



Think Twice When the Deal is too Good

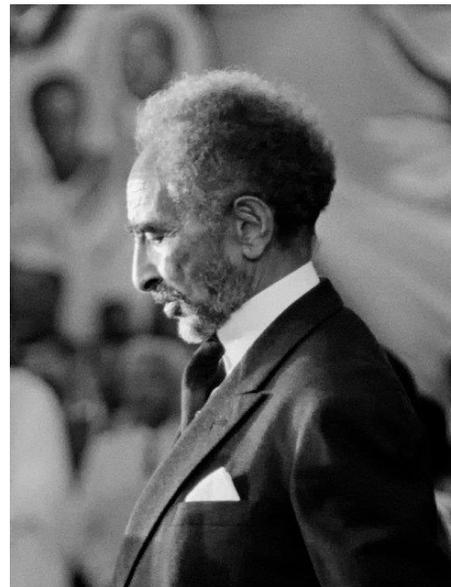
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In the last one hundred years, modern Ethiopia's political trajectory unceasingly provided us with factual schoolings that ignited mental debate on the present ethno-federalism versus the old unitary systems. This essay is intended to put a broader context the political challenges and the difficulties that have been laid open to the peace and progress loving Ethiopians.

However, few heretics among us do criticise the contemporary ethno-federalism political ideology in preference of the medieval unitary centralism for one reason or the other. With limitation of space and the consideration of some of the reader's time scarcity, I will start with the Imperial Feudal System of Haile Selassie rule.

Emperor Haile Selassie rule lasted for nearly 50 years, this era is normally counted as two parts; the first phase started from 1916 to 1930. He was on the throne for 14 years as a monarch but in procurator status. During this period, Haile Selassie was authorized only to act the designated function or authority of serving the empire in consultation with the court. The second phase started in 1941 as a fully crowned Emperor and continued to rule until he was overthrown by the military Junta in the year 1974. Remember, this period is not included in the six-years Haile Selassie was exiled in London.



Garvey expressed feeling of displeasure against Emperor Haile Selassie's decision to go into exile when actually his country was invaded by the Italian colonial fascists. In his book "The Failure of Haile Selassie as Emperor, Black Man", Marcus Garvey (1) noted: "fled from his nation to Britain, leaving his kin to be slaughtered by the Italians" (Garvey 1937). The power was squarely limited to a few relatives of Haile Selassie —the "top-layers" so they called.

This state of political style based on isolationism and the detestation to diversity applied to four compass directions of the country resulting artificial retardation and disproportionate growth.

The cumulative impact of imperial misrule and the petty tyrannies of local landlords created an atmosphere in which progressive economy was difficult to assume. Just imagine how those African countries that had attained independence, perhaps two decades after Haile Selassie sat on the thrown bypassed at, a high speed, the Black Empire in terms of economic growth and development as well as accepting diversities of the nationalities for proportional political participation so as to form rigid and tolerable nationhood. I am sure at least if not overtly the Emperor Haile Selassie must have admitted such embarrassment at the then Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Perhaps among other uncountable list of sham emerged from his administration's inability to impact critical economic and political changes joined with rising inflation, corruption, a famine that affected several provinces, raids and bombardment of unarmed civilians and the preceding wicked but lavish lifestyle he adopted at the palace. The worst scenario happened when he concealed from the world the shocking famine in the North of the country, Wollo province. While on the other side the Emperor Haile Selassie spent money to the tune of more than \$35 million to celebrate his 80th birthday.

What to recall when the deal is too good

As soon as he was reinstated right after the Italian defeat in his absentia in the year 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie in two years' times decided to carry raids using the first aerial bombardment with the backing of British Air officers based in Aden of the Arabian Peninsula against unarmed civilian and reduced to ashes the entire Raya and Azebo woredes of the north. Likewise, Oromo farmers were subjected to massive and ruthless land alienation. This was followed by the second bombardment that took place in Gojjam where in 1968 Hale Selassie sent troops to burn villages and houses into ashes.

There were ground assaults and aerial bombardments in both the highlands and the lowlands of Bale in the early months of 1967 leaving behind a mountain of casualties. Also there were retributive measures such as land confiscation, restrictions on nomads' seasonal migrations in the Ogaden. In 1972 Haile Selassie attempted to hide the existence of the scandalous Wollo/Tigreya famine as a part of his retaliation measures against his poor people.

According to a 1974 UN FAO report 300,000 people, predominantly the northern rural poor, died during the 1973-1974 Ethiopian famine. Unhappy with the famine situation in the country, Prof. Mesfin Wolde Mariam of Addis Ababa University once observed that;

“The famines of 1958 and 1966 in Tigray and Wollo were treated with official indifference, bordering on hostility towards the peasants who were considered

sufficiently ungratefully for the divinely sanctioned rule of Haile Selassie as to allow themselves to defame his reputation by dying of famine.”

Emperor Haile Selassie’s isolationism policy towards the Ogaden region was fully laid on the ground as soon as Somalia got independence in 1960, instead of engaging attraction and keeping policy towards Ethnic Somali civilian he moved his imperial “Andenet army.” Among the list of atrocities they committed which are still remembered in those border areas includes; the 500 civilians killed when the village of Aisha district/woreda was destroyed to make way for a military post in August 1960. In 1972, droughts locally known as “Abaartii Dabadheer” according to the traditional calendar added to the Ogaden’ problems of marginalization. The loss of pastures and browsing, imposition of restrictions on mobility to both people and livestock and continued scorch earth policy of the Emperor’s regime added more fuel to the cruel famine. According to a survey done in Harerghe in May-June 1974, death rates among the lowland pastoralists were about three times normal. Assuming “normal” to be 20 per thousand and the affected population to be 700,000, this implies 28,000 famine deaths. Be as it may, regardless of whether through an ethnocentric perspective of the predominance of a settled over pastoralists way of life, or through a cautious policy approach of utilizing the dry seasons (drought).

As a chance to expand the Emperor’s government control over the obstinate people, the famine relief program served to undermine key aspects of the Ogadeni way of life. By mid-1975—this time under Dergue regime—more than 180,000 Ogaden pastoralists were living in 18 relief shelters in selective destitution. In September 12, 1974 Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a Soviet-backed military coup that brought his nearly fifty-years old monarchic reign to its demise marking the finishing of the Solomonic dynasty which had ruled Ethiopia since the thirteenth century.

Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam was even evil on attire. His dictatorial rule triumphed from 1974-1991—a period characterized as diabolical disaster. As soon as he came to power he declared what he termed as “progressive motivation” for the nation, which meant introducing a new barbarian rule of public extermination. He started by sending of about sixty senior authorities of the ousted emperor's government to the axing squad (murdered). The emperor and the Patriarch of the predominant Ethiopian Orthodox church were too on the sly in the months that took after. The Dergue's initial casualties were not excluded individuals and members of the group itself. At one time no less than 22,000 individuals were executed in what he called “Red Terror” in Addis Ababa alone, with countless others tormented and detained under the barbaric conditions of the Dergue.



The worst was that Prisoners were not charged or tried, and frequently kebele (location or sub-location) officers had the full authority of life or death chances spontaneously. Huge numbers of the casualties were secondary school understudies and university students. A part from the policy of physical mass annihilation, detention, and terrorization, what followed next was the nationalization of private properties and business enterprises. Like his deposed predecessor, Col. Mengistu's Dergue regime also used the drought and famine particularly that of 1984 as a selective policy of persecution. At the same time, his Military Government was spending between \$100-200 million. The intent for this amount was to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the revolution as millions of his people were starving in Tigrey famine of 1984. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam routinely adopted the most dangerous aerial missions possible during his regime. He applied low elevation, precision bombing of villages and towns on market days as in the case of Hawzen town in the northern part of the Tigray region, killing thousands of civilians on a market day. Hawzen isn't the main case of mass murder in the Dergue reign; there were other major towns such as Wollo, Shewa, Gondar, and Wollega that suffered day by day events of his lethal air attacks against poor unarmed civilians.

This is not figures I am making out of my mind; it's kept both in official and oral records. A friend of mine who had the chance to peruse over this article before it was sent out for publication felt that the paper contains a painful report of discerning injustice and wondered in whimper if I can remember an iota of their good deed. I said yes of course as I numerate; Emperor Haile Selassie sent few students from his ruling circle and their distance relatives to abroad for higher learning, I am not quite certain whether they all came back to home. In order to sustain his godly perceived mercy, Haile Selassie would throw crumbs to the poor and bribe the rich. An example of this was his practice of tossing loose change (throwing monies) to the poor on the street to celebrate his birthday on each year; this is just to mention but few.

The Dergue military rule engaged on land reform policy thereby returning the land to the tillers. Col. Mengistu also engaged in legitimizing Oromo language to be spoken in public centers—a fact that was not possible under Haile Selassie rule and even before that reign. These successive regimes had a reason to fail at the end, so here I will share with you a small number of possible grounds why they could not survive anymore. In any monarchical rule, of course requires a solitary individual managing the whole affairs of the nation as long as he or she lives. In such case there might be the chances that, that nation will have a leader who won't be as genuine as needed as opposed to the case of participatory democracy.

On account of Haile Selassie, he was never thoughtful of all things in his government, believing that he would govern for whatever was left of his life.

This way, he wouldn't quickly assume liability to serve the advancement of his people because he was not answerable to anybody. In essence, he was above the law and held the title "Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah." The man who was quoted saying, "It is much easier to show compassion to animals. They are never wicked. We have finished the job, what shall we do with the tools?" eventually saw his country fall into miseries of absolute economic retardation.

Monarchic rule can also prompt imbalance of riches. For instance, amid Emperor Haile Selassie's rule the formation of Neo-leaders clergymen and the "decision class" were believed to have amassed a great part of the nation's wealth. Yet the average citizens' predicament has stayed hopeless. Basically, in monarchic system neither the general population would get higher positions nor appreciate any sort of extraordinary ideal in government management. In this way it adds to the ordinary citizen problems more harm than good—a condition inconceivable for him to survive longer than 1974.

Similarly, Col. Mengistu communist Dergue failure attributes to a variety of factors of which I will share with you here a few of it. Forced collectivization laws and denying the right to private property was a doctrine enforced through Soviet Russia between 1928 and 1940. This coincided with Stalin's rise to power and was adopted as a philosophy of communism across all the communist socialist states in the globe. This system slowed the production sector of the economy and thus made the people lazy and reckless. In other words, a person's God-given talent was not possible to exploit to the hilt under communist rule. Poorly managed famine, starvation, mass executions and depletion as a result of overwork, were the apparatuses of exchange which expedited the homicidal communist demeanors.

Centralism and lack of diversity consideration of then 'comrade belief' system have wane the efficiency and retarded the economic growth to its last destructions. There was the defective financial arrangement of the communists, the so-called "command economy" which was an organism that decided how the assets ought to be spent in the country. This obviously slowed the trade and industry progress of their countries. Taking on board all of this information as a base of your understanding of the past politics in Ethiopia, do you think that at this age of proportionate ethno-federalism anyone will suggest the reincarnation of those backward political systems? **Duly defending the federal system shall be our only duty of destiny!**

There has to be an endeavor to transform the country that was once exposed to the cruelty of the dynasty to the desolation of the Dergue's devilish dictatorship into federalism. This effort to bring everyone on board was the wishes of the young elites who resisted throughout the lifetimes of the regimes of the past. On coming to power in the hitherto centralized state into the Federal Democratic Republic and also redefined citizenship, politics and identity on ethnic grounds. The intent was/is to create opportunity to access the national resource pie as well as to construct a more flourishing, impartial and representative state for its entire people. In so doing, the federal constitution ratified in 1994 defined Ethiopian government structure as a multicultural federation based on ethno-national representation though kililawī menigisit—Regional States.

Also as the universal democratic principle permeates, the EPRDF government institutionalized the policy of people's rights to self-determination and self-rule. Basically, the Ethnic federalism is a federal system of national government in which the federated units are formed and defined according to ethnicity. This is the case where political power and its functions are shared between central and regional authorities with the aim of maintaining a degree of autonomy and integrity of a diverse society. Thus, Ethno-federalism system currently adopted in Ethiopia is one that seeks to preserve a balance in which the central government cannot dictate decisions on regional units. When units ought to differ and claim a share of what power entails, differences are resolved by consent not by duress as in the case of former regimes. In a nut shell, the intention of the Revolutionary Democracy or the Zenawism of EPRDF government sometimes Amharic known as " Abiyotawi Demokirasi " was to replace once and for all the then unitary government which was the hallmark of the old, past regimes that by their infinite duress held in reserve numerous Ethiopian nations and nationalities with cultural dissimilar packages, religious beliefs, language and identity under a unitary/central state control where again deciding power of their day to day affairs had been concentrated in the distance hands of the few at the centre of the central.

Therefore, EPRDF constitution promulgated in the 1995 was basically to form a nation whose characteristic backstops in a way on the definition of Stalin's national question. For this reason it guarantees cohesion without collapse of the original identity of nearly 83 diverse ethnic communities in Ethiopia. To such a degree, the constitution influenced the formation of ethno-federal system historically constituted, stable nation and nationalities, organized on the basis of respecting the diversities of their language, region, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in their own common culture. It goes without saying that a country, like every historical phenomenon, is subject to the law of change to its ancient history, past rule, its beginnings and end. Consequently, the EPRDF ethno federalism constitution has concluded both the centralized hereditary dynasty and unitary communist rule in the Ethiopia. Since 1991 on coming to power they adopted a new chapter of decentralization based on ethnic regionalism.

Watch out the Madness and Malicious on the social media

These days the effect of negative information emanating from the social media is making us quite unsocial. Its negative impact has gone far in destroying nations and nationalities, separated father from his beloved wife, isolated brother from his brethren and disconnected sister from her siblings. We seemingly become susceptible to the fake news of the contemporary social media to the extent that we take it as heavenly revelation. Some of us believe that any information sent through the Facebook's event posts, WhatsApp, Viper, imo, Instagram, Palmchat, Tango, to name but a few is correct and absolutely reliable.

Not knowing that it's the most dangerous venue that could carry and spread quickly misinformation that goes uncensored and can cause unintended psychological damage if it's used by people with distorted information, hate speech and incitement messages of which by doing so will make them gain more in the expense of the receivers' loss.

Here I have a by the way examples that I feel to share with, for instance the first week of October this year The Reporter—a Reputable newspaper in the country published on the front page a title that reads; “Somali-Oromia conflict persists despite federal intervention” anyone outside of the country who read this piece would obviously feel a sense of hopelessness with regards to the ending of the conflict between these two regions. They may as well feel sense of incapability on the part of the highest authority of the land—the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Of course the uninformed or wicked amongst us will believe the Federal Government can no longer provide peace and security for her citizen. Even though you may find inside story slightly different narration at end but what matters is the first impression of the title. Hence editors must be very careful to use such titles when reporting story particularly when there's sensitive issues that matters life and death. In another scenario, The Reporter newspaper carried a report with regards to the recently talk the Sugar Corporation corruption. The paper at one time reported the court proceedings that ETB 1.5% of 12.1 billion are the pledges to be paid as kickback of which only 0.1% was so far paid to the middlemen/women according to the report, remember the entire Sugar Corporation project is worth ETB 12.1 billion.

A few weeks later on the front page it was reported that 12.1 billion of the Sugar Corporation was wasted. These discrepancies of information the figure particularly on the newspapers can sometime be the instrument of sensitization to misinform and motivate public goading. In another development carried on the Daily Monitor newspaper was shared with me by a friend this week. As I read I found a portion with regards to the current situation between Somali and Oromo regions, the part reports alleged opinion of someone from the Oromia region who says that he/she saw federal convey carrying weapons to be distributed to the Somali region Liyu police to fight against Oromo. Such inflammatory opinion remarks shall not be carried on media pages of newspapers, reasonably speaking the spread of such unproven information won't bring any solution, and rather it will only add fuel to flame.

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