

## ABIY AHMED: THE ROOSTER IN THE CHICKEN COOP?

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Tecola W Hagos, 30 November 2018

**Dedication: I dedicate this Article-Commentary to Megabi Hadis Eshetu Alemayehu [መጋቢ ሐዲስ እሸቱ አለ መግሀ] and Deacon Daniel Kibret [ዲያቆን ዳንኤል ክብረ ት] - two of my favorite inspirational scholars with great understanding of Ethiopian culture and with incomparable humane wit.**

#### I. In General

It is the best of times for PM Abiy Ahmed to be surrounded by an admiring intimate group of people. Even more so for a man who craves attention to be surrounded by such female crowd, however, bordering the ridiculous. He has created what seems to me a modern-day version of a Turkish Seraglio—a harem minus the erotic aspect of that Turkish and Arabesque excesses. He has appointed females for more than fifty percent of all Ethiopian High Governmental Offices to date, including a female President and a female Chair of the National Election Board. Almost all of his female appointees are in their thirties. A couple of them may be considered mature and experienced, but the rest are untested with capacity no higher than mid-level administrative executive. I do not believe they were properly vetted to establish whether they would fit the Ethiopian community standard of ethics and morality as well as to gauge them how effective they can be in advancing a tradition of Ethiopian civic responsibilities. Leaders are not just efficient administrators: far more importantly, they are role models for young Ethiopians.



I can think of several senior Ethiopians who could have easily succeeded Former President Mulatu Teshome, such as HRH Princess Mariam-sena Asfawossen, TecolaWorq Hagos (myself), Mesfin Woldemariam, Yacob Hailemariam, Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu, Fikre Tolesa, Eskinder Nega, Tekeste Negash et cetera. For example, even with his unsavory participation in the Derg's Inquiry Commission in 1974, Prof Mesfin Woldemariam who have struggled

for all of his adult life for social justice and political rights for Ethiopians would have been a far more deserving personality than Sahle-work Zewde to be a Presidential nominee. The better choice would have been HRH Princess Mariam-sena Asfawossen as a great symbol of the Unity and Sovereignty of the People of Ethiopia. We Ethiopians have as yet to apologize to the Family Members of the Great Emperor Haile Selassie I for treating him and his Family Members in such despicable and shameful manner.

Thanks to Abiy Ahmed's skewered world view, now we are stuck with President Sahle-work Zewde who seems not to understand the fact that her life must be an open book once she accepted the Presidency and that the Ethiopian public has the right to know everything about her, especially because

of the fact that she was not really connected to the Ethiopian public throughout her career. We need a family picture of her, her husband, and her children. She seems to be ashamed of her husband and her children whom she had deliberately hidden from public view. This is not some frivolous curiosity on my part, but has an important purpose. One way of combating corruption is full disclosure of family members of every appointee to public office—an official family picture distribution would satisfy that need.

Abiy Ahmed's seemingly advanced form of staffing of his Cabinet of Ministers with several Women, and the nomination of women to be the President of the Federation State and the Chair of the National Election Board is simply a form of silencing his critics and camouflaging his limited capacity to lead a complex country like Ethiopia. There is nothing other than populist political optics behind all these high-profile appointments and moralistic preaching he conducts at every public address. As a matter of fact, he is a seriously flawed leader beyond repair or corrections, for he is self-righteous and intoxicated in his own presumed goodness. In a recent article Daniela Donno and Anne-Kathrin Kreft, "Sometimes autocrats strengthen their power by expanding women's rights. Here's how that works" [*The Washington Post*, Monkey Cage, Analysis, 23 November 2018], discussed such phenomenon of technique dictators use these days in underdeveloped countries to divert the attention of the citizens and also to attract foreign investors to their respective countries. Abiy's claim that women are less corrupt than men is bogus and not based on any scientific studies made in Ethiopian society. I do not believe that gender determines such character flaws in either men or women. As counter point to an accepted aphorism, I dare say that behind every corrupt leader there is a corrupt woman.

## **II. A Tyrant with a smiling face?**

I remember during the Transition Government in 1991, Meles asked people to suggest capable individuals for appointments as government high-officials. Two individuals I suggested were appointed Ministers. Abiy Ahmed seems to be a control freak even though he has a likable personality. He does not consult anyone for his high-profile appointments. I am told that nothing he does not approve of or initiates is implemented, and that problem is compounded by the fact that he has nothing concrete as yet to offer as solution to the ethnic based violence and displacements except his speeches. He smiles, he cajoles, and annoyingly he hags, but the fact remains that if one crosses his way or as much as point at even insignificant error, he or she is out of favor and shunned. He is very vindictive and holds grudge against individuals he can easily squash. For Example, Abiy Ahmed's Federal Housing authorities have evicted thirteen members of my Family out of their home in the Old Airport area that they have lived in for the last twenty-five years and confiscated their furniture and personal property. Mind you the fact that Addis Ababa is a city built by my ancestors from scratch. Who are these Fascists and Nazis to pushout anybody?

The housing privilege of long-term rental lease my Family Members and I acquired in 1993 was a minor arrangement for a Family of heroes and of origins who were Members of both EP/ANDM and TPLF, and some EPRP, who fought courageously against the brutal Derg Regime for years and paid heavy price with their lives and health conditions. We created and preserved Ethiopia in its sovereignty to this day with our blood. I can name my direct ancestors who fought the Italians (Adwa, Mereb, Mychew), the Mahdists at Metema, the Egyptians, Gagn's invasion armies, the Turks, and in legend as the commander of Kaleb's son Gebremeskel's liberation army in Yemen et cetera. Even Meles Zenawi, who is notorious for some vengeful acts, did not stoop that low when I was pouring down Meles's head an

avalanche of criticism from the time I left the Ethiopian Government service starting in 1994 to his death in 2012.

Ethiopia could not advance much even though it had thousands of years of independent existence to work with and improve the demands of existential necessities. I believe the single most negative reason that held us back is the absence of family-name system. Every generation in Ethiopia is an improvisation without the direct and visible hold of our respective families to guide, censor, enhance, or determine birthing rights. It left us open to entropic downward social spiral into a degenerate society without technological advancement, personal hygiene, or curbs on promiscuity. Only in a degenerate society the likes of Mengistu Hailemariam, Meles Zenawi, or Abiy Ahmed could climb the political and social ladder to become indispensable leaders. All great civilizations have family-name systems, and those that do not have such system are mainly in Africa, in places occupied by indigenous Americans, in parts of Asia, and there you find human tragedy of overpopulation, poverty, and violent existence.

From what I have heard from intimate observers of Abiy's *modus operandi* that his Ministers spend inordinate amount of time figuring out what Abiy wants. He is no different than Meles Zenawi or Mengistu Hailemariam in that aspect, subordinates are terrified and insecure. My reliable sources tell me that most of the government organs are dysfunctional, and even the most mundane clerical decision goes all the way to the head of the organization. There is tremendous amount of confusion and finger-pointing at supposed enemies. Abiy Ahmed has polarized the civil servants of Ethiopia into divided camps of accusers who cover their inadequacies by blaming a targeted group and those who are associated with the old administration especially those who belong to the targeted ethnic group.

The pattern of the appointments and those Abiy dismissed from Governmental appointments by the previous Administrations show certain personality traits. Abiy avoids former members of *Yethiopia Hizbawi Abyotawi Party* (EPRP), even more so members of *Mela Ethiopia Socialist Niqinaqē* (MEISON) or indigenous former Student leaders and members. He avoids also strong personalities such as Eskinder Nega, Andualem Arage et cetera. He avoids well educated individuals who are graduates of fully accredited Universities and Colleges from the United States. He is easily captivated by sycophants and flatterers, for he craves for perpetual attention and applauses. Most importantly and most alarmingly he becomes a lump of soft clay on a potter's wheel when he comes in contact with powerful and wealthy leaders. It is quite shameful and embarrassing to watch him act like a school boy in front of powerful and wealthy men/leaders such as the Arab Leaders, Issayas Afeworki et Cetera.

### **III. Sacrificing Mohammad Alamoudi for bin Zayed Al Nahyan?**

Corruption does not invade a nation waving great banners and using marching bands proclaiming its arrival. It creeps sleazily unnoticed and with attractive and soothing fragrances of hard-currency. I know of no one in past Ethiopian Governments who joined public service planning to become a corrupt official. It is totally moronic even to entertain such possibilities. But in time even great freedom fighters get corrupted and end up in infamy. We do not have to go far to prove such point. Listen to all the accusations leveled against some of the heroic EPRDF's commanders. The way to fight corruption in a government is to have transparency and strong and independent journalists and reporters in private outlets.

On 19 November 2018, Abiy Ahmed inaugurated the building plan of a multibillion-dollar mega mall, hotels, residential high-rises buildings project on the site of the old La Gare and the surrounding

area of over 360,000 square meters of land. The investor is Eagles Hills of Abu Dhabi with the Ethiopian Government as a 27% stake holder. I assume the value of the land might be the contribution to the joint investment with the huge developer from Abu Dhabi. This project marks the beginning of what may evolve into an important policy of Abiy's Government. Attracting such renowned investor-developer from Abu Dhabi is not to be looked upon lightly. This is a break-through for Ethiopia: this good will of the Emirati investors must extend to Axum, Bahir Dar, Dessie, Gondar, Lalibela, Wookro et cetera.

The Emirate alone commands nearly a trillion United States dollar worth of sovereign wealth fund managed by Emir Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan himself, the older brother of Crown Prince Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed who visited Addis Ababa during the very day of the holiest day of celebration in the Muslim World, Eid al-Fitr that marks the end of Ramadan on June 15, 2018. [Although not that important, I would point out the fact that Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed is an admirable personality with his simplicity and Spartan morality and modesty.] This puts Ethiopia in good light and in good grace in the eyes of the Arab World if this venture is carried out on time and effectively clear of corruption. This shift from Alamoudi to the leaders of the Emirate is cutting off the middle-man i.e., Alamoudi and a chance to deal with principal investors directly. This is a great improvement, indeed. However, Ethiopians must not forget or completely discard or discredit Alamoudi. He must be respected and appreciated for all the great things he has done in Ethiopia and forgiven for his errors.

However, I do have reservation on the timing and the type of project that is being undertaken at La Gare. In a country where most Ethiopians have no access to potable water, in a city of cesspools, where people are murdered daily in some Kilils, where millions of Ethiopians are displaced due to ethnic cleansing, then tell me, what is the significance of building mega malls and high-rises? Rather than venturing on this form of high-end mega mall, a people-oriented building project should have focused on improving and building Merkato! In fact, I believe the focus of Abiy Ahmed on buildings in Addis Ababa at this point (time) while the rest of Ethiopia is falling apart is all wrong. Currently, investment in Addis Ababa and surrounding regions is almost 90% in dollar value of all investments in the last twenty years in Ethiopia. This state of lopsided development has contributed greatly to the public discontent everywhere and the ethnic conflicts and huge displacements in almost all Kilils.

## **Conclusion**

There is already some fund being transferred from the Emirate to the Ethiopian National Bank, and soon investment money and material for construction will follow. Watch out how the Finance Ministry is going to cook the accounting books on expenditure and subsidies. Already there is tremendous waste of resources and the banking system is on the verge of collapse. The value of public discussion of any major project is tremendous. Ethiopian Communities whether urban or rural know what they need the most. Thus, opening such public forums before deciding on mega projects should be the accepted normal and regular process. Public forums are absolutely indispensable, for they inform and enhance the goals and purposes of mega projects.

The private media in Ethiopia is still at its infancy. The Ethiopian government ought to subsidize and bear some of the expensive cost of printing of journals, newspaper, et cetera by private owners. There should be extensive programs to train reporters, writers, et cetera. These are real structural pillars of a rich social system. But Abiy and his fellow politicians do not have that type of mind set. What they are after is the optics of modernity and flashy sign-posts of fake development that does no help people solve their existential humble needs. You may be wondering why I am so bitter in my criticism of Abiy

and the opposition diaspora politicians. It is simply because they are fake, inauthentic, power hungry, selfish bums who do not have their priorities in place. Is the Office of the Auditor General strengthened? No. I rest my case. I conclude with an irony that if you really want God to laugh, tell him your future plans.

**Tecola W Hagos**

30 November 2018

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