

Belated Yet Very Important
Revisiting the Question of Nationalism
to
Critique Siye Abraha and Tedros Kiros (PhD)
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At least for now, nationalism is the front and center primary dossier that holds all of the Ethiopian political questions into a single modes operandi. In other words, nationalism is a political, sociological, and philosophical concept that which strings ideas of freedom, independence, dignified sense of self and belonging, and all of the emotions and practices that the greater aspect of sovereignty brings forth.

In the lexicon of political terminology and the English language dictionary, nationalism is a derivative of nation- a word often confused to mean state as often as state is confused to mean nation likewise. States and nations make up our contemporary political world. And by definition, a state consists of an area of territory which is under the single rule of a government, and nation is a hard to define sociological, political, and philosophical concept often loosely and incorrectly used to mean ‘state.’

Oromos, Basques, Amharas, Scots, Tigreans, Catalans, Ukrainians, and Hungarians are nations, but of these, only the Ukrainians and Hungarians have states where most of the citizens are members of the nation; the other six, that is, Tigreans, Catalans, Oromos, Basques, Amharas, and the Scots nations are citizens of states which contain members of other nations. The implication of this definition is far greater than you might have imagined it to be, and here is the reason why.

As Ethiopians, we have argued passionately and to no avail so far, as to what it means to be an Ethiopian. At times, the question of who is Ethiopian is foretold for others by those who know little about whom they ask a pledge from. Even those Ethiopian PhD holders of social science discipline, have erroneously define what it means to be an Ethiopian, mistaking state for nation and nation for state in a spiral unenlightened diatribe to the abyss.

Tedros kiros (PhD), paraphrasing and accepting Siyes argument in his article on January 7, 2008, wrote, the “New Thinking seeks to draw from the values of classical Ethiopian personality: respect for tradition, tenacity, resistance and cultural pride.”¹ As fairly educated Ethiopian, I cannot still fathom the fact that this aforementioned presumption came from a PhD holder. The presupposition is fraught with so many idiotic hidden assumptions and conclusions that there is no need to a course in logic for any interested person to bring those to light.

The “New Thinking,” according to Siye and Kiros, “ seeks to draw the value of classical Ethiopian personality,” as if the contemporary values of Ethiopia are failing us. What is classical and what isn’t is being tacitly spoken here. It’s the unstated assumption that tells and considers all the contemporary value holder Ethiopians to knock-off what they think and do, and replace it with a millennial old tenacious cultural pride of an Ethiopian part and parcel. Dangerously and idiotically, I should add, it is this kind of presupposition, and an assertion of jingoistic nationalist

¹ http://dekialula.com/articles/t_kiros_jan_7_2007.pdf

fervor that makes the Somali, Sidama, Sidamo, Welayita, Oromia, and the many nations that compose the contemporary Ethiopian state tick for a good reason. All these nations that make the Ethiopian state are endowed with their own unique and beautiful culture that neither Kiros nor Siye has ever been able to experience let alone live it.

We have just started to appreciate the many beautiful diverse nations that we have had for years, which we nevertheless managed to ignore and ridicule for a long depriving time. Are we to succumb to that old prevalent tradition of lifting up the concept and perceptions of one nation to the zenith while depressing another to the bottom of the pit? We cannot possibly adhere and give prevalence and dominance to one and only one part of our history, to mold the rest of nations and peoples of the Ethiopian state into what Siye and Kiros are constructing- the “classical Ethiopian personality.” It’s this thinking and the failure to see nations as nations rather than nations as states or as nation-states that woke me up in the middle of the night to write and critique those who would otherwise hamper the state of affairs of Ethiopia.

A nation-state is a state where the majority of the members are from one nation. Iceland is the quintessential example of a nation-state, and Japan qualifies as one among the major states of our world. Not surprisingly, cohesiveness among people who stand to compose a nation-state is stronger than in a state where many nations stand to create it. Because, in a state of many nations, a nation may rise to dominate other nations by disadvantaging them politically, economically, and socially. The greater number of countries in the world are states composed of many nations, and this includes our country Ethiopia. As it is evident in our own history, a nation in our country had risen to dominate other nations by way of tradition, culture, and language to create an uneven political, economic, and social power structures. To correct this injustice, we have made most of the necessary changes. The new Ethiopian state has been born, where all of the nations of the state stand equally at the same pedestal of political, social, and economic power.

The kind of Ethiopia that Kiros and Siye are willing to construct in their newly found “New Thinking” is similar (not exactly the same) to the impossible task that America is undertaking to create a nation-state out of the diverse immigrant groups of the world. The United States, which was built on an immigrant culture of people from many nations, explicitly promotes the idea that immigrants become American, that is, become members of the nation, so that a nation-state with Anglo-Saxon deeply held values, culture, and language becomes the end result. In fact, Kiros and Siye are going further than what America is hoping to create. Siye and Kiros are asking all the nations that compose the state of Ethiopia to transform themselves into what Siye and Kiros are very familiar with -“the classical Ethiopian personality”

What is perceived by both Kiros and Siye as “classical Ethiopian personality” is not something that is made out of the culture, tradition, and language of the many nations that stand to make up the state of Ethiopia. Instead, it’s what has been acquired from the historical, cultural, and traditional perspective of part and parcel of a region of Ethiopia.

Revisiting the question of nationalism can be a salve to the fulfillment of all Ethiopia’s endeavor by correcting false premises that would otherwise have the potential to pit one nation with another. As nations who compose the state of Ethiopia, we cannot afford to continue acting as a group of quarrelsome people. When ever there is a discord about pivotal issues, the source of the disagreement should be explored to comprehend the real nature of the problem rather than stretching it to mean love of a country or lack thereof. This approach might lead us to find a

resolution faster in time and may give us a wider understanding of the issues that Siye and Kiros are failing to show us thus far.