

**Regarding names and languages arising from social pressures.**

Names people acquire and the languages they speak are better left to individuals to do as they respond to social pressures and governmental policies. Often though one may be engaged in heart wrenching and emotionally charged arguments, when one forgets the lessons of history and the role of social pressures on the names and languages people elect to use. I present the following exchanges between an individual and I. I think that the exchange has educational values.

Someone made the following observations in apparent response to my comments on a different but to him an apparently related issue:

The OLF represent an Oromo view of some magnitude. I don't care what you believe. Our history glaring that they have been pushed historically [?], and I understand them when they say they were not treated with dignity. I have an Oromo friend whose Oromo name was changed to Amharic by his teacher when he was a grade one student. I have seen with my own eyes when courts in Oromo regions where the judge used a translator to translate the sentence for the accused. We have to admit that the Oromo were not made to feel equal in their own country. I know the one sided historiography has to be examined to help us understand one another and bring us more closer towards forming a better union.

Here are my observations and comments.

The points you have raised are of a serious nature and would require a separate discourse. I leave you with pointers though.

a) There is a concept called national language, which in Ethiopia is Amharic, and the use of the national language in governmental affairs used to be implemented before 1974. The national language applied across the nation. Now, with the establishment of ethnic homelands, I suppose Ethiopians of other speech may be forced to translate their work into Afan Oromo if their cases are heard in Oromia. The question then is one of choice and is predicated on whether or not we have one nation with a national language or we are dealing with an entity of separate nations.

b) The east-west flowing River Gojeb, which is a tributary to the River Omo, divides the region west of River Gibe/Omo. Prior to 1500 the region north of River Gojeb, the Gibe region, belonged to the Hadiya, Sidama and Inarya kingdoms, while the one south of the Gojeb belonged to the Kafa Kingdom. The Kafa kingdom lasted from 1390 to 1897. After 1500 and in the wake of the Jihad by Imam Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al-Gazi (also known as Gragn) against the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, the Oromo migrated northward into Ethiopia. The strong Kafa Kingdom survived somehow. However, the Gibe region was significantly altered. Not only did the inhabitants (the

Sidama and Haddiya) of the Gibe region change their names they also spoke a different language, the Mecha dialect of Afan Oromo. The Mecha dialect is the way the medieval Ethiopians (Sidama, Inarya and Hadiya) spoke Afan Oromo, which in time the immigrant Oromo also assimilated. The Gibe Kingdoms, except just west of River Gibe/ Omo where the Sidama kingdoms of the Janjero and Garo existed, were occupied by the Oromo kingdoms of Jima, Limu, Guma, Goma and Gera in the 19th century.

c) The question to ask is what percentage of the Mecha speakers of the Gibe region and of the Leqa (Welega) or the Tulema speakers of Shewa or the Borena speakers of Welo, et cetera, were immigrants to Ethiopia. The question gains currency in light of the fact that medieval Ethiopian inhabitants of these regions had changed their names, and had spoken the language of the immigrants. Moreover, the well-known Gudifetcha tradition of the Oromo in which they adopt individuals into their families, and the strong intermarriage among the people, argue against any erroneous claim that the Oromo had wiped out the inhabitants of medieval Ethiopia into whose region they immigrated. The kingdoms of the southwest Ethiopia and elsewhere existed because the central Ethiopian kingdom was weakened previously by the Church-centered governance of the Zagwe Dynasty (1137-1270) and later by the Gragn Jihad in 1529-1543.

Ethiopia has not recovered to this day from that onslaught spawned by the Jihad that the Ottoman Empire encouraged, though initially Gragn began his efforts based on local

conditions and after he retrieved at River Awash the spoils collected from Harar by the governor of Bali who tried to transfer the booty to Shewa.

The question of changing names and speaking tongues to suit the ambient societal pressures are not unique to Ethiopia. The use of languages and the names people wish to adopt are better left to individuals as they mediate the societal pressures in which they find themselves instead of the pontifications by propagandists or supporters of ethnic-centered parties.

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A synopsis of the Aksumite to 7/20/07

Yesterday I posted a response on names of people and the language they speak as above, and later I thought that the historical material contained in the piece might be news to some. I want to quickly catch you up by providing a synopsis of the history up to Medieval Ethiopia that was subsequently joined by the history of Oromo migration.

By the turn of the Christian Era Aksum was prosperous, and it even ruled over South Arabia including Yemen. The advent of the Moslem religion in the 7th century disallowed Ethiopia to have maritime influences and AKsum became weaker. In the post-prosperous-Aksumite kingdom (630-1137)

King Dingjan supported by thousands of priests marched southward across the Tekeze drainage divide, and into the regions of Inarya, southwest of River Didesa (now part of Welega, Illubabor and Kafa ) and further south and east evangelizing across the region. Among the evangelists were the progenitors of Abune Tekle Haymanot, whose mother was once a prisoner of King Motalemi of Damot (medieval Damot was the region northeast of River Didesa, now partly in Welega and the rest in southwestern Shewa). Abune Tekle Haymont was the founder of Debre Asbo (now Debre Libanos), had Christianized king Motalemi, and is also credited for helping the move from the Zagwe Dynasty of Lasta across the Tekeze drainage divide into Shewa in the reign of Emperor Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285), the founder of the Restored Solomonic Dynasty.

The Zagwe Dynasty of Lasta had contributed to Ethiopian history through its architecture, which are of international repute. Most of the priest-emperors of the Zagwe dynasty were fair to their subjects and emphasized glorifying the Savior, but paid little attention to the administration of the outlying regions of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Jews took over places of Simen and west in Wegera. Moslems reigned over parts of Shewa including Yefat, Hadiya, Bali and places in between. Moslem strong men were particularly gaining more strength by slave trading with regions outside of Ethiopia.

The Restored Solomonic Dynasty contributed to Ethiopian history by re-unifying Ethiopia. Emperor Amde Tsion (1314-1342), born a year after the death of Saint Tekle Haymanot, brought in Dawaro (includes Arsi), Bali, Hadiya, Gojam and part of Wegera most of Shewa and

Adal (included Hararghe) back into the fold of Ethiopia, under a central governance. He used mounted soldiers from the Hadiya, Damot, Saqalt Kingdom under the command of his general, Begemidir Tsega Kristos, to subdue the Jews at Wegera and Semen. The name of the general was given as the name of the region he subdued, according to one interpretation. However, the Jewish rebellion had more life to it even after Amde Tsion efforts.

Emperor Amde Tsion is also noted for establishing the “roving capital city composed of tents” as he moved from place to place. His soldiers were organized into shield bearers, and those who carried swords, daggers and iron sticks. Three books were authored and the Kibre Negest was translated from Arabic at this time. He is also known for pleading to his soldiers to fight for the glory of Christ in his famous attempt to drive Moslem slave trader-kings out of Ethiopia as he marched toward the Gulf of Aden. He had driven away Moslem squatters from the Massawa Island in a previous campaign. Despite his Christianizing efforts, the second batch of monks after the tradition of Iyasus Mo'a and St. Tekle Hyamont, particularly Abba Beselote-Mikael, who had successfully campaigned against the presence of women in monasteries, challenged Emperor Amde Tsion to abandon his polygamous habits and his affairs with his fathers wife. The Abba was beaten and disgraced in court, and was exiled to Tigrey. Later Abune Yohannis excommunicated the emperor. Monks and priests were exiled to different and far of parts of Ethiopia, which resulted in the further spread of Christianity.

Emperor Amde Tsion successors had to fight again and again to maintain Ethiopia together and to subdue Jewish

rebellion in the northwest, and to counter the grip of Moslem slave traders on the southern and eastern, regions of Ethiopia. [Slave trading is a scourge at any level, and it was rampant in Ethiopia until the 20th century, but the emperors had fought against slave trading with regions outside of Ethiopia.]

The home-grown monastic tradition by Ethiopia that began by Iyasus Mo'a and was joined by Saint Tekle Haymanot, and Abba Ewostattios had evangelized from Lake Hayq in Welo to places outward. In the north Abba Ewotatitows did his best but exiled himself in 1331 (7?) and died in Armania. His assistant Gebre Iyesus returned ten years after the death of Aba Ewostatiois in 1346 (52?), and evangelized the Jews in the Lake Tana region. At this time a renegade Christian monk called Qozimos copied the Old Testament, left his monastery in Wayan, and joined the Jewish community in Semein, which raided Christian inhabitants in the foothills. Some wrongly assume that Ethiopian Jewry started at this time. Others, equally wrongly assume that Ethiopian Jewry started by Abba Ewostatios, who campaigned to make Saturday the Sabbath.

Amde Tsion's great grandson Emperor Dawit (1374-1413) expanded his dominion and the struggle to maintain Ethiopian control over its costal regions. The name Somalia was given to part of the coastal area at this time. Dawit's soldiers had killed Saad ad Din some of whose followers were exiled to South Arabia. Emperor Yesahq (1414-1427) had appointed locals to govern Semein and Wegera and pay tribute to him. When he was disobeyed he marched to the region and subjugated it. He proclaimed that

Ethiopians who will not be baptized and do not believe in Christ will not be allowed to inherit land and as such will be a "felasie", from which the name Felasha for the Ethiopian Jews (Bete Israel) was derived. Yeshaq also battled against Moslem strong holds in Somalia.

Later, Emperor Zera Ya'Iqob (1433-1468), fought to drive a Moslem strong hold from Dawaro, and appointed Ras Betweded Amde Mikael as governor of Fatager, a region that stretched from Dawaro to Guraghe land, and one that was crucial in arresting the Moslem slave trading. Zera Ya' Iqob chaired the council of Debre Mitmaq at which Saturday was instituted as a holiday in addition to Sunday. Similar to his dad, Emperor Dawit, Zera Ya' Iqob was a devoted Christian who emphasized the role of Saint Marry, and he is credited for ordering the wearing of the cross on clothes and skins of people. His young wife, Eleni, was the daughter of the King of Hadiya.

Queen Eleni lived through the reigns of successive followers of Zera Ya'Iqob until Emperor Lebne Dingel. **As was the Ethiopian tradition, before a queen of an emperor dies the wives of the successor emperors will not be given the title queen.** Hence, Queen mother Eleni lived as queen until the first half of Lebne Dengel's (1508-1537) reign. **The Ethiopian tradition of retaining the title queen to the queen mother, and not calling the wife of the king queen until the queen mother died was changed by Emperor Minas (1559-1563).**

Queen Eleni was an astute politician and established relationships with the Christian Portuguese Kingdom and sought alliances with them to counter the encroachment by



the Moslim Ottoman Empire. Despite her efforts Lebne Dengel was not warm to establishing close relationships with the Portuguese. He was content with his military strategies and had won battles against the Adal.

The governor of Bali was asked by Lebne Dengel to collect taxes from outlaws of Harar. The governor collected the taxes and upon his attempt to cross River Awash Ahmed Gagn suddenly engaged him and retrieved the taxes. That incident emboldened Gagn, and his jihadist conquest, supported by the Ottoman Empire, against Christians and the Christian kingdom, began in earnest in 1529 until he was killed near Lake Tana in 1534. Pursued by Gagn, Lebne Dingel requested the help of Portugal that sent gallant soldiers who fought in defense of Christian Ethiopia. In none of Ethiopian literature up to the conquest by Ahmed Gagn are the Oromo (called Galla until recently) mentioned. They were not mentioned in the history of Balia, Arsi, Hararghe, Gamu Gofa, Kafa, Gebe region, Welega, Shewa or Welo.

Upon the death of Lebne Dengel his son Emperor Gelawedos (1537-1559) ascended to power. His generals began to consolidate power over most of Ethiopia, including by removing the Imam of Harar. Unfortunately, Gelawedewos engaged Amir Nur, the nephew of Gagn, and was killed by him. The Amir married the wife of Gagn. The Ottoman Empire designated him as commander of the faithful. As his area of influence was being challenged by Oromo immigrants Amir Nur built the wall around his city of Harar. For the same reasons the seat of the central Christian kingdom was moved to Lake Tana and then to Gonder in the reign of emperor Minas.

Minas' successor, Emperor Zerse Dengel (1563-1597), though not a resident of Gonder was the first Gonderine Emperor to promote the reunification and consolidation of Ethiopia with its new inhabitants. He took Oromo soldiers as he marched to the Red Sea killing Turkish soldiers including Pasha Yeshaq, the governor of Merb Mellash, a turncoat who formerly was a follower of Lebne Dengel and fought against Gagn , though he subsequently served the Ottoman Empire. He eliminated the ruler of the walled city of Harar. He convinced the King of Kafa to proclaim Christianity as his faith and as the religion of his kingdom, and to build the Saint George Church. Abba Bahrye, the noted monk and historian who documented the migration of the Oromo in his book of 1593, was full of praises for Atse Zerse Dengel. Clearly, soon after their immigration, the Oromo were engaged in the construction of Ethiopia, their new homeland.

In the regions where the Oromos went in sufficient numbers the locals spoke Oromigna. As the manner in which an Indian speaks English is different from that of what an Australian does, so too different inhabitants of Ethiopia spoke Oromigna in different dialects, most important of which are the Mecha, Tulema, Borena, and Qottu dialects. The Oromo tradition of reciting history in poetry and or by songs delivered at societal functions went a long way in maintaining the language over those on which it propagated. Because the Oromo organizational tradition is different from those in the regions they immigrated to, and because they were transformed from a pastoral tradition to one of a settled tradition they had to make adjustments. They imitated the organization of the

locals by having strong men and chieftains and even kings in local areas. When the central Christian kingdom (Gonderine Dynasty) busied itself with troubles arising from Catholicism brought by the Portuguese and interference from the Ottoman Empire and its vassal Egypt, Oromigna-speaking Kings and others of different tongues ruled over many independent kingdoms "within Ethiopia".

Through intermarriage and by becoming Christians, Oromo emperors were borne, and Oromos became viceroys of emperors, generals, and acquired every title that non-Oromos would aspire to in Ethiopia. In the late 19th century following the vision of Emperor Tewodros, Emperors Yohannes IV, Menelik II, and Haile Selassie worked on the reunification of Ethiopians and governance as one people with diversity, one flag, and one nation. Since 1974 diversity was emphasized and instead of using diversity as the strength of Ethiopia, the TPLF, EPLF, OLF, and ONLF use diversity to divide Ethiopia into smaller enclaves, which would bestow a geography of poverty for each entity. The Kinijit party uses diversity as the strength of Ethiopia and was elected to power by the overwhelming majority of the electorate in the May 15, 2005 national elections. Unfortunately, the gun totting TPLF placed the elected officers in jail showing to all that only military power will remove it from office even by 2010.

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URL1. <http://www.answers.com/topic/amda-seyon->

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