

ETHIOPIAN MUSLIMS' SOLE SURVIVAL KIT: SHARIA LAW



Before I convey the theme of this article, I thought about presenting the literal meaning of Sharia law because the West, particularly the U.S. media, is fueling hysteria that the Sharia law will supplant the U.S. constitution and the non-Muslims will be imposed upon. For example, [nine U.S. states](#) have outlawed Sharia, in Tennessee, bill 1028, [equates it with terrorism](#). So, where did this unsubstantiated anxiety comes from? And why do the West and its allies detest it? The only probable answer is intellectual arrogance among the

contemporary Christians through a deliberate misinterpretation of Islam due to the lingering ghost beliefs from the Crusades.

Almost after thousand years, the term Islam still stimulates distressing subconscious emotions, and anything that has Islamic characterization is considered as deficient, and the Muslims as a lower grade of beings. This inherent sentiment remains intact despite losing its original religious impetus. For instance, on February 5th, 2017, President Obama [stirred a nationwide uproar](#) at the National Prayer Breakfast by simply saying that heinous crimes were committed in the name of Christ, *"... remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ."* Many people were upset because president did not uphold the illusionary principle that the West is immune from criticism, he condemned the purportedly the 'noble ambitions' of the Crusades, and expressing contrition to the victims which includes the Muslims was out of the green zone. Of course, the theme of this article is not about the Crusades but its intellectual effect and the intrinsic attitudes that trivializes the Muslim blood and affronts the Islamic cultural experience.

In contrast, Sharia is a religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition.^[1] It is derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the Qur'an and the Hadith. In Arabic, the term Sharia refers to God's immutable divine law and is contrasted with [Fiqh](#), which refers to its human scholarly interpretations.^[2] In Britain, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, endorsed [the introduction of Sharia law in Britain](#) stating that *"...the official status for Islamic law could aid social cohesion "* because the Muslims did not relate to the British legal system, and the reaction was extremely hateful. In Nigeria, 12 states have successfully implemented Sharia law. According to a research project led by the [Nigeria Research Network](#) at Oxford Department of International Development (ODID), *"The Sharia courts were generally working to the satisfaction of the people they served, although there were clearly problems "*, and the attitudes towards these religious institutions are quite positive

particularly in Kanu State where 84.3% of the residents feel that the *Hisbah* is more trustworthy than the police.

Ethiopia was the first foreign country to accept Islam when it was unknown in most parts of the world. ^[3] Despite that, the past and the contemporary Ethiopian leaders had purposely promoted alien concepts like Waaqeffana, nationalism, tribalism etc. to downgrade Islam and its influence. As a result, the religious based bond that was keeping the Muslim population in a single theological bloc has been evaporated breeding bitterly discordant groups. It may sound like a locally schemed agenda, but it is the Western nations that ultimately decide the fate of the Muslims. Though the régime may have the flexibility to do punitive measures, yet it has no authority to alter the predetermined goals or change the course of the Western policies. Hence, the Ethiopian Muslims are caught between a legalized oppression and the fear of being labelled as 'terrorists' for considering an alternative method of governing, and as a result, they are compelled to be cheerleaders for a constitution that negates their very existence. Fortunately, however, there is a sense of awakening amongst Ethiopian Muslims and the idea of being guided by a misguided people is no longer plausible, similarly, the terrorism label has lost its menacing effect to discourage.

Yes, we have a court that assumes the name 'Sharia' whose design is to modify the Sharia law in a way that makes it compatible with the Western lifestyle harmoniously rather than settling people's quarrels and complaints by means of Islamic law. Despite its esteemed designation, its duties are merely limited to issuing marriage and divorce certificates, and criminal law is out of its jurisdiction. According to Islam, it is not a Sharia court. However, some misinformed Muslims attend it solely because of its Islamic scent, not knowing that their passion is being used by malicious entities to demote Islam. Unfortunately, the religiously inspired feeling of, 'an institution of our own', is hardly dispersible by religious wisdom nor persuaded by reasoning. The only thing that is Islamic about this fictitious court is the Holy Qur'an that is idly lying on its dusty desk. In fact, going to a such court is an act that is diametrically contrary to Islam.

THE ETHIOPIAN MUSLIMS: THE ENEMY WITHIN



Islam is no alien in Ethiopia. It was Negashi, the king of the Christian Kingdom of Aksum (present day Ethiopia), who welcomed the Companions of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) who were fleeing from persecution by the prominent ruling tribe, Quraysh, for accepting Islam. According to Ibn Ishaq's Sira ^{[4][5]}, when the Apostle saw the affliction of his companions, he said to them: *"If you were to go to Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time, as Allah shall relieve you from your distress."* In 613 AD, he received the first batch of migrants followed by the second emigration in 615 AD but the hospitality and religious tolerance described in this exceptional history no longer exists in Ethiopia. It was merely due to Negashi's remarkable gentle personality that led to this benevolent undertaking. In fact, Christianity was always at war with Islam since its revelation in the seventh century, and it erroneously views it as a threat to its existence. The reoccurring episodes of past conflicts bred psychological scars, adverse sentiments, and negative assumptions regarding Islam and its adherents.

For example, Emperor [Tewodros II](#) (r.1855-1868) raised the bar to a new height by forcing the Muslims to convert to Christianity or leave his empire.^[6] Some Muslims converted due to coercion and those who didn't [convert] moved to the western parts of the [Gojjam](#) near Sudan where they continued practicing Islam.^[7] Equally, Emperor Tewodros II successor, Emperor [Yohannes IV](#) (r.1872-1889) continued to coerce Muslims into converting in order

to achieve religious uniformity by ordering them to be baptized within three years.^[8] Similarly, Menelik II described Ethiopia as “...a Christian island in a sea of Muslims,” in a letter sent to the Europeans in April 1891^[9], an expression that classifies the Muslims as an enemy within and as aliens that are a nuisance to the national identity, Orthodox Christianity. Despite all attempts, it is impossible to dispel or to shrug off the die-hard 'suspicion' that is hovering over the Ethiopian Muslims especially if the offence is being a Muslim. They will always be under the crosshairs unless they succumb to Yohannes IV's religious uniformity concept by meaning of mass conversion or revive the demising religious principles. And presently, it is quite impossible to be a practicing Muslim and stay out of prison at the same time unless one abides to a debased version of Islam.

In recent history, subsequent Ethiopian leaders such as Selassie, Mengistu, and Zenawi were all cruel in nature. Though the degree of their brutalities were fundamentally similar, yet their respective formats varied considerably. Selassie was a despotic ruler who surveyed the masses through religious lens: Christians or non-Christians. During his reign, based on oral history, he evicted many Muslims from their ancestral land and he even forced the Muslims to pay Gibir, extortion money. Mengistu was Marxist-Leninist whose indiscriminate red terror campaign spared no one, but under his supervision, about 30,000 to 750,000 people were killed over the course of the Qey Shibir ^{[10][11]} including the Muslims. Zenawi was a **modern dictator** who had a free pass from the West because he was an **indispensable** ally in the War on Terror. He cleverly attired his repressive activities with impressive legal phrases to maintain his reputation at the international stage, and bizarrely, he even established the Ethiopian Human Rights Watch (EHRW) to conceal the horrific reality on the ground. As a result, notable political figures were mutely assassinated without leaving forensic evidences. Many were falsely convicted in kangaroo courts for being members in phony terrorist organizations, some fled seeking sanctuary, and the rest were forced to hibernate making him the lone star at the political arena.

But some of his dirty laundries were inadvertently aired in the open. For example, Jail Ogaden, the worst prison in the world, held the allegedly supporters of Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) without charge or conviction. According to Human Rights Watch's [report](#), " *Officials stripped naked and beat prisoners and forced them to perform humiliating acts in front of the entire prison population, as punishment and to instill shame and fear.*" It was Abdi Mohamoud Omar, the former Somali Region president, and his associates who did the dirty job but it was Zenawi who orchestrated all the activities that went on within that notorious prison. As a former inmate, I can tell you that Ethiopian prisons are synonymous for torture and inhumane treatment and due to this, it is extremely difficult to maintain sanity, and this ghastly setting can weaken the soul but it cannot break the spiritual conviction of a pious Muslim. It was a brain tumor that finally brought down the undisputed tyrant but the blueprints of his success outlast his mortality.

THE CIVIL WAR

Ethiopia is a strange landscape full of volatility, unpredictability, tribal wrangles, Kalashnikov begotten respect, and by necessity, it teaches the rapidity to escape in case of unanticipated violence. Molded by nature's torrent forces and hardened by the recurrent violent confrontations, Muslims intimately know about unjustified bloodshed, extra-judicial imprisonment, tyrant rulers, and social turmoil. This war maybe about vengeance, but supremacy is the primary reason, and the subservient masses are in limbo waiting for a victor to emerge out of the wreckage for the (please have mercy on me) celebration to commence. Although war is disruptive by nature, yet it is a respite for the Muslims because TPLF-led government has committed atrocities in Ethiopia and in Somalia, and now it seems that Allah (SWT) is punishing a transgressor with another transgressor.

Abiy portrayed himself as the new messiah; a man who possesses not only the blueprint but also the intellectual capacity to lift Ethiopia out of the destitution. As an eloquent orator, he depicted a prosperous future. He promised accountability, harmony among the ethnic tribes, and unabated civil liberty. In fact, he released some political prisoners as a sign that he is a man on a mission. The gentle smile, the youthful look, the Nobel Peace

Prize, and the wide media coverage have fashioned a superlative character and a glamour of a twilight dream. He is a good man in his personal sense but Abiy has two defects that makes him unfit for this role: gullibility and tribal allegiance. The combination of these deficiencies have shrouded the sound judgement forcing him to manage public affairs on a personal level; depriving him the ability to see the full picture, the eventual ramification of his action, and it has molded a subjective environment where personal emotions guide the administrative process. This government will unintentionally destroy far more than it will ever build in the name of social reforms, and Abiy's romantic bypath will widen the already existing gap among the ethnic tribes further alienating the possibility of ever coming into terms. The future looks bleak for Ethiopians except Amhara who are beneficiaries of this pandemonium, and they will squeeze him like a lemon as long as he needs their support to stay in power.

In December 2019, Abiy won Nobel Peace Prize for the Ethiopia-Eretria peace agreement, on the [acceptance speech](#), he told the world, "[War is the epitome of hell](#)", and now [Mr. Abiy is at war again — this time with his own people](#). He sacked influential Tigrayans from senior posts in his government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) interpreted the dismissal as [cheating of what they considered their dues](#). The situation got out of control when TPLF militias have allegedly raided the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) base near Mekelle on Nov. 4, 2020, and he hastily blew the whistle. Motivated by their previous power struggle success in 1991, the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) occupied the trenches in excess to fight the final battle for survival. Addis Ababa's plan was to diminish the power wielded by the federal member states, and Amhara's vengeance driven enthusiasm greatly aided him giving the war a new label: civil war. Abiy has underrated the situation. There is no way that ENDF could have withstood against the TDF in asymmetrical war in a mountainous landscape that favors the adversary nevertheless he proceeded anyway, and the outcome was humiliation in a grand scale including over [6000 POWs](#). There was no need that justified this war; the risk was so great. In fact, Gebremichael, TPLF's chairman, was keenly ready to share the loot but Abiy chose war over political settlement knowing that likelihood of achieving a decisive military victory over the TDF

was almost zero. In short, after two years of futile civil war, the war has temporarily stopped, at least for now, and Abiy is in political quagmire.

Ethiopia is predominately Muslim and that the Christians of Amhara and Tigray are less both in numbers and in geographic terms, and figures presented by Central Statistical Agency (CSA) is irrelevant because it is known to cook the books. Geographically, they are only confined to the highlands whereas Muslims are spread all across Ethiopia. And yet, they have cleverly exploited people's unwavering tribal allegiance to their advantage by engaging them with endless tribal skirmishes like Benishangul vs Gambella, Sidama vs Arsi, Burji vs Konso, Karrayyu vs Afar, Boran vs Garre etc. to be on the leading role unopposed. They employ a derivative version of the old colonial method of 'divide and rule' that is skillfully tailored for Ethiopia's social upheavals to control the masses except that this version is much bloodier. This dreadful mishap identifies sluggishness as the source of our hopelessness and the farsightedness of the enemies. As for this war, it is the battle of the titans where every blow count and the winner takes it all.

THE ROAD TO SHARIA LAW

Unfortunately, the difficulty lies in the fact that some Muslims do not want to sacrifice their lives or their wealth for what they view as a venture with no prospect of success reducing the morale and the fulfilment of this religious enterprise - in a state of spiritual lassitude. The rationale is to practice Islam on a part-time basis by carefully 'shopping' for certain 'Ibadat' that are neither in conflict with daily schedule nor attract an attention from the authorities. However, part-time Islam is no Islam. It is lack of Islamic knowledge aided by unrestrained lust for worldly matters that has utterly masked the Allah-consciousness, resulting in outward wooden rituals that have no religious significance.

The curse lays in the fact that Islam is regarded as customary rituals, and many, though outwardly submissive, are agnostic about its intellectual and spiritual guidelines preferring the prevalent philosophy: democracy; thoughtlessly believing that Western ideals hold special promises, and all designs, socially or otherwise, must be relayed back to the

Western cultural environment for wider perceptions. And as a result, the Muslims are underprivileged in all fronts. How did we get here? The current generation have deviated from the path by abandoning the very element that had elevated the pious predecessors to the top: Jihad, and by embracing an alien civilization that corrupts far more than it helps. The decay is not due to Islam as a religion, on the contrary, Islam provides a spiritual plan and an outline of a virtuous society giving the adherents the freedom to maneuver within its perimeter because people's needs are time-bounded and are consequently, subject to change, but the failure is due to Muslims' negligence to embrace it wholeheartedly. Survival and a lasting victory depends on the Qur'anic verses, the degree of its success is directly proportional to the purity and the piety of its adherents. And the absence of these virtues means ignorance that will ultimately cease Islam's progressive way of life ceding to a shadowy form of spirit that is akin to animalism. Perhaps today's Muslims need Sharia law more than any other generations in the past.

THE GRAVEYARD OF THE EMPIRES



Sharia law was always a prime target for the Afghans and they have a consistent reputation of crushing the occupiers. In fact, it is nicknamed as the 'graveyard of the empires'. Both the British Empire and Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1839 and 1979 respectively, and both withdrew with huge losses and a tarnished reputation. Similarly, in 2001, the NATO

forces including the mighty America came in with far-fetched ambition and an ego as big as Tora Bora Mountains but it was the combination of patience, unyielding religious conviction, and the mounting casualties that shattered their supremacy mindset forcing them to withdraw emptyhandedly, leaving the Taliban in full control of Afghanistan. Watching the Taliban at the Presidential Palace and the fleeing Americans compacted in airplanes like a tuna can was a festive panorama that made the Ummah proud. The uncontested truth in Taliban's victory is that democracy has lost and Sharia has won. **"...And magnify Him with all magnificence."** (111:17) Allahu Akbar. Islam needs to be safeguarded and propagated by people who firmly believe in it, without Jihad, the Qur'an is simply a sacred book on a shelf and that defeats the purpose of its revelation. Perhaps we can use this historic event as a propellant to accelerate the velocity of our effectiveness by tirelessly devoting to the noble cause, and in Ethiopia, the time is now.

Beware, Islam has a divine habit of verifying the veracity or the falsity of the Islamic testimony and punishing those who subordinate Islam's radiant guidance or go astray from the prescribed path at the hands of non-believers. In Ethiopia, the scholars for dollars are few and the unconcerned spectators are numerous but the consequent collective punishment has thoroughly blanketed us all, not only the transgressors but also the silent majority. Consequently, many Muslims adopted Christian names to be on the safe side, and others joined the oppressing institution, the army, as an insurance. Ironically, we are being victimized in the name of Islam and we are utterly ignorant about Islam. In short, the Muslims' survival lies in: **"Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the last day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adapt the religion of truth from those who were given scripture - [fight them] until they give the Jizyah willingly by hand while they are humbled"** [9:29] Some people may question the applicability of this verse in this modern era, we say to them **"...Are you more knowing or Allah"** [2:140]. If the ill-equipped Taliban fighters can see off the Western militaries with unmatched hardware (with the help of Allah (SWT)), how much would it take, knowing that ENDF is ineffective militarily, to erect the banner of Tawhid in Muslim inhabited lands? It is not the adversary's military potency is that

blocking the way, the Taliban is a living proof, but it is the Muslims themselves that are impediment to Sharia law.

Finally, the intent of this article, apart from its informative nature, is to counsel those who are drowning in the illusory waves of democracy and to awaken the sleeping giants for an Islamic revolution in Ethiopia. To reinstate full Sharia law is religiously binding obligation and upon success, it will certainly free us from the foreign domination. It may sound difficult to achieve it, but the heavenly reward for this enormous responsibility simply lies in trying it within personal abilities, not the effort that is needed to move the Mount Everest from its position. **"...And Allah has full power and control over His affairs, but most of the people do not know [that]"** (12:21).

Do not forget us in your sincere prayers.

Your brother in Islam: Hassan Jarso Kotola

Nagelle Borana, Ethiopia

- 3,6,7,8 Baye, Temesgēn Gebeyehu (2018-06-04). "Muslims in Ethiopia: History and identity". *African Studies*. 77 (3): 412-427. [doi:10.1080/00020184.2018.1475634](https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2018.1475634), [ISSN 0002-0184](https://www.issn.org/issn/0002-0184), [S2CID 149879228](https://www.s2cid.org/cid/149879228)
- 4 Ibn Ishāq (2004). *Sīratu Rasūlillāh* (tr. Alfred Guillaume). Oxford University Press. p. 146.
- 5 W. Montgomery Watt (1980). *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford University Press. pp. 110-111.
- 9 Desplat and Ostebo, "Muslims in Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics, and Islamic Reformism" p. 5.

