

Betrayals of Multiculturalism and Secularism

Demystifying Lion and Peacock emblems in Ethiopia

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Betrayal of the Federal constitution of Ethiopia amounts to betraying of its diverse peoples. It is sort of defiling the rights of 80+ social groups, creating social injustices and favoring one religious group over the others. The creator has created various ethnic groups with its unique language for each; but humans created artificial political boundaries to have states, provinces and nations we see them today. Ethiopians are thirsty for justice as a pillar with its full intensity and dignity, but the current administration is devoid of justice and rule of law. Without harmony of ethnic groups, there is no political nation. Harmony is acknowledging diversity first, and then unity is living together under the common denominator, humanity. Without social justices, equity and equality, there is no democratic secularism. Without harmonious multiculturalism, minority rights and democratic secularism, there is no peace. Without peace there is no political entity or a nation.

Social injustices caused the fall of assorted regimes in Ethiopia. Since the fall of repressive imperial regimes, Ethiopia has followed secular (non-religious) systems of governance, Military Socialism (1974-1990) and multi-ethnic Federalism (1991 to present). Referring to the current Federal constitution, Article 9: Supremacy of the Constitution states that

1. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. Any law, customary practice or a decision of an organ of state or a public official which contravenes this Constitution shall be of no effect.
2. All citizens, organs of state, political organizations, other associations as well as their officials have the duty to ensure observance of the Constitution and to obey it.

In addition, Article 11: Separation of State and Religion also states that

1. State and religion are separate.
2. There shall be no state religion.
3. The state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.

In the last few weeks, the social media and radio waves were congested with discussions and arguments surrounding Abiy's controversial religious messages contravening Articles 9 and 11. He went beyond his leadership jurisdiction of congratulating Christians; but, preaching 'The rise of Christ' on state radios and TV channels. It has not stopped with the Prime Minister, but his Prosperity Party also went on tweeting evangelistic messages against Article 9 of the constitution in its entirety. Also, in defiling the "supreme law of the land", Ethiopian Telecommunications, as public institution has texted a message 'He is risen' to its customers regardless of their religious affiliations; this is again violating Article 9 in its entirety as government institution, and ignoring the large segment Muslim and non-Orthodox population of the country. The prime minister, his party and Ethiopia telecommunications are not above the law in betraying over half of Ethiopia's population who are not followers of Christianity. Even for a proper and social justice conscious Christians what the prime minister and his entourage institutions had done were wrong and unconstitutional. Some Christian quarters immediately condemned the announcements to their cores with the strongest term possible. In

fact, all these are manifestations of betraying multiculturalism and secularism, which are the soul and spirit of the constitution and Ethiopia's religiously diverse population.

It has not stopped here. The prime minister has erred gravely again! Replacing the Lion statues to Peacocks at the National Palace entrance, which has also caught national and international attentions. The social media platforms, radio and TV airwaves are congested with pro and cons, as well as, assorted political, social and religious views. Why is the prime minister keen to replace century old symbol? Does he have hidden agenda? Or, was it part of glorifying himself? Why did he not consult the population before indulging in such controversial changes? Wouldn't Ethiopians have the right to decide for themselves to have common and representative symbol? On all the platforms, the presentations and the debates were hot, sometimes emotional and subjective, and at times reasonable and fair. There are assorted attempts to proving and disproving what is the right symbol, analyzing weaknesses and strengths of Lions and Peacocks, philosophizing their implications as a national symbol, demonstrating various scientific, historical, political and religious illustrations of lions and peacocks, as well as, attempting to demystify "Medemer" philosophy within the context of these animals.

Within Ethiopia's historical and political perspectives, all the debates, opinions and presentations in the airwaves have one thing in common. Religious denominator! A denominator symbolizing Christian regimes of Ethiopia, which has ignored the majority of the population who are Muslims, non-orthodox Christians and others.

According to Ethiopia Orthodox Christianity and Imperial Ethiopia, the Lion was a statue of the Lion of Judah, symbolizing Ethiopian Emperors. According to Wikipedia, the Lion of Judah served as the hereditary title of the Solomonic Ethiopia emperors including *Menelik* and *Haile Selassie*, and was depicted across the country and on the flag of Ethiopia from 1897 to 1974. This shows that the imperial regimes had completely ignored the Muslims and other non-Orthodox denominations as true original Ethiopians; implying that the Lion is not a symbol for the entire Ethiopian populations, but for the demised imperial regimes and their associates only!

Coming to the second and current hot issues of peacock as a symbol at Ethiopia's national palace, the common conclusion is that the prime minister is glorifying himself and promoting Pentecostal evangelism through Peacock, *Medemer* and Prosperity Party. The debates signify that people has no trust in him anymore. When Prosperity Party advances Pentecostal evangelism through its Ethiopian Easter holiday messages, and *Medemer* promoting assimilation of diverse cultures and glorifying the Cross; then what would the majority of Ethiopians, who are not followers of Pentecostal evangelism think of the peacock emblem? The peacock is widely regarded as a reference to the Second Coming of Christ connoting as slaughtered yet risen lamb among Christian evangelism followers. This was the exactly message that was sent by Ethiopia Telecommunications, and the Prosperity Party to Ethiopia's diverse population. In fact, they utterly violated Articles 9 and 11 of the current Ethiopia Constitution. No national leader nor any government institution should preach and promote its personal religious beliefs as a national message in multicultural and secular governance system. It is unconstitutional!

Behold and beseech! Some so-called historians and political analysts attempted in relating peacock as emblem for Islam; they are mixing up "Tagut," which is all false deities associated

with Adam and Eve's fate, with the word "Ta'uus," which means peacock in Arabic. Islam has nothing to do with peacock (Ta'uss) as a symbol. Nowhere in the Qur'an and the Hadeeth verifying a peacock story; however, you can perhaps find a fairy tale story about peacock written in the 9th century, most likely devised, written and propagated by enemies of Islam.

Politicians are weak since their inner-self is deception. It is sad they emotionally exploit their people for their selfish end. Selfishness, my sisters and brothers, is the cause of blind superiority and arrogance. Arrogance and superiority create disintegration of a family, a community, a society or a country. Nowadays, we are smelling, hearing and seeing assorted false political messiahs in Ethiopia including the current prime minister!

Of course, symbol, emblem or statue matters as a trade mark in business and politics. A picture worth thousand words! As a reasonable, objective and fair Ethiopian, leaving emotional attachments, egoism, illusive nationalism, inferiority and superiority complex behind, what would you choose as a symbol for the country? Not a Lion nor a peacock, but something that encompasses all; nothing but a symbol for peace! The Creator has created human being and divided them into tribes, as exemplified by the 12 tribes of Judah in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Hence, the existence of clans, tribes or ethnic groups in modern Ethiopia is fact of life. It is a reality no one can deny; however, Ethiopia is a superficial political territory created by politicians, oppressors, colonialists or political entities, in general. In the Almighty's dictionary there is no political nation, be it Ethiopia, Germany, USA, China, Brazil and the like; but, tribes, clans, ethnics or social groups, which were divinely designed and diversified in order to know one another, and live together. Among all these, the most loved individual in the sight of Almighty is the one with piety. Tribal differences are always there, will be there; it is natural, but we need to amend our attitudes towards one another for peaceful co-existence.

It is time we follow divine principles, reform our attitudes towards one another and find a common symbol, flag and even renaming the country, if the majority opt for it. Navigate the new and correct normal! I come to speak my mind and I shall say it now. I yearn for my un-westernized village and beautifully diverse country. I love its peoples because of their worldly poverty and spiritual strengths. In my country I spoke Amharic. I spoke Oromo. I spoke Somali. I spoke Harari. I spoke Tigrigna. I spoke Arabic and many more. I spoke even English. I live all! Live all anywhere in any territory, call the country Ethiopia, Abyssinia, United Emirates of Habesha, United Kingdom of Habesha, United Kingdom of Semites and Kushites, Democratic Republic of Semitic and Cushitic peoples or any other name that is suitable, reflective and representing multi-ethnic and multi-religious peoples in the country.

Last but not least, I yearn for all the languages to develop and social groups to self-determine with integrity, respect and dignity. My soul believes in the power of knowledge and justice over dark ignorance; it denies the sick mentality of political elites from numerically dominant social groups that supplies arrogance, ignorance and social injustices in the current political dispensation in Ethiopia. As Khalil Gibran said it beautifully, "The only authority I obey is the knowledge of guarding and consenting in the Natural Law of Justice." My wallet is full of equity, equality and justice, and being shared in my daily life. I live in the glory of humanity that encompasses every diverse being for peaceful co-existence on the planet earth.

Until we meet in my next presentation, keep healthy and safe in this Corona era.