

WHY P.M ABIY'S CHARACTERIZATION OF ETHIOPIANS AS 'PEOPLE WITH A SHORT MEMORY' HOLDS WATER?

By

Habtamu Girma Demiessie

Notes to Editor:

Habtamu Girma is a Lecturer at Jigjiga University, Department of Economics. He can be reached at ruhe215@gmail.com or hab200517@yahoo.com

Introduction

In his cabinet speech couple of months since selected as Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed (Ph.D) disclosed lack of integrity would be one of the challenges his leadership would face in time ahead. Roughly seven months later, on Feb 1 2019, while reporting the house of peoples representatives on the half-year performance of his government, the premier reiterated the challenge as core hinderance.

But this time, Dr. Abiy was cautious but explicit about the problem when he opted a soft wordings on the issue as 'short memory', while openly dubbed it a popular problem. As Dr. Abiy reckoned, '.....i t is unfortunate that (we) Ethiopians are people with short memory'. Such a reporting of the problem implies two. whose traits can be generalized as: one's will and determination to arrest his/her ego, and firm abidance to moral laws.

For Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the need to fighting the problem of 'short memory' in defending the pillars of MEDEMER, his governance principle. And short sightness, the syndrome associated with short memory mindset breeds such evil traits as - immorality, disloyalty, mistrust - all of which are antithesis of the behavioral foundation of MEDEMER - love, reconciliation and togetherness.

This piece questions if 'short memory' problem characterzes Ethiopian society at large; will try to explain the problem and put forward possible way outs of 'short sightedness' syndrom.

By way of operationalizing the concept of 'lack of memory', the writer opted a term 'lack of integrity'. And Also, the writer buys Dr. Abiy's take as short memory a feature characterizing (we) Ethiopians, and believes lack of integrity responsible for making every of our interactions rough and tough.

Conceptualizing the term 'Integrity'

Lack of integrity, a popular problem in Ethiopia, has ample to explain the recent crisis country has to endure, which is manifested by two interrelated faces: leadership crisis and institutional (formal or informal) dysfunctionality. And a genuine diagnosis on the ailments and sound prescription on the cure of lack of integrity character should base itself on Methodological Individualism, analytical tool this piece adopts. According to Methodological individualism, explaining social phenomena should begin from the individual as a unit of analysis.

Integrity Defined

We find the term integrity much in theology items than in an academic literature. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - defines integrity as \"simplicity,\" \"soundness,\" \"completeness,\" \"upright,\" or \"perfection.\" In Islamic teachings, the word 'taqwa' is used to refer the conduct of integrity. The lexical definition of integrity bases itself from makeup of the word itself - \"Integrity\" comes from the Latin word \"integritas\", and \"integra\" meaning whole, undivided, unbroken, or complete. The Random House Dictionary defines integrity as: doing the right thing, staying true to yourself and your word, even when you're faced with serious consequences for the choices that you're making.

In layman words, to show virtues of integrity means to be good.

Virtues of Integrity

From broader definition on the conduct of integrity are three quite interrelated virtues it embraces: i. adherence to moral and ethical principles - soundness of moral character, honesty; ii. A state of being whole - entire or undiminished; iii. Perfect condition - being sound, unimpaired.

The three virtues of integrity in turn born the three aspects of integrity: ego, rationality and moral. From ego perspective, integrity means one's traits to arrest his/her ego. From rationality angle, integrity involves traits of showing thoughtfulness and consistency in making decisions or taking actions. From moralistic point of view, integrity implies traits in an individual to be loyalty to acceptable moral standards by virtue of being a human; by virtue of roles and expectations in age, profession, family or societal status. Moralistic aspect of integrity justifies one's moral height to get approval or legitimacy for leadership role(s).

Does Lack of Integrity Characterizes the Ethiopian Populace?

Here is my hypothesized look on Ethiopian society: Ethiopians recognize integrity an important asset; by virtue of being a 'human', they are able to pay for it; and in lieu of their value for socialized lifestyle, they desperately need integrity in their daily lives. With scanty historical accounts on fabrics of Ethiopian society, existing documents tell Ethiopians are well acclaimed for their values of integrity in the past. Those evidences often taken for granted integrity a feature of Ethiopians.

Moreover, it was customary that Ethiopian kings tried to justify their regimes on the cause of defending integrity values. Even in some instances, as fetched from historical accounts, imperial regime pursued closed door policy on background of defending Ethiopian values from imported values threatened integrity of their subjects. As times goes by, in the advent of globalization, the integrity values of Ethiopians faced threat of contamination. Indeed, evident from our fabrics, I observe integrity elements having been eroded.

To corroborate the point, let me fetch from stock-pile of Ethiopian literature (since 1850's E.C), a task which I have been doing not primarily to organize this piece, but as part of my book project. As to my inferences so far, integrity issue has got much concern since the post-second world war Ethiopia. Those years were when Ethiopian artists & writers in their novels, stories, poems, plays, songs raised integrity threatened, and struggled in their works to defend the cause. Readers can consult works of some Ethiopian literary giants like Kebede Michael, Mekonnen Endalkachew, Roman Work Kassahu, Senidu Gebru, Hadis Alemayehu, Abe Gubegna, Assefa Gebre Mariam, Yilma Deressa, among others.

Perhaps, one of the factors that challenge integrity values is corrupt interpretation on capitalism and globalization, the two inalienables featuring the 20th and 21st century. What is important to note is that it takes to cope up with values of capitalism and elements of globalization like spread of science and technology.

Though Ethiopians are not fully embraced capitalism and globalization, as the day counts, the spirit of capitalism and effects of globalization are fast prospering. And what capitalism and globalization both requires, to function properly, is integrity of agents in transactions. In the age of capitalism where much of our fabric are marketed, integrity is a necessity, perhaps equally basic as necessities of life - water, food and sheltering.

In our time when globalization is at its zenith, our world diminished a village. As a result of that, every knocks in one corner of the world is heard in another corner. Hence, in today's world, the cost of breaching integrity is so dear that every one of us are subjected to count the cost.

Let us all Ethiopians genuinely evaluate our walks in various departments of life - intra-personal, inter-personal, societal or citizenry and interactions defined for various causes - social, economic, politics, religion, security, or other. As to mine, a dwindling characters of integrity is an apparent reality of today's Ethiopia.

From our relationships, I see frugality of integrity, where we are unable to be good to ourselves let alone to others. I perceive Ethiopians misinterpret conduct of integrity as old fashioned, characterizing it with foolishness.

Our day is when gross suppression is inflicted against morality, loyalty, trust and rationality. It is ironic that we blame each other or point finger on others for the woes, self-declaring as being clean. From the outset, how can all of us be clean while all of us talk about woes? Who balmes who if everyone perceived genuine? Nothing explains this except paradox of integrity.

How Ethiopians get Cure of their syndrome - 'Short - Sightedness' ?

The answer is upto and when we are introvert about aspects of integrity: rationality, ego and moral, upon which I ask all Ethiopians to genuinely evaluate ourselves.

How Rational are (We) Ethiopians?

The rationality aspect of integrity reveals itself in our intra-personal or inter-personal relationships. A critical look into our communications entails rationality element as one of scarce virtues. To evaluate our rationality, each Ethiopian has to be genuine, not only for answers, but also for the importance of the following quests in our daily lives:

How faithful are we on the power of human as a master of his life, as blessed by its creator, almighty God, as well noted in holy books? How often are we mindful of our actions and reactions with ourselves or others? How far we consider the pros and cons of our decisions or actions before taking action or make decision? How genuine are we about conceding that our life today is the result of a course we chose yesterday?