

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Here, I am specifically referring to the Ethiopian Muslim extremists. The primary reason to be in such a resolute position is to protect and preserve the cumulative tolerance and living in unity, side by side, built and developed through thousands of years, slowly but surely threading from generation to generation. Right now, at this critical economic and social situation, the unity of Muslims and Christians is a function of stability and economic development, hence, in the case of Ethiopia, the eradication of poverty. In what ever ways we see, think, rationalize, and argue, the ultimate conclusion ought to be the eradication of poverty. Without tackling poverty to its roots first, by using whatever tools would be available, to think about science and technology is putting the cart before the horse. The effort becomes very superficial. When the main target is the eradication of poverty what ever tools needed to hit that target, including the improvement of science and technology itself, logically becomes part of the necessary tools. Establishing the target very clearly is very important.

Coming back to the crux of the issue, I argue that, in the case of Ethiopia, national security and stability, the precursors of economic development hence eradication of poverty, trumps up individual rights. And, to certain extent group rights, depending on the condition. State rights become paramount. I will extend this argument to religion. In my opinion, ultimately, religion is the issue of individual rights. It is not group rights. An individual's redemption, be a Muslim or a Christian, and entering heaven is to that specific individual's benefit. The redemption of the family's head, for example, cannot be transferred or spill-over to the wife or to the offspring. What if the family head dies first? He takes his trophy with him. The wife and the children have to fight their own spiritual fights. It is a unique form of struggle to save ones soul from burning in hell. Religion appears on the surface to be group issue but it is an individual issue. Therefore, group issues, state issues that are linked to economic development and therefore the eradication of poverty trumps up individual rights. If religious extremists try to take advantage under the cover of religion, by invoking individual rights, to disrupt the tolerance and the stability of the groups, in this case of Christians and Muslims, hence of the state, they should be dealt with mercilessly.

Here, I want to emphasize that, as I have said it before, I am not against, the expansion of Islam or the religion itself. Just as the Orthodox Christians, the Catholics, the protestants, even the traditionalists are doing in Ethiopia, Muslims, about 30% of the population have an absolute right to do it too. My main concern is, for religion to be a divisively used contentious issue in Ethiopia where Muslims and Christians have lived

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side by side for thousands of years. Muslim extremists undivided and dedicated intention is to break this organic linkage. They know very well that unless they break this organic linkage they have no where to go and nothing to do. One concrete example is the killing of Sheik Nurru Yimman. It was a very strategic move to break the link. That is to shut his mouth and break the link, if you will. Extremists should never, ever, be allowed or left alone, or even think about instigating division using religion among the Ethiopian society. Dr Ahmed A. Moen of Harvard University clearly and beautifully stated the following:

**Throughout history, the Islamic values and mores practiced in Ethiopia have helped Ethiopian Muslims to lead moderate, patient and resilient pathways which, in turn, neutralize hardships and threats to their ways of life. Many scholars attribute tolerance and accommodation to the culture of assimilation and diversity of the peoples. The tolerance for ambiguity and differences is also the by-product of widespread continuum of Judeo-Christian-Islamic religious heritages. Each of these religions ushered in its own peculiarity or commonality, when occasional religious fanaticism or conflicts erupted other social and cultural factors intervened to restrain disintegration and chaos. On the other hand, the confluence and convergence of intrinsic values inherent in customs, religions and ethnicity have served as catalyst of unity in diversity.**

Dr. Ahmed A. Moen further stated:

**.... Yes, as other Ethiopians do, Muslims draw gratification from their ancient Ethiopian heritages and deep-rooted sense of belonging to the land and its history. ... overall, the most cohesive bond is the realization of shared heritages and common destiny that evolved overtime mostly through intermingling of geographically contiguous ethnic, tribal and national interest.**

I was born and grown among Muslims. I have had very close Muslim friends. There are many anecdotes, beginning from my early childhood that I can itemize, that I still cherish when remembering and thinking about them. My close relatives, a generation or two below me have intermarried with Muslims. Two directional marriage. Christian boys marrying Muslim girls, and, Christian girls marrying Muslim boys. So, one can see the strength of the stake I have in protecting this Muslim-Christian relationships and their unity. As the late Tip O'Neill (D), former Speaker of the House of the United States Congress, once said, "politics are local."

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As far as I am concerned, the crux of the demonstrations and therefore the formation of an organized body called "**Dimtsachin Yisema**" is the vehement Competition, call it political struggle, based on ideological difference between those who uphold Wahabism and those who follow al-Habaash. According to Al Jazeera, "demonstrations" were set off when students at the nation's only Islamic institute walked out of the classes after their teachers were dismissed and replaced by Lebanese Islamic sect called al-Habaash. Except indicating the core issue of the competition, I am not going to indulge into specific philosophical differences, even though I have read a lot about it when preparing myself for this article. The three demands that were pushed forward and following it up with successive demonstrations ultimately comes down to the ideological differences between the two groups well manifested in the process. I further argue that the extremists have tried to use it as a forum in a very subtle way. I will come back to this issue later.

## **2. The Seeds of Muslim Extremism was Already Planted in Ethiopia**

Muslim extremists existed in Ethiopia before the formation of **Dimtsachin Yissema**. Who knows, they could have been the precursors of **Dimtsachin Yissema**. There is no doubt they were actively involved during the demonstrations organized by **Dimtsachin Yissema**. To think otherwise is meekness. They are not fools not to participate and guide it to their political advantage. Burning churches, killing unsuspecting and unarmed Christians, converting Christians by force, converting churches into mosques, clearly exposed the hidden agenda of fierce hatred they have for Christians, and their determination to act upon it. Can these extremists change? No! Can leopard change its color?

The waving of slogans during the demonstration to indicate their feelings about the long absence of a Muslim leader at the helm of the state. They wrongly assume that they are the majority. For the extremists it is a strong motivational factor. Because they believe in it. A Somali leader, sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys, who is in jail now, in his secrete meeting with Meles Zenawi, said: "**Sooner or later, there will be an Islamic uprising in Addis Ababa similar to that of Mogadishu.**" He further clearly stated that, "**The leadership has always been Christians though more than 65 percent are Muslims by the most conservative estimate.**" Note the connection between this last statement of Sheik Aweys and the slogan held during the demonstrations. These statements by the leader of the Somali extremists definitely must have had a role to play in the activities of the Ethiopian extremists who already partnered with the Somali extremists, most likely cadres of al-Shabaab, an off shoot of the Union of Islamic Courts, while they were killing Christians and burning churches in Southern Ethiopia. Further more, the burning of Ethiopian flag, and, above all the killing of Sheik Nuru Yimman, who was a persistent

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advocate of tolerance, indicate the possible infiltration of these extremists in **Dimstachin Yissema**. As to the existence of extremists in Ethiopia, before the demonstrations organized by **Dimtsachin Yissema**, here is what World Magazine of October 10, 2006 recorded in it:

**"... For weeks a group of about 300 men the locals described as 'Muslim fundamentalists' trained in a remote area near the town of Jima, 250 miles southwest of Addis Ababa. According to eye witness, the 3 group includes a number of Somalis. Government forces alarmed by their activities, arrested several of the leaders. But the remainder organized and, armed with machetes and knives, attacked Christian churches and villages. Within a matter of two days, they had burned over 350 homes belonging to Christians, killed 31 Christians, and took dozens as hostages, according to local church leaders. Muslim attackers burned one Catholic church, one Orthodox church, and three evangelical churches. The later are part of the 75-year old Kale Heywet Church (EKHC), which began under the missionary influence of what was then known as Sudan Interior Mission and now includes over 5 million Ethiopian believers. Attackers quickly converted five local EKHC churches into mosques. "**

Note that a number of Somalis were among the extremists when doing these heinous act. Therefore, one can boldly say that these extremists who were definitely part of **Dimtsachin Yissema** have also connections with al- Shabaab. How about with those in North Africa and with those in the Middle East? If al-Shabaab has connections with al-Qaeda it is not a rocket science not to conclude that the Ethiopian Muslim extremists to have connections with the al-Qaeda of Middle East. Al-Shabaab joined al-Qaeda of Middle East on February 9, 2012. With the blessing of al-Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahir, it was recognized and accepted to be **Somali based al-Qaeda cell**. Therefore, the connection of al-Shabaab, an extremist organization that have a connection with Ethiopian extremists, with the al-Qaeda of the Middle East is an established fact.

Logically then, the most serious question to ask is what is the guarantee what was done in Kenya and Uganda not to be done in Ethiopia by the Ethiopian Muslim extremist with the instigation and encouragement by al-Shabaab? As explicitly shown by World Magazine of October 10, 2006, they already have the experience and also the potential to do it again. So, let us not fool ourselves.

### **3. Outside Connection and its Impact**

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The connections between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda is a well established fact. The connection between Ethiopian Muslim extremists particularly with al-Shebaab of Somali is already there and solid. I have shown it in the previous segment briefly. So, what is the difficulty in connecting Ethiopian Muslim extremists to al-Qaeda of the Middle East. In addition, I don't think the Ethiopian extremists will seat idle from having the secondary and tertiary connections, such as with Islamic Maghreb and Bokoharam of North Africa. The sophisticated technology that exists will assist them to do it very easily and very rapidly. Without going into detail, the Ethiopian extremists will emulate these foreign extremist forces in every single thing they do, in and around where they preside and able to function. They believe in what ever extreme things in the name of religion they do and they aspire to do it again and again, whenever it is possible.

Somali is a source of trouble for Ethiopia. Reuters, Sept. 25, 2008 clearly recorded as follows: **"Somalia truly is one place in Africa where you have a potential conundrum of recruitment and extremism that, left to its own devices, will only increase in terms of the danger it presents to the region...."** Al-shabaab have converted young and poor Christians in Kenya and Uganda.

According to Wikipedia, there are a number of foreign countries that back al-Shabaab. Egypt is one of them. Egypt has a long standing policy of securing the Nile River flow by destabilizing Ethiopia. It further indicates Yemen, Sudan, the Swahili Coast, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh to be foreign al-Shabaab members. The wider the foreign base of al-Shabaab the wider the communication base for Ethiopian Muslim extremists. The wider the feedback would be, as to what to do, when to do, and where to do. In today's technology and the funneling in plenty money, including from local suppliers, I think it is as simple as that, to do what the extremists want to do if and when the time comes. Well structured organization is there. Finance is there. Connect the dots between Ethiopian Muslim extremists, the al-Shabaab, the Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

#### **4. Fabrication of the Population Size of the Muslims**

In Ethiopia the population size of the Muslims is tacitly being used by extremists as well as by some prominent Muslim leaders for agitation purposes. Muslims are in the majority therefore Sharia law ought to be the law of the land, they say. Muslims are in the majority therefore Ethiopia should have a Muslim leader to apply the Sharia law, they say. If the Muslims in Ethiopia were the majority then it would have been quite logical, and I might add that it should be an acceptable fact, to apply this premises. But it is not the majority. Here, what is critically important to note is that this fabricated proportion is being used to agitate particularly the young Muslim generations. It is very easy to plant it in the minds

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of the younger people. The older people may not accept it. Allow me to quote two subtly and openly used agitation statements:

**One: Based on World Year Book of 1991 and UNICEF/Ethiopia the estimated number of Ethiopian Muslims ranges between 23.9 to 27.7 million (45 percent to 52 percent. Nejib Mohammed, Sept. 1, 2013.** But according to the Ethiopian census bureau of 2007, that is after 16 years of the quoted figure, the Ethiopian Muslim population is 25 million. Go figure.

**Two:** Hassan Dahir Aweys of the then Islamic Courts Union, now in prison, during the secrete meeting with Meles Zenawi said: “... **but the leadership has always been Christians though more that 65% are Muslims by the most conservative estimate.**” I have already quoted Sheik Aweys I am repeating it to emphasize my argument. Here is a very important point to note . Whether one accepts it or not, the reference point, with regard to the size of the distribution of the population into its nationalities and religious groups, is the Central Census Bureau of the central government. Be it the current or the previous regimes. It is the only one that compiled it by physically contacting the society in question. Regarding Ethiopia, the source cannot be UNESCO, UNICEF, CIA, US State Department or even the United Nations. They have no right, unless there is a motive to deliberately mislead and destabilize the society, to put out a fabricated size of the population into religious and nationalities groups. When dealing with a nation such as Ethiopia, with over 80 nationalities and with different religious groups, these international organizations mentioned above aught to be very careful not to fabricate the census products other than the one produced by the Central Census Bureau of the central government of Ethiopia.

Let me provide some background facts and figures to validate one of the major arguments of this article. Before the arrival of Mohammed Giragn there were sporadic raids and counter raids between Muslims and Christians. Muslims with the aim of expansion both their religion and their trade, and Christians with the aims of resistance to protect their religion and to control and protect their trade. Amazingly trade was a widely and effectively used conduit to spread out religion. Ifat in the northeastern of Shewa, Islamic city of Harar, Afar and Somali in low lands along the Red Sea were the major role players in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ifat the strongest was defeated by Amda Sion in the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Muslims then could not form a united front, because of :

- Islamized peoples inhabited small and independent states;
- they were divided by differences in language and culture;
- some were sedentary cultivators and traders; and
- others were

pastoralists. (Source: US Library of Congress).

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Here, an important point to note is that the expansion of Islam was specific to a limited geographic locations and other living and cultural conditions. Islamism could not expand freely over a large area. It appears the above four factors plaid an important role in favor of the Christians, who have already established wide and strong mass based conditions to dominate and dictate their policy. And of course Christianity too. Christianity was the religion of the kingdom. Even Mohammed Gagn, the Adali, could not succeed to establish a deep rooted mass base. The 18 years (1545 to 1525), he was killed in 1525, of intensive campaign was not strong enough to hold together the ethnically divers and geographically dispersed groups of Muslims. When Mohammed Gagn died the unity of Muslim forces was destroyed. I argue then, the current size of the Muslim proportion is the outcome of the size that existed during and before Mohammed Gagn. Also note the above four factors itemized. Given the then existed environment and other social and cultural factors, the growth of the Ethiopian Muslims will be very limited. At the time the number of the Christians was greater than the number of the Muslims. The logical conclusion would be, the growth then would be directly proportion to the size of these two religions in question. Logically, then, The one with the greater size will grow greater than the one with smaller size.

Let me add to the above about what the situation is in Ethiopia today. According to the National Census of 2007, the size of the Ethiopian religions population were:

- A) Ethiopian Orthodox was 43.5 percent, that is, 32 million.
- B) Protestants were 18.6 percent, that is, 14 million.
- C) Muslims were 33.9 percent, that is, 25 million.
- D) Traditional were 2.6 percent, that is 2 million.

Further more, again according to the National Census bureau, the growth of Christians and Muslims are as follows:

**Christians:** the Ethiopian Orthodox, the Protestants and the Catholics together grew from 61.6 percent, 1994 census to 62.8 percent, 2007 census.

**Muslims** grew from 32 percent, 1994 census, to 33.9 percent, 2007 census.

## 5. The Hypocrisy of Dimtsachin Yissema

What prompted this segment of the article is the article of **Dimtsachin Yissema**, "Ethiopian Muslims Voice Along with PM's Death." August 21, 2012. This article blindly

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condemns the two previous regimes, namely, Emperor Haile Selassie's and Mengistu Hailemariam's, while unashamedly applauding Meles Zenawi, who was number one enemy of Ethiopia. All Understanding God took him away early before he enjoyed what he looted, a better descriptor is what he sucked, from the people of Ethiopia. A thoughtful and fair minded Organization would have looked into what took place within the Ethiopian society in general and the Muslim society in particular. The history of Ethiopian society is the history of Muslim society. These two social interactions are inseparable. This was what **Dmtsachin Yissema** was, perhaps still is, unable to discern.

At least, this Organization could have brought two major and historical events to the surface and let the Muslim community know and understand better about them before the condemnation. They are: **1)** The existence of the application of Sharia law in Ethiopia even before Emperor Haile Selassie's rule. And, **2)** The separation of religion from state during Mengistu's rule. I will quote below what Dr. Ahmed A. Moen of Howard University said, particularly which applies to Emperor Haile Selassie's rule:

**Islamic religions Sharia court systems, have existed for centuries side by side with customary laws even though Islamic laws have no treatment in the modern civil and penal codes of Ethiopia. Sharia laws primarily regulate succession, guardianship, inheritance, marriage and divorce for the majority of Muslims in Ethiopia.**

He further explains, the separation of religion from state, which particularly refers to Mengistu's rule. Note to whom he gave the credit to achieve this political outcome:

**The separation of religion from state has been in existence since 1974**

**revolution and continues to be the law of the land. This historical change evolved from the dynamic interaction of heterogeneous people known for their resistance, flexibility and assimilation of ideas, races, culture and religions.**

Amazingly, even back in 1668, an imperial decree was issued declaring that the Muslims (Jabarti) and Jews (Felasha) of Gondar would henceforth live apart from Christians, but they were allowed to practice their religion freely in their own quarters. Even though the decreeing of living apart should not be condoned, Ethiopian society should be proud of its history for the existence of the tolerance of different religious practices three hundred years ago. The part of the decree that decreed the liberty to worship according to ones faith should be celebrated today.

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Instead of building on these concrete historical facts and come up with fact based constructive criticism this Organization completely ignored these historical facts, and shamelessly tried to appease TPLF. It is very cheap and opportunistic politics. It is dishonorable to take such mercurial position as if Meles's constitution helped Islam. Meles Zenawi used the constitution only when it applied in favor of his political control and his business empire expansion and protection. When constitution related issues are not in his favor he resorted to the other constitution of the land, the "Democratic Revolution." So, where is Meles's support of Ethiopian Muslims and Islam?

Now, the question is, given this hypocritical position clearly manifested in this Organization, how could one affirmatively say particularly this Muslim Organization is credible? One would be forced to label it as a Trojan horse for extremists to provide it a cover, even though whether it is done intentionally or unintentionally is a matter to be contemplated upon, for conspiring to create a rift between Christians and Muslims. The Muslim extremists are against the tolerance of the Muslim masses towards the Christian masses. Why was Sheik Nuru Yiman killed by the extremists? Because he was actively and persistently preaching tolerance. Why was he openly preaching tolerance? Given his age, his experience, and the active participation in the community he was able to sense and notice the moves of the extremists who were trying to create a rift between the Christians and the Muslims. And, perhaps between the Muslim society themselves. There will definitely be those who are for tolerance. **Dimtsachin Yissema** should clean itself from the extremists.

## 6. What should be done?

Here, it should be clearly understood that, the issue is not between any concerned Ethiopian forces, including the regime itself, and the Ethiopian Muslims society in general. The issue is strictly between any concerned Ethiopian forces, including the regime itself, versus the Ethiopian Muslim extremists. Putting aside, the concern of democracy, the concern of human rights, and the concern of the rule of law, as related to the current regime, and solely looking into this issue as related to Muslim extremists, face-to-face, nothing in between, not even the current regime. Muslim brothers and sisters, Christian brothers and sisters have blended long time ago, with no visible seams at all as reflected in the following activities. There are teachers, (universities, high schools and elementary schools), researchers, nurses, medical doctors, artists, musicians, actors and actresses, engineers, administrators, judges, attorneys, merchants, farmers, etc., etc. not as Muslims but as Ethiopians. As Dr. Ahmed Moen said assimilation have taken place in Ethiopia long time ago. This is what the Ethiopian Muslim extremists, and of course their guardian and motivators international Muslim extremists is irking them. They don't like it and they didn't like it. Destroying arts, and

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anything related to artistic works, killing teachers, banning recreational facilities, standing against anything and everything women do independently, literally annihilating the rights of women, factors that are part and parcel of assimilation, are activities of the Muslim extremists in the Middle East and in Somalia. They are against any enlightenment. They aspire to create a clean slate, a brain, on which to write their wishes. I am quite sure these are behaviors envied and with the potential to be emulated by the Ethiopian Muslim extremists.

I have tried to show the reality that Muslim extremists exist in Ethiopia and their outside connections that cannot be denied. In addition, I have also shown that the crux of the contention that prompted the successive demonstrations was purely ideological struggle between al-Habash and Wahabists. Given these stark realities any regime, for that matter including the current one, that administers the country has solemn responsibility to apply any available means in its disposal to fight back and retard the extremists before they are rooted deeply and create permanent damage to the stability of the society. It is critically important never to be late.

Once the extremists achieve an upper hand they would do anything to achieve their goals. They are cold blooded ruthless. What they did to the Christian community in the South and Southwest Ethiopia attests to this behavior they possess. Another case in point is the two Muslim extremists in England who literally butchered a British soldier. Note the next one too. Ibrahim Hassan al-Asri, al-Qaeda's chief bomb maker harnessed his own younger brother with bombs. The younger brother was killed by it. Go figure.

Stability, hence economic development and eradication of the poverty of the nation, combined with the cultivation and maintenance of the tolerance between the religions, at any cost, with no hesitation, ought to be part and parcel of any regime's policy in Ethiopia. The motto ought to be never to be pro-active. In Ethiopia, religion is no more a phenomenon to be ignored or to be put aside as simple as accessory factors. In addition, which is equally very important issue to be concerned about, is, to look into who is, among the riches inside Ethiopia as well as outside of Ethiopia, financing and encouraging the extremists? Note this! ...**"The distribution of funds was managed by an exiled Saudi businessman in Ethiopia, Sheik Mohammad Husein al-Almadi, and the Afghan-based Abu Zubayda, who is thought to be a Palestinian originally named Zein Abedein Mohammad Hassan."** Jan's Intelligence Review, August 1, 2001. This particular individual is a deliberately overlooked cancer, slick business man, who is taking advantage of the wide spread corruption, top to bottom. The extremists cannot do much without sufficient financing and moral support. Therefore, in order to cripple them it is very important to completely dismember and cut the financial sources.

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