the titles of 'Ethiopian patriotism' by fusing citizenship with religious identity and blindly doubting the loyalty of others to the Ethiopian state. The remedy of this biased interpretation of history could never come, however, unlike some wrongly think, at revenge or package of compensations but through social empowerment of citizens, their religious attachments aside;

Fourthly, the Ethiopian state was historically a political and ideological institution with little room for the growth and deepening of 'rationality'. State leaders asserted legitimacy from 'divine right' in imperial times or 'history' in Derg's case and never from their commitments to development, equality, and justice. Such inclinations never benefited one group without disadvantaging another group. The problem was that the constitutions of these regimes, which should have been rationally crafted institutions, were themselves instruments rather to the opposite goal. As the consequence, the state

machinery for long bore stamps of open irrationality, personality, and favoritism, which makes state level reform urgent at present.

A secular state institution and behavior is therefore both a practical exercise of secular principles today through correcting and reforming the past, and an ideal to attain for the future across generations through correcting past irregularities and strengthening best experiences.

III. Secularism in Ethiopia is ‘positive separation’

I repeat here my argument that the developmental state in its Ethiopian brand goes much farther than even most notable liberal as well as emerging states concerning in-discriminatory treatments. The government, for example, does not finance directly or indirectly religious schools or religious charities unlike the case in France; it does not preferentially subsidize religious pilgrimages. This squarely contradicts the experience in India where Muslims enjoy such state sponsorship by Parliamentary Act in their annual journey to Saudi Arabia. Surprisingly, the British Queen, in the very country of John Locke, the father of liberalism, has to swear up to these days at her inauguration into office to ‘protect the Anglican Church’ and its faith. Despite optional, the President of the United States is required by custom to mention God at his official oath. There is no such legal or customary imposition in Ethiopia except that presidents may be at liberty to say like what Girma Wolde Giorgis did: ‘God bless Ethiopia’ without referring to Christian or Muslim God.

I should also remind my readers and commentators that Ethiopia’s secularism, no matter how much secularized it is, is not what scholars call a ‘hostile separation’ of the state from religions. It proves rather a ‘friendly separation’ in the sense that the state limits not only religion from intervening in political matters but also restricts the state from intervening in religious matters. This, I believe, has a resultant practical secular value pattern emerging now in the country.

To my knowledge as a lecturer, there is no any restriction on “substantively religious codes of dressing and attire” or the wearing of all "ostentatious religious symbols," across Ethiopia’s school system. Muslim students are conventionally free to interrupt their class attendances midst lectures and go out of class for prayers. Informing their Islamic identity to the teacher is the only requirement to qualify.

Government institutions in Ethiopia are duty bound by the law to consider letters certifying that a believer was with them for some religious service like prayer for health or taking holy water as genuine. This is however a strict violation of the law in France, for instance. In Ethiopia, female Muslim students are free to cover their whole body except the eye; Orthodox Christians wear appreciably big crosses at visible sites of their bodies, the chest; all believers of any religious faith can wear freely T-shirts with biblical or Koranic messages at their fronts. Even teachers are under no known restrictions from posting and exhibiting religious quotes, frescos, and paints at the walls of their offices. It is common to hear religious songs out of government owned computers here and there. All these are against the law of the land in many western European states.

This may be something provocative particularly at times of sectional religious agitations. On that score, I am not a fan of any religious grouping with excessively exhibitionist tastes. However, I do not , at the same time, deny that there have been surviving legacies demanding state and citizens’ tolerance in the context of positive secularism.

IV. Secularism in Ethiopia is recognition of differences

Despite fundamental differences, religion and politics share the methodological fact that they are also subjective consciousnesses. No objective criteria could formulate a common line of agreement to help people think same way and uniformly. The best achievement in politics for state stability is to win the hearts of the majority, at least, by 50+1 equation through words and deeds, and never through the muscle. This however fails to be the case in religion where the doctrinaire interpretation of a word could lead to a break up a congregation into more and more denominations. An orthodox Christian today but may change into another denomination or religion and vice versa. It is unwise therefore to think that it is possible to maintain majority or monopolistic domination through imposition of a single party rule or a handpicked religion as an official state religion.

State recognition of this diversity is nothing but, the other way round, disestablishing state-church marriage by reframing from partiality or sticking to the principle of neutrality. The state better insures stability more by neutrality than by preferential treatment for one or more religions, which is the logic of a secular state institution. The practice in Ethiopia is recognition of any denomination of any religion or religious faith so far as it fits the moral and social expectations of the society at large. I remember that a religion with a proven 100 or more followers has a procedural title to access state services like plots of land for building church, cemeteries, and other civic demands. The Ethiopian government provides equal security services for all religions and denominations within a religion during religious holidays. This is recognition of plural identities with strict neutrality from doctrinaire and religious matters.

It is against these thresholds of the matter that I will examine the recent Muslim agitation in Ethiopia.

3. The Muslim Agitation

On the nature of the controversy, we are witnessing reciprocal allegations between the government and the group of critical Muslims cross cut by other third parties. Muslims taking streets complain that the government abuses its power by intervening in Islamic matters falling wholly in the domain of religion. The government in its part says these Muslims conspire to hijack the constitutionally independent roles of the Ethiopian state to serve their sectional interests. Political parties of the opposition block stand in support of the aroused Muslims claiming that their demands are legitimate and civic. This configuration of diverging interests demonstrates itself in practice by a merger of the aroused Muslims with some opposition parties while the government tries to retain the support of other Muslims, agreeably the dominant majority.

I feel at this point that this is an independent and objective evaluation of the controversy as it is. What is the specific list of demands by the disgruntled group of Ethiopian Muslims filed against the government and its structural origin and location? By its genesis again, was it an interreligious dispute (between Christians and Muslims, for example,) or an intra religious row over either doctrinaire matters of power allocation? Why do Opposition parties opt for supporting the aroused Muslims in either case? Why could not the government stand up to addressing the demands if it believes that their concern was detrimental to national peace? How do scholars explain the row between these actors about its initial causes, proportions, and scope and future trends?

It is methodologically difficult to locate the origin point of the dispute within the structure of the Ethiopian state as a whole for two interrelated reasons.

Firstly, the protest coined across the social media as 'let our voices be heard' is not a clearly and coherently scribbled and well-organized body of questions. Rather, it is a crude composite of several interests branching out into more other demands, far away from the first genesis, Pandora's Box. The problem here is that no one could sketch an unquestionable common genesis of dispute affecting the majority of Ethiopian Muslims as a distinct cultural group. Was it the shut down of the Awolia Koranic School igniting the agitation or the coming into the Mejlis of a Muslim leader from a different sect or that Kebeles were venues of election or the imprisonment of Muslims suspected of terrorism, or what? Nobody could say this or that to be the precise Pandora's Box. While some Muslim friends emphasize the Awolia crisis as the beginning spot of the crisis, others shift focus to demanding for a new design of power sharing between Muslims and Christians just for its own sake. Still other agitated Muslim friends said simply that they started protest in the middle when suspected Muslims went into custody.

Objectively speaking, the Muslims in the action of protest pose their demands as essentially an 'Islamic affair of all Ethiopian Muslims'. Conversely, however, the majority of Muslims point their fingers against the protester minority as a 'few rebels'. I heard and saw that some Muslim dignitaries even went as far as pressuring the government to take strict measures against those in the protest action. I, of course, never support such demands and pressures of any citizen or group on the state. It is unacceptable to advise government leaders whose hands hold both the sword and olive without adequate reasons of state level insecurity and threats that meet the American legal criterion of *clear and present danger*.

In any case, it would be sound for impartial and just analysis if I could find a Muslim friend or any agency arguing that the genesis of the crisis was that Christian Ethiopians and the Christian state of Ethiopia humiliated and oppressed Muslim citizens for simply religious differences. More important than this were if we could hear a Muslim colleague who argued that the problem started due to economic discrimination, if not, exploitation of Muslims by other religions. I, as a student of conflict, strongly believe that any political and cultural oppression necessarily precipitates an economic parallel, which, otherwise, means pointless and naïve to oppress others. If one picks the government closure the Awolia Koranic school, then, it is a curricular controversy in violation of citizens' duty to comply with constitutional and technical restrictions. If one specifies controversies over prescriptions who should head the Mejlis, it is an internal sectarian concern decided by free and democratic election. If imprisonments of suspected individuals of conspiracy against the state, it is a purely procedural and judicial matter in the criminal domain of the state, and ever a community affair. Overall, almost all items of demands by the protestors fall within the category of sectarian interests short of the qualification as 'demands of Ethiopian Muslims'.

Secondly, many opposition leaders and other concerned citizens have expressed fears that the Muslim agitation may cripple gradually into becoming a fully-fledged state crisis. They mention the expansions in the incidences of protests from Addis Ababa to other towns as an evidence for their fear. This fear is worth considerations but suffers limitations of deeper insights into the nature, extents, and dialectics of social conflicts in Ethiopia's context. Socio-culturally, any social conflict matures into violent escalation

out of the control of the state only on certain conditions that spring from the exact nature of the political organization and the entire structure.

In our case under review, Ethiopian Muslims as a community have special and distinct structural features studied from four dimensions. Socially, the significant majority is predominantly rural, semi-agrarian and pastoralist population from which they as Muslim citizens have developed distinct interests and demands from the Ethiopian state, that is, equal opportunity for social inclusions. Culturally, they always stand against any policy or practical moves aimed at assimilating their religious beliefs into other non-Muslim worldviews and life traditions; politically, their demand for self-government comes to the fore; and, historically, they want the Ethiopian state to redress fundamentally past discriminations and deliberate socially exclusive policies on permanent and consistent fashion. As a community, the majority of Ethiopian Muslims have now been able to combine the facts of their Islamic identity, the right to self-government, cultural assertiveness, and social service programs into one office under secular principle in four of the nine regional states of the federation. These are the gauges to measure and categorize whether the protests by Muslim in towns deserve being marked as 'structural social conflicts' or 'potential crisis of the Ethiopian state' or not.

In tune with this, my assessments of Islamic books by Muslim scholars and private press publications revealed for me that none of them had criticisms or reservations on these fundamentals at present. They stress largely one pattern of political historiography and evaluations of the present: Muslim plights inflicted by past discriminatory regimes, which will take long time to redress. This is something that the state also agrees with. So, where is the structural demand of 'all Muslims in Ethiopia?' One may be automatically be correct if one could convince us against this description of the true events. However, I could hear none of them mentioning and listing exactly each demand in clear statements understandable by the average Ethiopian. The paradox rather was that opposition leaders who made speeches in front of the protestor group were saying completely different story having nothing to do with their slogans.

The flirtation between the protesters and the opposition parties, confidently speaking, proves to be the most fragile one not because of chance but for reasons of clear divergences in principles. It is naïve for an analyst to expect the leadership of *Andinet* Party, for example, to sympathize to any items in the demands of Muslim protestors as a party envisioning and working for the restoration of the Unitary form of the state in the past. Any observer can be sure that nostalgic political programs can never meet positively any Muslim complaint in Ethiopia at any time.

Thirdly, I repeatedly hear opposition leaders and the private press describing the Muslim agitation as a 'popular claim for the legitimate rights of Ethiopian Muslims' sometimes, and as 'unconstitutional interventions of the state' in religious matters, at other times.' As a rule, generalities are easier to make and assert than specificities. The fact is that a group of Muslim Ethiopians may demand for this or that perceived right of their own, which is healthy, normal and unavoidable in a big country of big diversities. The problem for analysts however is to interpret what 'unconstitutional intervention' by the state' means. Because the statement implies controversially that, 'the state stands against the basic rights of all Muslim Ethiopians as a structure simply because they are Muslims, and that the state is simply a non-Muslim institution.

This is also a difficult position facing many Muslims, who opted for either indifference or counter opposition to the protestors, and many other concerned bodies and groups including the Opposition block and curious analysts. No party, so far, gave details of specific interventions by the government in Islamic doctrinaire matters, day today administrations, financial or other freedoms. Maybe, somebody may say that police arrested some Muslim Ethiopians. This is, however, in principle, at least, something odd. 'Police actions on citizens for the rule of law' and 'state interventions in Islamic affairs' are two diametrically different notions of state roles.

It is true and correct when the government tolerates heated debates between Ahmed and Jemal, for instance, over doctrinaire divergences. It is also correct that the government tolerates aggressive campaigners during elections by Ahmed and Jemal for opposite Mujlis candidates. However, how can one ask the government to be tolerant and indifferent when Ahmed picks a stick to kick violently Jemal or vice versa? Government tolerance in this case is as much against the rules of the game as what Jemal tries to do, in our example. Of all these, however, the most dangerous in-secular argument by some Muslim friends is that which equates Muslim loyalty to the constitution with idolatry. This is nothing but a call for political religious anarchy, dissolution of the secular state and, of course, a war of one against all. The irony is that we do not hear such extremely dangerous positions said and advanced even in states of Muslim majorities, leave alone, among societies of unbounded diversities. Unequivocally, such a call when made publicly goes to be a criminal affair falling within police purviews than an exercise of religious freedom.

4. Secularism and Academics

Midst many common lines as human enterprise, I noted that academics is unquestionably different from politics for a dozen of reasons. While the essence of politics is power, the fundamental trait of academics is scientific enquiry. Politics pursues 'competition' as its means to its end, while academics exercise dialogue and research toward its ideals. Politics is partisan; academics is independent. Politics is authoritative; academics is summative. Voting tests politics; reason gauges academics. Politics, in the most popular terms of an American scientist, is about 'who gets what and how' while academics is who studies what subject and how. In daily social interactions and roles, too, a politician and an academician differ. The politician rules, opposes, campaigns, or competes. The academician, on the other hand, examines things, teaches, studies, and publishes and so on. In short, differing, if not diverging, rules of the game strictly guide politics versus academics.

The misunderstanding between most of my readers and I however did not revolve around this general set of principles. It is my disappointment to realize that some of these readers remained prisoners of the above prescriptions, which they tended to understand in the absolute sense of the term. Apparently, that was the reason why they could not capture the essences of my argument, which I wrote as follows:

The separation between politics and academics is a relative one as there are always grey areas at which they voluntarily or involuntarily meet each other. This meeting, we like it or not, is more evident unavoidably in developing states than developed ones. This is because academic institutions in the former have a least likely option to be substantially self-sufficient in every demand. As a result, they have to depend tremendously on the state and its government.

One should be careful here. By this, I believe that academic institutions are ultimately public establishments designed for meeting a particular state vision. By this, I never said that academic institutions must be wholly and blindly subservient to all demands for service by the government. That academics is dependent on the state does not mean that academics is dependent for all its mainstream activities, too. Even so, the state and its government are limited structurally to furnish along with the budget and university buildings, specifically, the autonomous scientific tools of thinking, examining, conducting a research, and arguing about findings together. These tools fall within the domain of academics and academicians themselves for their innovations, developments, functioning, and applications.

Reciprocally, academic institutions and their community with special emphasis on their Management are duty bound to cultivate and maintain unquestioned loyalty to the principle of academic freedom. They should demonstrate this ideal in practice by refraining from abusing opportunities borne by academic freedom for the satisfaction of sectional, personal, ideological, religious, political beliefs and commitments. Technically speaking, academic engagement stands freely and works responsibly to challenge, prove, or disprove these biased worldviews, as its subjects, and never vice versa. A wisely entrenched and implanted tradition of academic freedom proves to be a living school ground where rigid scientific methodologies are powerful enough to force any academician to shake off previous biases.

Concerning current developments in Ethiopia, I strongly believe that an academic personally has the right to join any political party or support any political position. However, this academic should refrain from abusing free enquiries in order to serve a particular political view, ideology, religion or any sectional interest. No academic has to use university resources including buildings, stationary and time for these sectional positions, be it the ruling party or the Opposition. While party members are free to raise and discuss issues of academic performance, they have no rights whatsoever to intervene and influence the conduct of academic engagements-curricular, teaching-learning, etc. On this score, I often hear that there have been polarized traditions in Ethiopia. The common trend at Addis Ababa university is toward interpreting 'academic secularism and freedom' to mean being de-linked from the state, advancing gross criticism of government behaviors as a standard rule and nodding heads to oppositions. On the other pole, other universities opt for the opposite where they tend to confuse EPRDF as a political party with the state and its government in office. These institutions must revise their traditions before they become canonized codes of behavior across the university system in the country.

Conclusions

One should emphasize that the Ethiopian state is to embrace 'secularism' as one of its inherent morphology as a multicultural society. That it is developmental is also the organic part of its secularism, without which, the developmental state immediately loses its fundamental essences. The paper shows also that any sectional interest or religious belief endangers, primarily, its own advantages and positions by violating secular principles than otherwise. The developmental state in Ethiopia's context is therefore the social empowerments of its various cultural groupings that transcend fairly obviously cultural boundaries.