Prophetic Discourses and Power Shift in Ethiopian History: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The main intention in this article is to critically analyze the role of prophecy for power shift in Ethiopia in history. Data collected from archives, traveler accounts, and history documents were critically analyzed. Critical historical discourse analysis was used as a framework and methodology of analysis. Interpretation, symbolization and operationalization of dreams, prophecies, and “told spiritual accounts” by prominent mystics and interpreters had been the critical turning-points of Ethiopians in history. Their role was consequential and influential. Royal families used to “invent, disseminate and operationalize” dreams, prophecies, and superstitious practices. Consequently, their instinctive wish for abundant fulfillment and power grant had been gained by “revelations” and “connections” of each interpretation with supernatural powers. To scale up the benefit, ecclesiastical intervention had been badly sought out. The prophetic discourses and ideologies had been very instrumental in Ethiopian theopolitics, sociocultural practices, and power use.

KEYWORDS

Dream, Ethiopia, History, Power, Prophecy, Religion, Superstition

1. INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to analyze key prophetic discourses that caused major political and social power shifts in Ethiopia in History. The analysis is conducted chronologically to show how these discourses propagated in power functions or fold down in powerless malfunctions. The analysis used archival data collected from manuscripts, published books, hagiographies, traveler accounts, chronicles, images, sacred covenants and magic scrolls. The study is opted to be a chronologically critical analyses because the role of prophesies in Ethiopia in history could be seen in a timeline of change and continuity or in the reverse. The analysis is also made to comprehensively understand the perpetual utilization of prophecies in shifting the dynamics of power in Ethiopia in history. It sees how sacred like texts and cultism were operationalized in Ethiopia in order to bring change in the system and structure of the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and political practices and directions of the nation. This study could provide clues on how the “prophetic” power of individuals in Ethiopia influenced the political landscape and the power balance. It also unloaked how religious and traditional beliefs had been used to manufacture discourses that were belied to be seen in “special characters” dreams,

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visions, prophecies, revelations and superstitious practices which were able to construe people, space and power in altering the power of the nation into the intended route.

2. BACKGROUND

In Ethiopia, key prophesies, dreams, and superstitions have been manufactured and interpretatively applied for countless functions. Each dream that was seen at night could have been interpreted and propagated in a next day or year to gain acceptance in the society. A prophetic text would be produced in convincing contenders, supporters and mediators. It was also intended to make people submit to countless dreams manufactured as a theological and sociopolitical propaganda. Divine power has been embedded into each dream, prophesy, or revelation. The people would also be agitated to reject or activate a huge revolt against a dominating prophesy. The prognostic discourses which were “made” and disseminated by faith-based institutions had been interpreted and operationalized for individual, group or institutional functions. Each credulous discourse has played vital roles in shaping the ideology and power of Ethiopian politics, sociocultural practices, religion, and history. Jesman (1963) once said:

Ethiopians are being seen fiercely independent and xenophobic, Christian and yet too Judaic, black and yet Semitic, with written culture and yet with no literature, deeply religious and yet superstitious-ridden. (p. 10)

It is vital to underline that Ethiopians are deeply religious and yet superstition-ridden. This dichotomy of Ethiopian characters and actions triggered political actors, groups, institutions, relations and systems to indulge into using “prophetic” discourses and their connected interpretations as powerful tools. Utilization of prophetic discourses built political values, attitudes, and actions. To take or abide by political actions, prophetic discourse had been extensively utilized in Ethiopia through the millennia. It is also important to note here that prophesy in this article refers to both religious and traditional (cultural) channeling of “sacred” ideas in the world. It shall also be known that dream is intended to represent ideas revealed during night time or day time sleeps (at full or partial sleeps). Revelations are the channeled systems of thoughts and actions by hermits, nuns, monks, and sacred people that are deemed to happen at a certain point in time. Superstitious interpretations are the cultural interpretations of oracles and occult symbols.

Religious canons repetitively presented fundamental accounts of both positive and negative prophecies and experiences of each. In resume, there has been key prophesies about Ethiopia in the Holy Bible. These Christian prophesies have shaped the practices of “things” and the development of identities in Ethiopia. Many people acted for or against each prophesy. For example, in Muslim communities, Ethiopia is understood as “a secure haven” because of the frequent prophecies seen and told by chosen people (Hisham, 2000). Once Prophet Mohammed said to his beloved family (a Muslim prophesy), “Yonder lieth a country wherein no one is wronged: a land of righteousness” (quoted in Hisham & Ishaq, 1967; Blyden, 1888; Perry, 2006). This has been one of the resonant texts that immensely contributed for peaceful coexistence between the Muslim and the Christian community in Ethiopia. These days, many Muslims see that Ethiopia is the prime among the holy places in the world.

Connected interpretation and the widespread operationalization of theological prophecies had been accentuating discourses, ideologies and powers that were used to be attached to dreams, prophesies, revelations and superstitions. Many documents of miracles, chronicles, hagiographies, images, covenants and magic scrolls presented multiple prophecies, dreams, revelations and superstitious accounts. The interpretations, i.e. the theological commentaries ignited the discourse fire. Each document raises issues of a complexity of which power is variable. The variability of power balance
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