

THE LINK BETWEEN ETHNO-CENTRIC MINORITY RULE AND CORRUPTION; THE CASE OF ETHIOPIA

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"Nobody Made A Greater Mistake Than He Who Did Nothing Because He Could Only Do a Little." -Edmund Burke

INTRODUCTION

Many observers, including those members of the Diaspora community who visit their homeland, Ethiopia, have observed that the level of corruption in Ethiopia is so unprecedented that it defies common sense. The outright theft that is going on in the country has many dimensions, which are: 1) ***economic*** - as exemplified by the deep involvement of the TPLF in the Ethiopian economy and its ability to completely monopolize each sector of the country's economy using its controlled oligarchs.ⁱ Not only the TPLF was able to hijack the so-called privatization process and "buy" the previously government owned enterprises at throw away prices but the organized and corrupt officials were also able to appoint themselves as owners and CEOs of the same conglomerates. 2) ***Political*** - due to the fact that those who are at the top of the political power continue to enrich themselves while at the same time suppressing those who object the looting. They have accomplished this by denying them any political space and wiping out the already weak independent media. Mr. Meles also continues to use his absolute power and selectively prosecute his political enemies in order to cover-up the criminal behavior committed by the TPLF and its allies. Of course, Mr. Meles also throws into jails a handful of his collaborators as scapegoats whenever he feels threatened or he becomes too embarrassed by their excesses. 3) ***Legal*** - due to Meles's and his cronies' use of and changes of the legal codes to both enrich themselves and attack their political opponents with trumped-up charges. 4) ***Social and cultural*** - due to, among other things, the instigation of ethnic and religious-based conflicts by the ethnocentric clique. Most importantly, the embezzlement is so commonplace that it is changing the culture and the way of life in the country. For example, it is not uncommon for the layman in the streets of Addis Ababa or elsewhere to hear him say out-loud, that it has become impossible for anyone in the country to make a decent living without being a part of the corruption process. It is not uncommon to hear the traffic policeman boasting to a minibus driver that his police badges and hats can garner more revenue than he does, while at the same time telling the driver to meet him at a designated place where the bribing would take place. These are daily incidents that friends of mine and I have observed in the streets of Addis Ababa. Unfortunately, such practices seem to have badly affected the minds of those who are deeply involved in the rampant corruption to the extent that they have come to believe that their involvement in the corruption process is normal and part of their booty. 5) ***Military*** - due to the fact that the military wing that is controlled by Mr. Zenawi- the Agazi killer squad - has intensified its intimidation, killings, terror, disappearance of people, and mass-arrests, especially after the 2005 election. The military's involvement in the contraband and business sector, especially around the border areas also shows how the entire system has become so corrupt. How lethal the Agazi killer squad could be is proved not only by its senseless killings of peaceful protesters after the 2005 election but the military's willingness to burn the entire villages and wipe out the civilian population in order to fight the militants of the Ogadeni region. Information coming out of Meles's circle indicates that, sensing that different gorilla type of fighters maybe propping up in many parts of the country, Meles is now in the process of assembling many more similar Agazi-type killer squads which will be used to immediately attack and burn villagers who may be susceptible to

harboring them. My sources also indicate that Meles continues to reconstitute the military command by appointing those who go along with his ethnocentric beliefs and those who enjoy the pillaging.

The purpose of this article is three-fold: 1) to show the potential fallouts of this mafia-type corruption which could be manifested by increased misery and migration of people; the continuous sinking of the Ethiopian economy to the ground; and the increased polarization of the society which may culminate to an ethnic-based warfare; 2) to explain the basis of the unprecedented corruption using the propositions and hypotheses advanced by other experts in the economics field and myself;ⁱⁱ and 3) to raise the awareness of and remind Ethiopians and those of Ethiopian origin, as well as those who care about that country that not *only the rampant corruption is here to stay and is deeply rooted in a minority ethnic-based administration*, but every indication also suggests that it will intensify, with its potential to completely destroy the social fabric of that society and the country itself. I call upon the foreign enablers of this oppressive clique that it is their moral duty to do the right thing- not only deny the regime their support but also put pressure on it so that it would respect the rule of law and human rights. Those of us who know the level of misery in each village of the country, albeit the EPRDF's lies of continuous double-digit economic growth, know and strongly believe that Ethiopia is on the brink of catastrophe, albeit slowly but surely, that we have never seen before. This increased misery, some of it already being manifested by unheard of migration of people, will spill over to neighboring countries and the rest of the world. The organized crime culture and the squalor created by the TPLF economic policies are now dangerously manifesting in such a way that the relatively young population of that country is acting against its own interests. For example, imitating their political leaders and forced by the misery they are in, it is now common to see thieves stealing public property at night and selling them back to the TPLF-owned businesses during day time. Putting such thievery scenarios in motion, one would not be mistaken to that such a creeping lawlessness and misery would lead to the already failed state, Ethiopia, to be like that of its neighbor, Somalia. With such a scenario, Ethiopia could become a breeding ground for terrorist activities and piracy. I believe it is about time to recognize the fact that the TPLF's terror and lawlessness will breed more terror and lawlessness. Of course, neglecting this fact will result for the world at large to pay for it, as it is now evident with the phenomenon currently existing in Somalia!

I especially would like to call upon all Ethiopians and all those of Ethiopian origin, to recognize this fact and do their utmost before things become worse. I call upon all of you to think about what you can do to fight this monkey of rampant corruption off the back of the poor Ethiopian people. We have come up with one way that you can do your part I explain at the end of this write-up.

THE LINK BETWEEN MINORITY ETHNIC GROUP RULE AND CORRUPTION

When it comes to the sub-Saharan Africa in which Ethiopia is a part, experts who studied the effects of corruption agree on two things: that both corruption and the study of it are on the rise. There is also an increasing consensus among empirical researchers that corruption has a significant negative impact on economic growth. Most importantly, experts also agree that the level of corruption within some countries, such as Ethiopia, is so ubiquitous, so rampant, and so

endemic that it may even determine their survival. Because of this fact, one may ask; “Why is corruption so bad in countries such as Ethiopia?”

When one looks at the degree of corruption that exists in some of the sub-Saharan African countries, one can easily observe that the countries which are highly affected by high corruption crimes seem to be fractionalized among many ethnic groups. One can, therefore, hypothesize that *the rise and the endemic nature of corruption is highly correlated with ethnic fractionalization and ethnic-based-politics, the latter being the cause of the former. Since some of these countries which have been highly affected by corruption are ruled by a minority ethnic group, a corollary to the same hypothesis is that ethnic-based politics localizes corruption and makes it intractable to both detect and manage.*

I submit to the reader, therefore, that, looking at it in this framework, we can easily explain both the endemic and intractable nature of the corruption scourge that exists in Ethiopia. Here are some of the characteristics of a government ruled by a minority ethnic group, nearly all of them being applicable to the Ethiopian situation:

1. As Etienne B. Yehoue from the World Bank and Banerjee et al theorize and empirically found, a political process based on ethnocentrism creates regional *kingmakers* who claim to represent the interests of their ethnic groups. Such a scenario allows them to rally behind all of those who belong to the same ethnic group creating a sense of rivalry among ethnic groups. The society as whole gets highly polarized, thereby creating a sense of cohesiveness within each ethnic group. In the process, each member of the ethnic group becomes *myopic* in the sense that it is blindfolded to look beyond its own ethnic entities. Such a scenario not only creates *uninformed* voters but it also allows regional kingmakers to insulate each other from their corruption activities. Since the state is divided among the corrupt regional kingmakers, it is incapable of fighting the corruption scourge. The autonomy given to the smaller regional kingmakers also prevents the state from interfering in their local affairs. As a result, a political process, which is based on “you scratch my back and I will scratch yours”, becomes the norm rather than the exception. The top kingmaker always tries to reward the regional kingmakers by allowing them to stay in power as long as the kingmaker at the top is allowed to do whatever he wants. Such a scenario creates *veto power* to the top kingmaker, thereby allowing him to leverage his ill-gotten gains. As Yehoue stated it, in the process, ethnicity becomes a “rent-extracting technology that fosters a highly politicized administration and widespread corruption.” Since the state is weakened, its ability to adopt growth enhancing policies is weakened as well. In the process, nationalist parties are overwhelmed by regional king-makers resulting in rent-seeking behaviors and wide-spread corruption.
2. Even though ethnic-based fractionalized rule brings with it a localization of officials, it also promotes personalism. But, as Tanzi argues, personalism reduces professionalism which breeds corruption since officials would have to pay greater attention to individual citizen’s needs. In the process, the public interest is neglected and even disregarded. Ethnic-based rules also foster a greater influence of interest groups and lobbying at the local level, thereby increasing the tenure of incumbents who happen to enjoy unethical relationships. Such localized corruption activities become intractable in that they allow local kingmakers to collude with the local media and auditing agencies.

3. Ethnically based localization has also the potential to distract competition by awarding contracts and business licenses to only ethnically based firms. Powerful local leaders could also encourage and be involved in perpetual rent-seeking behaviors. They tend to serve narrow interests with *diminished accountability to national interests*. Since powerful ethnic lords have the potential to rebuff any accountability, and because power is decentralized, it would be very difficult to fight corruption. Moreover, ethnic divisions increase patronage thereby reducing the efficiency of public services. Ethnocentric leaders foster the fragmentation of resources which are vital to the national interests.
4. When it comes to economic development, the economics literature suggests that ethnic fractionalization and low quality institutions are highly correlated. And highly fractured and ethnically fractionalized societies are prone to increased polarization, violent conflicts and zero-sum game activities. Lack of social cohesion due to ethnic groupings negatively affects institutions and therefore economic growth. Such a situation is also counterproductive to foreign direct investment and international business.
5. As Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999), argue, ethnocentrism exploits already existing heterogeneity and attempts to raise the low tastes or preferences, such as suspicion and gossips, of different ethnic groups. By creating and intensifying rivalry between different ethnic groups and regions, it is prone to under-provide local public goods either by generating unfocused lobbying (i.e., every group wants different local public goods, or local public goods physically located in different places), and as a result no agreement is reached on which goods should be provided, and none, or fewer, are provided. Additional characteristic of ethnocentric leaders is their attempts to exploit the unwillingness of some community members to fund social services that will benefit members of other groups. They just try to carve out the biggest slice of “their own” group in the process.
6. Ethno-centric governments provide relatively very low security, health care, education, and local infrastructure, because, due to being highly splintered and localized, they lack the capacity to garner unified sums of funds. With ethnic and religious conflicts in full force, the ruling party is unable to create a common security. In all likelihood, an ethno-centric administration is blinded by hatred and ethnocentric phobia. As a result, it is incapable of addressing or solving a crisis. Instead, it intensifies polarization. Obviously, not only a polarized society becomes engaged in a totally useless zero-sum-game, but the results of the game are highly unfair to the poor. When the same zero-sum-game escalates, it even has the potential to be highly destructive!ⁱⁱⁱ At times, especially when the going becomes tough and the paranoia intensifies, such regimes use collective punishment, as it is evident by the use of the economic deprivation practices that are applied on the people of the Ogaden region.
7. A minority administration is predisposed to spur militarization due to security fears. The kingmaker, especially the one who represents a minority ethnic group is always afraid, to the point of being filled with paranoia, of being overtaken by other and possibly bigger ethnic groups. To overcome his fears, he tries to bring in other paranoid minority and

oppressed ethnic groups. And one thing that the kingmaker and other minority groups have in common is their **fear of the one-man-one-vote principle**.

8. Kingmakers and their henchmen make relentless efforts to create mistrust among the different ethnic groups and within the general populous and exacerbate the already existing confusions among dominant groups. They do it, as it is evident in Ethiopia, by controlling the commanding heights at any cost, such as having full control of the national economy, the army and the media outlets. Such control allows them to countervail their weak legitimacy and inferiority. Moreover, ethnocentric thinking causes ethnocentric people to make wrong assumptions about other people whom they think “don’t belong to them.” Such wrong assumptions are spread to the rest of other ethnic groups and, from here on, suspicion and fear of the others feed each other, thereby intensifying the potential onset of ethnic-based wars.
9. . It has been provided with main sources of growth, by the authoritarian government, by a poorly developed press, by ill-informed public, by lack of democratic tradition, which alone can provide checks and balances in the exercise of power by government.
10. All of the above inhibit the macroeconomic performances of a country. Ethnic divisions are bad on economic growth since they decrease the efficacy of macroeconomic policies and trust. By increasing mistrust, ethnic divisions are anti-democratic in nature. As Collier (1998) states: Ethnic based politics is an identity politics and hence is blinded to see the common good in a macro sense. An identity politics, according to Collier, reminds voters about differences and hence builds less social capital. Collier says that an ethnically divided society gains more from democracy than a homogeneous one since the former needs more dispute resolutions and cooperation. Unfortunately, ethnically fractured societies and ethnic-based ruling work against the rule of law and democracy.

A CONCERN TO SHARE: CATASTROPHE IN THE MAKING!

If you really look at the economic situations of the country, including the abject poverty of people, the continuous starvation and misery, the recurring droughts, the shortages of foreign exchange, the rampant inflation rates, the trade and budget imbalances, the constant power outages that are taking place in all cities, the lack of access to clean water, the dire situation of health care and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the impacts of the continuous deforestation as well as the wind and water erosions accompanying it, the proportion of the population that is underage, the level of unemployment/underemployment (some speculating it to be over 70%), etc., you would conclude that the country is on the brink of collapse and financial bankruptcy. A recently published report of the World Bank revealed that Ethiopia is facing governance, trust, and technical deficits, and its trade deficit is unsustainable. It is because of these deficits and the constant fear of persecution that the citizens of that country are migrating by the drones. No one would like to leave his/her country unless the situation forces him/her to do so. No one would like to leave their loved ones behind and no one would risk his/her life just to become a super nanny unless the country they live becomes a living hell to them. The impact of this migration will be devastating to the country due to the fact that most Ethiopians who have decided to leave their country are the ones who happen to be the relatively young and educated. As we all know, the TPLF’s harassment, coercion and intimidation of the intellectual community has forced a

good portion of them to leave their country, thereby making Ethiopia to become increasingly brainless. Since those who leave the country are also the relatively young and energetic, the loss of the relatively productive citizens will torment Ethiopia in the years to come.

Add to all of these the impact of the financial and economic meltdown of the world economy and the projected fall of commodity prices such as coffee. All of these problems and the current and future food shortages and the misallocation of resources would lead you to think that, not only the future of that country is at stake but you would think that something would happen, sooner or later. Knowing this to be the case, even the dictatorial regime of Meles Zenawi is known to have feared an *implosion* to take place. I even read a report just a few weeks ago that, fearing such an implosion, the regime had hired foreign nationals who would advise it on how to stave off public anger and potential implosion. One indication of this is seen by the regime's quick importation of several hundred tons of wheat and rationing it to major cities. The regime bought the wheat, in an expedited manner, in the open market, and possibly paying exorbitant prices, despite the fact that the country is facing an alarming level of foreign exchange shortages and being warned by both the IMF and the World Bank about the consequences of the country's too low foreign exchange reserves.

Moreover, I don't know if this rumor is true or not, but let me also share with you a recent Addis Ababa street talk: Once the starvation that they regime was hiding for more than a year became public, Mr. Meles and his advisors were so worried that they had to discuss on how to stave off the potential public revolt. Towards the end of their discussions, people who are familiar to the story indicated, Mr. Meles told his advisors and security men that they did not have to worry about the opposition parties, for he either has gotten them by their necks and/or he knows how to divide them thereby making them ineffectual. He rather told them to worry about the potential revolt from the public that has been disaffected by the abject poverty and starvation. If this is indeed true, and I don't doubt it at all, his statements are tantamount to an indictment to the failures of the opposition parties and a challenge from Meles to them as well!

The arguments that I listed above are *intended to show that a minority-led government is prone to corruption and social destruction*. It is my contention that these corruption crimes committed by the mafia type clique, which are made worse by the release of the mean-spirited video which I discussed in my previous write-up, have become a clan type of evil yeasts that are fermenting hatred. As those who are involved in the corruption scourge have said it several times, every indication suggest that their "in your face, we will continue doing what we have been doing" will continue. Again, many experts who looked at the level of corruption in Ethiopia and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa clearly show that this disease could be the bane of the continent. After carefully looking into this matter regarding Ethiopia, I have truly fear not only the corruption scourge would challenge the survival of that country, but it could also become the most important element that will challenge the survival of the EPRDF as we know it. The tensions which became evident during and after the recently concluded EPRDF congress are testimonies to this contention. Unfortunately, Mr. Meles's announcement, done somewhat abruptly at end of the EPRDF congress, that the "status quo is maintained indicates that those who are highly immersed in the corruption process have the upper hand, at least for now. It shows that this evil, that is, the rampant corruption, would not go away unless we all begin to do our part to fight it. *We cannot just wish evil like this to go away and be done with it!* Moreover, both common sense and empirical evidence indicates that the best way to fight corruption is by exposing the scourge itself! That is why we all need to cooperate from here on. My collaborators

and I have taken the lead towards this effort. We plan to document all the corruption crimes committed by this regime and expose it to the world. At the end of the day, we hope to make the corrupt officials accountable to their crimes.

A CALL FOR DUTY:

We, therefore, ask you to document all of those corruption related crimes, past or present, and send them to us. And you can do it unanimously- by using a name that no one else knows other than yourself and/or creating an alias email address. Even if you decided to use your real name and email address, we guarantee that it will remain confidential.

We also guarantee to assemble all of the information and present our documentation to the Ethiopian people and the world at large. We will immediately begin categorizing the corruption crimes by:

- **Grand corruption types:** This may take the form of government purchasing goods and services at an inflated price because some of the money is going into the pockets of senior officials - either political or bureaucratic. Grand corruption takes place in kickbacks in public works' contracts, etc.
- **State corruption types:** This is when the state itself gets corrupt aside from its individual officials. This takes place when corruption involves the head of state himself and his cronies. Mobutu Sese Seko fell under this category. So did Nigeria's successive military dictators. Mobutu did not deny accusations of corruption leveled against. Instead, he tried to justify it by for example blaming western institutions that corrupted him into it. At one time, it was reported that when his government was broke, and could not pay salaries, Mobutu lent it US\$5, 000,000, which is a lot of money for a poor country such as Zaire!
- **Electoral Corruption Types:** Manipulation of electoral process, the rigging of election results as it happened to Ethiopia during the 2005 elections; intimidation of the electorate; irregular and illegal voter registration and candidate and party registration, party financing (e.g. Lack of disclosure of funding sources), voting and counting, campaign and media regulations; and
- **Petty corruption Types:** such as is often seen on the side of the streets at a police roadblock

WOULD YOU ANSWER THE CALL?

What else would not motivate you other than the scourge that has subjected the country to shame, such as the gold scam? What else would not make you angry other than the recent Tendaho Sugar Factory Project scandals, where Ethiopia was dragged to the Bombay High Court over unlawful awards of a contract to some TPLF cronies, worth \$184.00? What else would not anger you more than the selling of both our land our children to foreigners? ... What else would not motivate you to do your part if the callousness and meanness theatre that was done at the Sheraton Hotel did not? As I pleaded to you in my recent write-up regarding the shameful “fundraising” theatre, we should not allow them to pit us against our Tigrian compatriots whenever the dictators feel threatened. We rather should tell them, “No, you cannot be a good kin of the Tigrian people while at the same time instigating hatred against them by spewing your

ethnocentric venom!” We should say to them, “enough is enough- from now on we will not allow you to continue shamelessly sucking the poor Ethiopian peoples’ blood using your mafia-type of corruption.”

It is about time for you to do your part so that your deeds could assist the people you love. It is time for action, not just talk!

Here is the email address we want you to use when you send us your reports:
africanstudies@murraystate.edu

N.B.:

1. We are preparing some survey questionnaire regarding the same issue. We hope that you also will cooperate to fill those questionnaires.
2. The ideas and propositions presented in this article are taken from ongoing research topics of the writer.

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ⁱ In which case their only main competitor is the Alamoudi business sector.

ⁱⁱ Some writers have now began comparing the ongoing corruption to that of a mafia-type of activity, citing the fact that, among other things, that those who are deeply involved intimidate and coerce those who object their activities. There are indeed interesting parallels between the mafia type of activities that are taking place in Ethiopia and elsewhere, especially those which took place in Russia and East Europe. We will revisit this issue in another write-up.

ⁱⁱⁱ As a matter of fact, many trade experts and economists believe that the zero-sum-game policies which were adopted by many countries were contributing factors of the Second World War.