



## MANIPULATION OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS REGRESS DEMOCRATIZATION:ETHIOPIAN MUSLIMS CIVIL RIGHT MOVEMENT

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### **Abstract**

*Democratization as a multi level process is very volatile in many African countries and still in some countries democratic breakdown can happen anywhere and anytime. Religious freedom as a fundamental human right and independence of religious institutions are important social sphere where democratization can be tested. In this article how manipulation of religious institutions affect democratization in Ethiopia where religion has important role both in the society and the public sphere. Explaining the role of religion and religious institutions and models for religion and democracy relation, the article build theoretical framework to analyze how manipulation of religious institutions are challenging Ethiopian infant democratization and testing the ruling party's commitment for principles of democracy and its political program. Detail analysis is made on the ongoing three years old Muslims' civil right movement and the government reaction as an important indicator. As a result state intervention in religious affairs to the extent of playing prophetic role and repression of basic religious freedoms found to be risky domain of democratization in the country. Consequently the government's failure to meet the democratic demand of citizens reflects both the decline of infant democratization process in the country and disclose the ruling party's lack of commitment to be governed by it political program and the countries constitution.*

**Key Words:** *Ethiopia's Democratization, Muslims Civil Right Movement, Manipulation of Religion.*

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# DİNİ KURUMLARIN MANİPÜLASYONU VE DEMOKRATİKLEŞMENİN GERİLEMESİ: ETİYOPYA MÜSLÜMAN SİVİL HAKLAR HAREKETİ

## Özet

*Çok katmanlı bir süreç olarak demokratikleşme pek çok Afrika ülkesinde istikrarsızlık göstermektedir ve hala bazı ülkelerde herhangi bir zamanda ve yerde demokrasinin kesintiye uğraması söz konusudur. İnsan hakkı olarak din özgürlüğü ve dini kurumların bağımsızlığı demokrasinin kalitesinin test edilebileceği bir alandır. Bu makalede hem toplum hem de kamu hayatında dinin önemli bir rolünün bulunduğu Etiyopya'da dini kurumların manipülasyonunun demokratikleşme sürecini nasıl etkilediği ele alınmıştır. Din ve dini kurumların ve din-demokrasi ilişkisinin modellerle izah edildiği bu çalışma, dini kurumların manipülasyonunun daha bebekliğini yaşayan Etiyopya demokrasisini nasıl zor durumda bıraktığını ve iktidar partisinin demokratik kurallara ve parti programına bağlılığını nasıl test ettiğini açıklayan bir kuramsal temele dayanmaktadır. Henüz üç yıllık bir hareketi olan Müslüman Sivil Haklar Hareketi ve önemli bir gösterge olarak hükümet tepkisi üzerine ayrıntılı çözümlenmeler yapılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, devletin din işlerine kehanete varacak düzeyde müdahalesinin ve temel dini özgürlüklerin bastırılmasının ülkenin demokratikleşme süreci açısından riskli olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu nedenle, hükümetin vatandaşların demokratik taleplerini karşılamada yetersiz kalması hem demokratikleşme sürecinin gerilemekte olduğunu hem de iktidar partisinin siyasi programına ve anayasaya bağlı kalarak bir yönetim sergileyemediğini göstermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Etiyopya'nın Demokratikleşmesi, Müslüman Sivil Haklar Hareketi, Dini Manipülasyon.

## Introduction

Democratization in the wave of change by the end of the Cold War able to establish strong democratic systems in many countries while democracy gave way to authoritarian government of one kind or another in many others (Anthony, 2007: 129). It should be noted that none of the reversion to authoritarian systems after a light of democratization said to be caused by a single reason like ethnic cleavages in society, economic collapse or any. Democratic breakdowns can happen anywhere in the public space where disorder prevails in social or political space where the public build its identity and states unable to play their custodian role based the principle of democracy. That is why political philosophers while locating themselves within liberal democratic framework, advance alternative ways to allow religious values and discourse in to democratic politics so that religion will not be a threat for democracy (Cunningham, 2005:2).

When the era of socialist insurgencies and state-building projects, from the 1970s until the early 1990s, ended in more or less failed projects of national development in the horn of Africa, religious identities have returned as vigorous

constituent elements in communal and political discourse in the area (Abinik, 2011:254). Hence in a country like Ethiopia where more than 85 ethnicities inhabit with distinct culture and language and citizens are generally known as “believers”, the way states handle religious issues can lead both towards and away from democracy. Unfortunately, for long time in the history of Ethiopia, the term democracy was unthinkable as the manner rulers came to power and manage state affairs was far from the principles of democracy. The “one state- one religion” slogans of regimes for hundreds of years until the coming of military rule in 1974 is considered as a major impeding factor deteriorating democratization and development of the country.

After the fall of the last Monarchy in 1974, the long relationship between the Church and state was once and for all ended thereby making Ethiopia a secular Military government based on the principles of Socialism and Communism (Bahru, 2002). The outbreak of the popular revolution that toppled the Ethiopian monarchy triggered by more of due to religious inequality in addition to demand for land reform and ethnic politics. The demonstrators called for the separation of religion from politics, publicly denounced the notion that Ethiopia was an island of Christianity surrounded and besieged by Islam, and declared that it was the home of the adherents of other faiths, including Islam. Subsequently, the Ethiopian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was established in 1976 (Hussein, 2006:7). However, both Muslims and people of other faiths did not benefit much in the communist system which regarded spirituality as an undesired hindrance on the road to growth. Hence, the civil right movement for religious freedom undergoing in the current Ethiopia cannot be separated from the unfinished struggle that started during the 1974 revolution.

Yet in 1991 a new government, Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power after a long armed struggle claiming the principles of Democracy and equality. EPRDF has established a new Ethiopian state with many of the feature of Electoral democracy. However, in a country like Ethiopia elections and Electoral democracy by themselves are not a sufficient condition for political representation, individual and group rights but there is little doubt that they are necessary conditions. The first “democratic” election took place in 1995 and the second in 2000. The third and the most competitive election that had a potential to transfer the country to a multi-party system took place in 2005, both for the Federal Parliament as well as for the nine state councils. On this election the ruling party has faced a land slide defeat especially around major cities including the capital. In Addis Ababa only 2 of the 46 seats not won by Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), 44 were won by parties that are considered allies of the ruling coalition.

Following the demise of military regime and relative freedom as a result of efforts to move towards democratization, Islam, as a cultural and social identity,

also became an active, integral part of the Ethiopian fabric. Ethiopia's redefinition as a federal state based on ethnic diversity contributed to the country's openness toward its Muslims and toward Islam (Erlich, 2010: 119). This marks the beginning of democratization in the country as the regime conducts series of elections and shows its commitment to the realization of its political program which is based on revolutionary democracy.

However, just when things were improving for the Muslims the government started changing its policy towards Muslims. The government was systematically trying to reverse whatever little improvement the Muslims have made over the years. Things got worse when politicians decided to bring and sponsor one specific Islamic sect from Lebanon in an effort to "de-radicalize" Muslims in 2008. Muslims, finally, came to know the "radicalized" that is supposed to be "de-radicalized" is the entire Muslim community, especially, the large and enlightened who stand up to demand a constitutionally enshrined religious right and the fight government interference in religious affairs which is a move against an established constitutional declaration.

Ethiopian Muslims are undergoing a three-year-old peaceful struggle for their democratic right and more specifically for religious freedom. Writers, researchers and local & international organizations are witnessing the democratic demands of the people and the peaceful constitutional struggle. Many believe that the government's approach to handle the case is diametrically opposite to its political program and the country's constitution. This article will investigate this issue through a detailed analysis of the case to test whether the current status of religious freedom is a setback for democratization for the country or not. The article will assess the ongoing movement in light of principles of democracy and the government's response in light of its strategic political program. And at the end it tries to answer whether the prolonged Muslim struggle and unwillingness of the government to address the democratic demands of citizens is a declining stage for democratization in Ethiopia and the ruling party's program or not.

## **1. STATE RELIGION INTERACTION FROM THEORETICAL VIEWPOINT**

The dynamics of religious freedom and democracy relationship has attracted great emphasis from researchers and writers. To make our work well focused we will not deal with every one of its dimensions but how state and state institutions in a democratic state are interacting with religions and religious institutions. We will discuss three different systems of categorization of state-religion interaction briefly and build our theoretical framework for this specific article.

Depending on historical time line Donati Pierpaolo in his work 'Religion And Democracy In The Post-Modern World (Donati Pierpaolo, 2001:311-318), designs two models of state-religion interaction. Accordingly, the beginning of mo-

ernity (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) considered as the first category that forced religion to adapt itself to the political symbolic code of democratisation, that is to say it saw and treated religion in relation to that code (nothing of a religious character was accepted within the public sphere unless it subjected itself to the criteria of democratic political procedures). This strategy is also known as 'The European model.' The second type of strategies conceded autonomy to religion but relegated it to the purely private sphere and separated it from the political sphere. This model is named "The American Model'. This model will not help us to analyse whether state is manipulating religion and religious institutions and vice versa for two reasons. First, the model is very broad and build based on the historical experience in western liberal democrat countries that cannot explain countries of new democracy. The second reason is the model mainly discusses whether religion is a threat for democracy or not. Based on this premises active neutrality (marginalization) and passive neutrality (in-difference) are suggested as means to keep away religion from public sphere.

Boothby (1998) proposes another four country model that can capture more diversified nature of religious freedom-democracy interaction specifically taking church as symbol of religious institutions. First, the Greek model, which is refer to as the official state church model, which recognizes the Church as the official religion of the Greek state and other religions are relegated to a disadvantaged status. The second is the Austrian model, which is referred to as the 'official multi-religion' state church model. Under this model, churches have certain specific rights, including the right to participate in the state-controlled religious taxation program, to engage in religious education, and import religious workers. Registration requirements are major strategy for the exclusion of many other religious groups from the religious marketplace. The next model is the Spanish model, which is also called 'multilevel pluralistic model'. This model provides substantial religious freedom, but is divided into four levels, or classifications, of religious groups. These four levels afford varying non-equal degrees of protection, and enjoy different relations with the state. The fourth model is the Netherlands model, which is termed as the 'full pluralistic model'. In the Netherlands, churches are not even mentioned in the constitution, but they enjoy full and equal religious freedom. This is because it is generally accepted that religious groups and organizations, as well as individuals, are guaranteed certain fundamental rights. This model seems appropriate to our interest but still has a limitation when it comes to multi religious countries with historical marginalization that needs constitutional safe guard (Boothby, 1998:2-4).

The other model suggested by (Kurt, 2001:2-3) encompasses five alternatives to evaluate religious liberty and are listed below.

**Religious Establishment (religion is true):** Under this model, government regulates on the basis of religious truth. Churches are not autonomous but are subject to state regulation directed towards the end of encouraging true, and

discouraging false religion. Particular religious or political views may be suppressed due to their threat to particular religious ideals.

**Religious Freedom (religion is valuable):** Religion is treated as a valuable aspect of society. Accordingly, government acts in a manner that maximizes religious freedom. An important aspect of this model is the presumption that religiously motivated conduct is immune from laws significantly burdening religious exercise absent a sufficiently compelling justification.

**Equal Protection (religion is neutral):** Government should not use religion or religious belief as criteria for action or inaction. Discriminatory treatment of religion (either for or against) is prohibited, but not government actions that incidentally burden or benefit religion. To the extent that religious exercise shares secular aspects of other preferred rights, religious expression or conduct would receive the same heightened protection.

**Nonestablishment (religion is private):** Presumes that the government should minimize actions that incidentally benefit, or positively influence, religious participation or belief. Unlike the equal protection model, under non establishment the government avoids incidentally benefiting religion along with analogous secular activity. Thus, religion is presumptively subject to generally applicable laws and presumptively excluded from otherwise generally available government benefit programs.

**Secular Establishment (religion is dangerous):** Under this model, religion is treated as a problem which requires affirmative government regulation. Law under this model tends to minimize, suppress or otherwise influence citizens away from religious belief and conduct. Like the religious establishment model, government has power to regulate religious expression and conduct on the basis of the idea or belief expressed. All religion may be regulated or only those religions that are considered to be especially dangerous to secular political ideals.

For the sake of this article equal protection and secular establishment model will have better importance and our hypothesis would also be ‘Ethiopian government made a shift in attitude towards Muslim citizens taking the religion as dangerous and manipulate religious institutions to tackle this danger.

## 2. DEMOCRATIZATION AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Extending the argument we built above that democratization is a gradual step that will not often fulfilled, no regime should be called a democracy unless its rulers govern democratically. As Linz and Stepan (1996) elaborates if elected executives infringe the constitution of the nation, violate the rights of individuals and groups, impinge upon the legitimate functions of the legislature, and thus fail to rule within the bounds of a state of law, their regimes are not democracies. Democratization in Ethiopia should be evaluated not just from the status of transition from authoritarianism but from status of putting basic democratic

principles in effect. Our basic focus will be whether the regime is using its 'liberal constitution' to deepen democracy or just as a mask of oppression taking the status of Muslims' religious freedom as our point of analysis (Linz-Stepan, 1996:1).

Religious freedom is certainly important element of democratization in a country like Ethiopia where its citizens generally labelled as 'religious'. Stepan as cited in (Michael D., 2010:11-12) proposes essential aspect of religious freedom-democracy interdependence in any regime that portends to be democratic. This flows from the basic political rights and civil liberties which democracies must guarantee their citizens to secure them their ability to exercise democratic rights to elect officials and hold them accountable. With respect to religion, Stepan argues the government cannot regulate or prohibit private religious belief and worship or prevent citizens from organizing politically and pursuing policy objectives which are in line with their religious values as long as they do not violate the constitution. In another perspective in liberal democracies, the upsurge of public religion might appear compatible with democracy and political civility (Hasan, 2011:6).

The key link in a chain of arguments to show that democratic state should respect religious freedom and avoid endorsing any one vision of a given religion on the expense of others is the state must facilitate people's pursuit of their various aims as far as possible in their own ways-that is, pluralism (Cunningham, 2005:4). The absence of such right in Ethiopia since the Imperial era makes religion one of the three major agendas Ethiopians were struggling in the path to democracy next to land reform and equal right for nations and nationalities. More importantly religion was the main reason for the deposition of the Imperial regime in 1974 when Emperor Hile Selassie deposed through popular uprising led by the military that ruled for seventeen years with an iron fist. Muslims had formed a major contingent in the demonstrations that led to the demise of the Imperial regime (Shinn, 2002:2).

Ethiopia, which was known as Habeshistan, is the first country to have accepted Islam and its king at the time known as Nejashi was the first ruler ever to accept Islam. When the first Muslims were persecuted in Mekkah due to their religion, The Holy Prophet ordered them to flee and take refuge in Ethiopia - a land which he called "the land of truth". Ever since that time Islam has been preached in the country through foreign traders and now Muslims constitute nearly half of the country and share a common motherland with people of other faith; mainly Orthodox and Protestant Christians.

After the remarkable historical moment Islam laid its ground in Ethiopia, Muslims have passed through various stages of societal development and territorial expansion. This ranges from coercive repression to powerful Islamic states which were named 'Sultanates'. One of the most powerful Sultan was

Imam Ahmed bin Ibrahim Al Ghazi who was consolidated his power in the early 1520s in the City of Harar, succeeded on his administration of Abyssinian territory (Brhane, 2009:7). With the help of Ottoman Turks Imam Ahmed almost completely succeed in his task of defeating the Christian king Lebna-Dengel (1508-1540), and shrinking the Christian Empire's territories deep north. Consequently, the Emperor appealed for help to the Portuguese, who were quite happy to respond (Bahru, 2002:221). The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are mostly dark ages for the Muslims in that they lost their glorious position due to excessive repression by the Christian kingdom and internal conflicts among different sultanates. This period was mostly described by coercive action against the Muslims to the extent of denying their citizenship.

The last two regimes discussed in our first part of this article laid their own finger print to the current status of religious freedom in the country. During Emperor Haileselassie the regime had officially established religion. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, as one of the oldest and strongest institution in the polity, had monopoly over the various spheres of life of Ethiopian Christians, and the State affairs. The Derg regime was quite opposite to that of the Imperials. The Constitution drafted during the Derg era proclaims the separation of religion and State purportedly recognizes freedom of conscience and religion. However, the Derg's key ideological focus was the triumph of the so called 'Scientific Socialism', a temptation that sought to make this political ideology a substitute for religion, undoubtedly, this type of hypocrisy was meant only another form of the extension of religious repression; at best it was a kind of benign neglect to religious rights at worst it was an outright religious persecution.

With the downfall of the Derg in 1991, and the establishment of a federal republic, the State once again officially detached itself from matters of religion and religions also cease to interfere in State affairs. Ethiopian Muslims, Christians and other denominations finally achieved a sense of equality unparalleled in their previous history. The FDRE Constitution of 1995 guaranteed equal status to all citizens and to all forms of religious denominations. The FDRE constitution was the first in its kind to secure religious freedom in all of its forms. For the most part Muslims gave a warm welcome and dedicated to keep it respected. There was little grievance heard as to the constitutional rights, however in implementation we are witnessing a growing grievance that is reaching its climax currently.

The current Ethiopian government requires religious institutions to be registered in order to enjoy recognized status. And religious institutions must also renew their registration with the Ministry of Justice every three years. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was awarded legal personality without having to go through the same procedure as other religions. The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, here in after (EIASC) which was supposed to represent more than half of the total population, has been registered in 1988 E.C (Brhane, 2009:138)



which a symbol of discrimination in practice. This act of forcing EIASC was not simply a bureaucratic procedure but the main gate for manipulation of religion and religious institutions in the incumbent government. Such partial treatment and intentional attempt to disrespect the constitution by those state actors and institutions by large contributed to the current Muslims grievance and peaceful right movement continued for the last three years to be discussed in much detail in latter sections.

### **3. MANIPULATION OF RELIGION: SETBACK TO DEMOCRATIZATION**

September 11, 2001 attack on world trade centre reshape the world politics and Africa is not an exception. Following the politics of the war against terrorism a number of African governments under pressure have been getting ready to enact new legislation ostensibly against terrorist threats but it is more likely to be used against selected groups believed to be a danger for the government in power. The number of failed states around the world in the aftermath of September 11 has been demonstrated that even a democracy which is about two hundred years old can be very fragile (Mazrui, 2002:7). Although Democratic institutions and practices have been firmly established for four decades or more that able to build younger but seemingly secure democratic regimes, still there and many new democracy in fragile state and still handful of countries not a system even by name (Anthony, 2007:110).

The aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has affected not only the issue of war and peace but also civil liberties in many countries. In addition, the aftermath has interrupted the democratic revival in Africa. A number of African governments under pressure from the politics of the war against terrorism have been getting ready to enact new legislation ostensibly against terrorist threats. The legislation is more likely to be used against either ethnic minorities or political opponents or any possibly organized part of the society demanding democratic right to the regime in Africa (Mazrui, 2002:7). In Ethiopia, there is evidence to suggest that the Minister of Federal Affairs has been given additional powers to fully control religious institutions and manipulate them to the extent of assigning politicians as leaders of such institutions.

#### **A. Manipulation of Religious Institutions Reversing Democratization**

History shows that it is easier to establish democratic institutions than to develop the political conventions and practices that are needed to build a stable system of democratic government. The latter requires not only a system of free elections but also free mass media, freedom to organize, a non-partisan judiciary, a willingness of the state organs to refrain from using their power to abuse democratic process and rights of citizens (Anthony, 2007:129). To this end Africa's progress toward democracy in the wave of change that was precipitated by the

end of the Cold War has been halting and partial. After the first decade of transition, many African regimes could still be characterized as what Ninsin termed “choiceless democracies” at best, and as forms of “electoral authoritarianism” (Merara, 2011:3)

More specifically as Rose and Chull (2001:337) logically put it an incomplete democracy can follow one of three different paths: completion, repudiation or the indefinite persistence of incomplete democracy. An incomplete democracy can persist in its state is a result of political imbalance of supply and demand. On the supply side, governors may show major shortcomings like untrustworthiness and unresponsiveness to the demand of ordinary people that clearly seen in many countries the difficulty in completing democracy rather turning to an undemocratic regime. Following the September 11 attack the Ethiopian government become suspicious of many, especially Islamic activities nationally. This leads to the state manipulation of religion and religious institutions for repression and marginalization of its members and ignoring the public demand for basic and national rights. In this section we will cover how the government manipulate religious institutions and its effect in the reversion of the infant democratization of the country ever seen since its development.

Manipulation of religion is a phenomenon which is as old as the history of mankind himself. And in our modern time misapplication of democratic rule may lead to manipulation of religion both by politicians and individuals. Ilesanmi (1997) as cited in Mike (2013:1) describes manipulation of religion as “the art of using religion as a tool for cheating to achieve one’s personal ambition. However manipulation is not limited for individuals rather states and state actors do it in greater extent. Politicians, in their quest to acquire power use religion as a tool of oppression, disunity and war (Oguntola, 2008:131). The basic argument for the state to intervene in religious affairs and oppress believers in the name rational force is to retreat religion from politics that did not happen spontaneously. In order to establish their own political authority which was based on the rational and not the divine, state authorities strove to acquire a monopoly over religions and religious institutions (Michael D., 2010:5). This argument in reality is two dimensional: one dismantling religious authorities from political power and the second is making religion free from state hand. In most countries including those said to be democracy is consolidated the first wing is usually successful in that political leadership become free of religious authorities but not the second.

Political actors of all stripes regularly manipulate religious identities and religious institutions for political ends. This includes modern state elites. State actors have never been reluctant to manipulate religion for their own purposes. State actors have long used religion to sanctify political power and to imbue relationships of dominance with an aura of legitimate authority. Besides, in our time the efforts to draw on-to exploit-illiberal interpretations of religion had an

enormous impact on the political fortunes (Hibbard, 2010:7-10). What is more surprising is when state actors play priestly function for a religion they didn't follow just for a political goal.

Ethiopian Muslims have been consistently holding peaceful civil right movement against the alleged unconstitutional governmental interference in their religious affairs. The protest is continuing throughout the country since 2012. The movements' unique characteristics from its inception to the current stage have an immense importance to evaluate the effect of manipulating religious institution on the status of democratization process in Ethiopia.

It has now been exactly two years since the Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA), in collaboration with the unelected leadership of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), officially launched a program aimed at indoctrinating Ethiopian Muslims with the teachings of a sect known as "Al Ah-bash", which is a religious sect believed to have been founded by the Harar born Ethiopian Abdulahi Harari that tries to interpret Islam using Philosophical and Aristotelian logic. Muslims alleged that a training program jointly administered by the government and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) constituted government interference in Islamic affairs. A majority of Ethiopian Muslims saw the program as a government-led attempt to impose a foreign religious philosophy (LEBMA, 2013).

The MFA/EIASC collaboration goes beyond mere indoctrination and alteration of the faith of Ethiopian Muslims, as they have been engaged in a series of unlawful and unconstitutional measures that have affected and continue to affect the peaceful lives of Muslim communities across the country. Even though the organization /EIASC-Mejlis/ is supposed to be one similar to the "Diyamet" organizations in Turkey, the Ethiopian Mejlis is by far the most corrupted and most unspiritual "religious" organization in the country because it has always been controlled by filthy government cadres who hate Islam and Muslims the most. Its most dangerous trait was the fact that it works very hard to destroy the unity of Muslims in the country.

Such illegal and unconstitutional backdoor control mechanism has been practiced since 1995 onwards and the new campaign the government announced in 2011 was to be done by manipulating the religious institution Mejlis. Government Ministers were recorded saying openly that "government was working with mejlis how to indoctrinate this sect and was mobilizing huge resources to fund the 'de-radicalization' projects. Indeed, this was most shocking for the Muslims of the country. Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA) hiding behind the corrupt Mejlis was clearly breaching the constitution that prohibits the state from interfering in religious affairs.

In an effort to formally appeal to the government to stop violating consti-

tutionally guaranteed freedoms and rights, Ethiopian Muslims elected, in January 2012, a committee of 17 members to speak to pertinent government authorities. The 17 Muslims' representatives met and held talks with officials of the MFA articulating three key current demands of Ethiopian Muslims directly related to the forced indoctrination campaign, namely: (1) Let the unelected leadership of the EIASC leave office and a fresh, free and democratic election be held with the full participation of the Muslim community; (2) Let the government stop interfering in Muslims' religious affairs and its attempt to impose the al-Ahbash sect on Muslims; and (3) Let the Awoliya Islamic Center be run and managed by a Board drawn from the Muslim community.

The three questions are potentially inclusive in that they manifest key historical problems Muslims are facing when it comes to religious freedom. Islam and Muslims have faced injustice in the hands of kings and emperors. No one can deny the extent of intolerance Muslims have endured for the last 60 years in particular. Since the time of Hile Sellasie such injustice has been made by government hidden agendas in the name of EIASC. Therefore the ongoing peaceful protest and struggle for religious freedom is both historical and democratic in its nature. Analyzing the government response to such democratic demand will disclose whether democracy is facing setback or not in Ethiopia.

## **B. Liberal Constitution Unable to Defend from Oppression**

Constitution is one of the pillars used to evaluate democratization of a given country (Linz-Stepan, 1996). It refers to governmental and nongovernmental forces, which have to become habituated to the resolution of conflicts within the democratic procedures and laws ratified in the constitution. In 1995, a new Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was adopted by a National Assembly. The Constitution guarantees human rights, making all the international Human Rights Charters that Ethiopia has ratified part of Ethiopian law. It endorses and deepens commitment to democracy and accountability (Fausewang, 2004). This long waited constitution was highly welcomed by the Muslims community. It was believed that the ratification of the constitution was the prime gift EPRDF brought and the best safe guard for their existence as a first class citizen. Almost every article was found in comply with historical demands of Muslims and triggering instrument for their active participation in the overall development of the nation.

The constitution protects the freedom of opinion, religion, association and movement as well as the freedom of information and the press. It prohibits inhumane treatment/ guarantees the right of access to justice and asserts the right to vote, to be elected and to take part in the conduct of public affairs. It even asserts a right to development and to a healthy environment. Furthermore Muslims felt confident in that the constitution will not be a mere articulation as it has complete asymmetry with the party's revolutionary democratic goals. According to

the strategy document of EPRDF (2011:7):

*If our democratic order is to flourish, the peoples' constitutional rights must be fully respected. With the furtherance of popular understanding as well as democracy culture, ordinary people can freely exercise and protect their rights. Democratic arrangements and institutions, the pillars of democratic order, must be strengthened so that they can fully discharge the tasks assigned to them. The people must freely organize in ways of their own choosing in order to secure active participation. We seek a thriving democratic order based on the free and organized participation of citizens, where the rights of the people are respected, where the people exercise their rights to advance their interest, where the democratic state and popular institutions thrive, and where popular democratic consciousness and culture develop based on transparency and accountability.*

The Ethiopian constitution is liberal democratic document as regards to its elaboration of human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and parliamentary democracy (Solomon, 2012:18). However, practically the country is not adapting and adopting most of the democratization process from those liberal countries that used to be. And this same constitution cannot protect Muslims against the increasing deterioration of religious freedoms as it has repeatedly disrespected by state institutions. Since the start of Muslims right movement objecting the politically motivated indoctrination campaign, dozens killed, thousands have been detained and the remaining majority in the cause are exposed to continues acts of repression that are diametrically opposite to the constitution.

Since the start of the civil right movement the government charged hundred protestors with terrorism and attempting to establish an Islamic state. The individuals charged were among tens of thousands peacefully protesting the government's violations of international standards and their constitutional right to religious freedom. As U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF, 2012) put it "These charges are only the latest and most concerning attempt by the Ethiopian government to crush opposition to its efforts to control the practice of religion by imposing on Ethiopian Muslims a specific interpretation of Islam." The government has punished innocent citizens who have resisted unconstitutional acts.

In a situation where thousands arrested without arrest warrant, the fate of the constitution that makes illegal such actions is a prime concern for anyone standing for freedom and democratic principles. The detainees are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, and there have been numerous reports of beatings in detention. Some detainees have been held in incommunicado detention since their arrest without access to family members, often in unknown locations (HRW, 2012:2). The ongoing criminal prosecution of the 29 famous individuals, including eight of the 17 members of the Muslim community's representatives,

religious teachers, peaceful protesters and journalists, as well as the continued arbitrary arrests and detention of thousands of Muslims across the country is nothing but a clear manifestation of the government's unwillingness to respect its constitution and implement its political program as it was intended. The government has been doing all these in a blatant disregard to the secular ideals enshrined in the country's constitution and all international human rights instruments to which Ethiopia is a party.

More devastating is the unconstitutional trial procedures of thousands of detainees. The Ethiopian constitution and other laws guarantee accused persons the right to fair trial. Article 20(1) guarantees accused persons "the right to a public trial." But this constitutional protection is weakened by the lack of responsible law enforcement, insofar as the absence of check and balance in the judiciary system, the right to a fair trial for Muslims becomes unthinkable throughout the nation. Constitutional Article 19 (5) stipulates that, "persons arrested shall not be compelled to make confessions or admissions which could be used in evidence or against them. Any evidence obtained under coercion shall not be admissible." In addition, Article 20(3) provides that "during proceedings accused persons have the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law and not to be compelled to testify against themselves" (FDRE, 1995). However, the government has undermined the defendants' presumption of innocence by broadcasting inflammatory material and accusations against them on state television (HRW, 2013). The government has also been hampering the operation of several legally registered NGOs (such as Orphanages, Research and Cultural centers, Muslim Youth Clubs, Islamic Schools, Learning Centers etc.) run by the Muslim community and handing over the running and management of such NGOs and other community-based organizations (CBOs) to the unelected EIASC. What is more worrying is that the government is bestowing upon the EIASC illegitimate powers allowing it to infringe the constitutional rights and freedoms that Ethiopian Muslims have as citizens of the country and as human beings.

It is clear that democratization will impede due to break up of rule of law anywhere in the public sphere. It is not a matter of only withholding the right to vote from someone nor such things as racial or sexist discrimination that excludes people from forums for public debate and discussion or from forming potentially effective organization (Cunningham, 2002:68), democratization will also impede when established rules and institutions unable to defend citizen from oppression that involves being politically subordinated to the will of specific members of other groups in the public office. Taking the Ethiopian experience in relation to the ongoing civil right movement of Ethiopian muslims whether democracy is impeded will not be left for one's conception but a fact. Most of the rights and securities articulated in the constitutions are not no more in a position to be functional and thereby let the country without working constitution which is a demarcation between democratic and undemocratic regimes.

### **C. Democratization Reversed**

Articulating three basic democratic demands, the 17 members of Ethiopian Muslims representatives supported with petitions from millions of Muslims throughout the nation, they planned the most democratic and peaceful ways to address the demands of the angry crowd. They start with formal and informal lobby to convince the pure democratic and religious nature of their demand and clarify misunderstandings of officials and citizens both Muslims and non Muslims. Their relentless effort together with the most disciplined protest of hundreds of thousands of Muslims brought a remarkable achievement in that the three articulated questions believed to be legal democratic demands of Ethiopian Muslims and the 17 members of the committee the legal representatives. By following the very democratic paths that government fail to do so in the latter time, the civilized protesters and committed leaders able to pass one of the biggest challenges in such moment where every agenda set by Muslims labelled with terrorism. And they test for all, Ethiopians Muslims are demanding secular Ethiopia where freedom of religion is secured as well for the international community the unique nature Ethiopian Muslims despite the fact that the movement was began when the Arab spring did not get to its end.

In the first few responses to the simmering Muslim opposition to its anti-secularist policies, the government tried to play it legal. It acknowledged that the Majlis (Ethiopian Islamic Supreme Council) problem was a legitimate concern and also was willing to negotiate with the committee that was representing the angry crowd. It praised the demands of the representatives, and declared that an election would be held to form a new Majlis (LEBMA, 2013: 164). All the state Medias and government official started praising the democratic way Muslims demanding their religious right. The Late Prime Minister Meles also urged his party executive committee members on the need to address those demands in accordance with the constitution. Accordingly, it was soon announced that the Majlis election was to be held in an obviously highly controlled environment to be conducted in the government -controlled kebeles- a political administration unit (ibid). However this action was completely unacceptable as it was unconstitutional as it allows government hands to manage directly religious affairs and contrary to the demands of the protesting masses.

Although the demonstrations have been absolutely peaceful and have been confined to mosques, the government has responded with deadly force. Security forces shot dead a number of people in, Assasa town, Arsi Zone of Oromia Regional State, in April 2012, and in Gerba and Degan towns in Amhara Regional State in October of 2012, and latter in 2013 in the capital Addis Ababa (HRW, 2012). Having realized the government's apparent unwillingness to address the Muslim communities' plights properly, the representatives urged the Muslim community to exert utmost patience and continue the struggle to ensure the respect of democratic rights through only peaceful means. While the government

left no stone unturned to make the movement lose its peaceful path so that it will be easy to label and terrorize the non-Muslim community, Muslims stick to their struggle in a religious and peaceful context. In that way the movement is gaining momentum and getting smarter despite government's confusing and divisive propaganda.

While the call for pursuing the struggle through peaceful means and using the public institutions entitled for this strictly adhered to by Muslim communities all over the country, the government resorted to the use of force and/or the abuse of power to carry on letting the infant democratization to setback.

By now it is understandable that the cause and stages of the ongoing peaceful struggle of Ethiopian Muslims is by large a struggle for social change in a democratic manner. It is a struggle for respect for the country's constitution. The demands are clear democratic demands that were guaranteed in the constitution and the stages the movement is passing through also pure democratic. On contrary, the government response to this peaceful movement is too far from the constitution and the ruling party's political program.

EPRDF is believed to be governed by the principles of revolutionary democracy and struggles for the objectives as specified in its party programme. The EPRDF'S strategic political objective as it mentioned in its political program is to put in place a stable multiparty democratic system whereby the human and democratic rights of citizens, upheld in the Constitution, are fully respected and where democratic institutions and culture flourish through ensuing popular participation in the country's political and economic life. The organization's first political goal was listed as "Materializing the peoples' political and human rights completely."

To help us analyze the current position of the party's program in the face of the ever strong challenge the Ethiopian Muslims peaceful struggle put on the ruling party, it will be more important to go one step deep in the party program's articulation. The ruling party take itself as a sole saviour of the country standing to ensure respect for rights recognized in the Constitution, with all citizens enjoying them to the full, while progressively strengthened. It was meant to staunchly fight for the full exercise of these rights by the broad masses in a democratic system where rights of citizens are respected.

The democratic rights of the masses are listed and include a roster of such human rights and due process protections as freedom of expression, the right to organize at any level and in any form, the right to strike in accordance with the law, and the right to express one's opposition even to the revolutionary democratic government which serves the people's interest. The rights of the people enumerated in the strategy document are best feet in articulation, including guarantees against imprisonment without due process and protections from beatings, confiscating of people's property, searching people's property, searching people's



houses, or restricting their freedom of movement or belief. In spite of the reality on the ground, the party's political program force the full implementation of the Constitutional provisions on independence as well as on checks and balances among the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

These most significant pillars of the party's program and hopes for democratization of Ethiopia become mere mirage for the Ethiopian Muslims. The three years old peaceful struggle was a test for the ruling party whether to abide by its program to consolidate democracy gradually or the program was just hypocrisy. All the developments leading up to the challenge and the form of government response to it have most severely weakened the democratic status of the regime, and it is on its move to re bring authoritarian regime. The right movement has altogether shattered the ever-strong desire of the government to be seen as having mature democracy and forced it to discard democratization is in danger. From direct intervention in the religious affairs to the severe treatment of citizens both on protest and detention and as well the full control of judiciary system by political decisions are an indication of the declining stages of democracy. A party that has failed to be ruled by and committed to implement its program is no more a democratic party.

### **Conclusion**

Indeed, Ethiopia is formally a secular state with constitutionally enshrined freedom of worship, but the state is very suspicious of presence of religion more specifically Islam in the public sphere and its functions as a key framework for community life (Abinik, 2011:254). It is legal for state to play a custodian role to keep the civic order when religion starts to undermine substantive democratic mandates of the state. However state intervention in religious affairs to the extent of playing prophetic role designing dogma for the believers and repression of basic religious freedoms is risky domain of democratization what we are witnessing in the current Ethiopia. A new chapter in the history of Ethiopian state repression began with deliberate state imposition of religious outlook on its people that was the first of its kind. The move is both deeply anti-democratic and anti-secular. While the Ethiopian state has declared democracy is not a choice but also a matter of national survival and show of committed itself to safeguard democracy, there are in practice numerous complaints. This article demonstrates the discrepancy between basic democratic principles at least as accepted by the government and their application in practice, by focusing on the experiences of Muslims especially for the last three years. Through ample justifications, the article reveals most of those civil liberty protections in the party program and constitution were denied for Muslims. This in turn confirms the practical failure of ERDF's initial effort to democratize Ethiopia.

On the other hand the ongoing Muslims' right movement is playing the biggest role in exposing the setback democratization Ethiopia is facing. It is the

recent indicator for the government's U turn in its attitude from 'equal protection for all religions' to 'religion is dangerous' which is manifested in its move against Ethiopian Muslims. It has also some magnificent effect for the development of democratic culture in the country in two main aspects; firstly they show they are constitutional citizens by effectively articulating their constitutional rights and regulating their actions based on it. Secondly by showing endurance to make the social order fundamentally just and equitable to the highest level possible. The movement is also affecting the country's political situation both in cultural and institutional dynamics. Even to some commentators the movement has a moral equivalence to the anti-apartheid movement of South Africa (Alemayehu, 2013:5). The government's failure to meet democratic demand of citizens reflect both the infant democratization process is in its decline stage without giving fruit and the disability of the ruling party to address publics' democratic demand and in turn the failure of its political program.

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