

Regime Change without Cultural Transformation is Empty and Cultural Transformation without Regime Change is Blind

By Teodros Kiros

The specter of revolution is haunting modern Ethiopia. We Ethiopians rightly want regime change, but the necessary cultural transformation is not there, although it ought to be.

There is much that I admire about us Ethiopians, which I enumerated in my last piece, *Ethiopianity and Independent Thinking*, in which I wrote and with which I would like to begin my reflections.

Ethiopianity and independent thinking

By Teodros Kiros | January 3, 2011

I love being an Ethiopian, and I am honored to have been born to Ethiopian lands; I am humbled by our sublime mountains designed to nurture spirituality, manifest in the birth of the great thinkers who grew up there; my soul is pervaded by the depth of thought that the ravines and valleys inspire in me; my eyes are drunk with the beauty of the lush and green of the south, which

greet me,

when I land from

Ethiopian Airlines to visit my homeland; my heart vibrates when it listens to the roaring sound of the saxophone and the sharpness and power of the trumpet in classical Ethiopian music, how many times have I shed tears of passion as Tizita, pierced my sensitive heart in the darkness of a lonely night; how often have I fallen in love with those round and bright Ethiopian eyes, resting on the ravishing bodies of our women; how tirelessly do I admire our dance and the cuisines that accompany them; how desperately have I wished that I could master all our ethnic dances and consume their cleansing fragrance, when one is possessed by them.

These features need to be buttressed by a foundational cultural transformation, which would then ground the mighty fortresses of a new Ethiopian regime. I fully understand our passion for a regime change, which is long overdue; but I also want every Ethiopian to embark on the path of cultural transformation. This is a categorical imperative.

As a writer, my vocation is guided by keen observation of people and all that they do. Years of careful observation of the Ethiopian cultural scene and political behavior have led me to make the following propositions.

Regimes have come and gone in our lives. We are still leaving with the legacies of these regimes. At the moment a coterie of brilliant scholars are deeply engaged in assessing the connection between forgiving the forgivable and the unforgivable, such the Derg's excesses of its violent past.

This monumental event of our past is bound to repeat itself until after we collectively attend to our individual conditions dispassionately and wisely. Every Ethiopian must ask the following question, everyday and every night as a moral exercise of the care of the self. The question is: how is my soul?

To ask this question is to point at your own self, before you point at others; it is furthermore an exercise of humility. Examining the condition of your soul is a way of attending to the internal relationships among your reasoning capacity, the state of your desires and your spiritedness. Before we act and speak, we must pay attention to the conditions of our individual souls. We must examine our actions by asking further questions,

What have I done today?
Whom did I lie to today?
Whom did I inadvertently hurt today?
Whom did I belittle today?
How well did I control my envies and jealousies today?

These are fundamental questions, which propel the winds of cultural transformation.

Every Ethiopian ought to know that our country is contaminated by cultural decadence, which is going out of control. Friendships, marriages and collegiality are infested by the DDT of cultural decadence, that we are not even aware of, but which we must attend to as the activity of the soul.

Our souls, like our bodies need tending and watering from the fountain of culture. Culture is nothing more than the moral organization of the self, the self's soul. We have a moral duty to put our own houses, that is our individual souls in order, by carefully and consistently attending to the internal interaction of reason, desire and spiritedness, as a matter of everyday duty.

If we develop new habits of attending to the conditions of our souls, before we know it, we will develop new ways and new habits of interacting with one another. The venoms of destructive ethnicity, envies and jealousies will be cleansed from our souls, and we will thus ready our lovely Ethiopia, for a genuine regime change. Once we change ourselves deeply and seriously no leader or leaders of future regimes will play us against one another; other wise regime change on the crucible of a decadent culture is empty.

Ethiopia is indeed ready for regime change but without a change on the superstructure of culture, the change is vain. I assure you that we are going to bitterly complain about future regimes, unless we change individually and collectively and ready our nation for a regime change by cultivating a population of Ethiopians who are quietly attending to the conditions of their souls, with the help of meaningful prayers, prayers with which our nation is historically blessed.

Prayers must be accompanied with the care of the self in its quest of enlightening itself and putting its own house in order.

