

Ethiopia's Rise, Oppositions' Demand: Should they be always mutually exclusive?

Habtamu Alebachew (Lecturer)

1. Introductions

Ethiopia's dramatic rise is now beyond the point of denial. Some could not compare the very speed of Ethiopia's rise with any one else but with its own past as the only possible way of making analogy. Some others have tried to draw some parallel of Ethiopia's rise with China as two cases of quick and unbelievable revivals of fallen civilizations. It is amidst this that I personally hear and read rising disappointments of many Ethiopians over the behaviors of opposition leaders.

The challenge for scientific enquiry is however a vivid one: who is the prime target of opposition parties every where in the civilized world: existing policies of the ruling party or the entire state and its destiny? Can the program and demand of an opposition party be mutually exclusive with the benefits of the society whoever may bring the changes? Do Opposition views mean an alternative to the best or to the worst? These may seem naive questions at face value. However, I believe, they are queries into the political psychology of how a multiparty system should operate in a starter country swarmed by a multitude of different interests like Ethiopia.

I personally feel that a fast track development has begun to impress Ethiopians living here; it has already begun to objectively knock at our doors individually particularly since the second half of the 2010s. In parallel, I equally feel a bubbling heated escalation of divergences of opinions and interpretations of Ethiopia's rise between average Ethiopians versus the 'big men' among opposition leaders. Until a focused political science research could pinpoint which side may be 'right or wrong', I may be able to crudely assume and summarize these divergences in a table at ensuing parts.

This baseline will be followed by a comparative demonstration of domestic opposition arguments versus foreign witnesses of Ethiopia's rise, sources that Opposition leaders once insisted that we should hear and believe in them as reliable media.

2. Basic Assumptions of Opinion/View Divergences

I tried to review and go back across my notebooks to remember views a lot of ordinary Ethiopians with apparently no commitments either to the ruling party or the Opposition. I also tried to as positively as possible arguments, criticisms and predictions by opposition leaders, just leaving aside what the government and its public relations

machinery might have said in the previous two and three years. Admitting that I myself also might have had subjective interpretations of things, I, nonetheless, argue, that, at least, a rough political spectrum could be drawn.

One could realize that this spectrum has already begun to speak louder and louder for itself along with the wide publication of foreign statistics of Ethiopia's close-to-miracle pace of growth serving as a major catalytic agent. Unfortunately, this emerging political continuum tends to represent at many points of opinion gradations extremely polarized as well as disturbed emotional positions on both sides of the counter—Opposition leaders versus supporters of the existing regime. One could also critically discover that some opposition leaders obviously lack the required minimum understandings of basic development concepts. It is not uncommon to see and hear many opposition leaders falling victim to mental confusions, for example, in their comments on 'growth', 'project', 'development', 'civilization', 'wealth distribution', 'transformation' and so on.

Let me remind you Zemen Magazine's (2012) interviewed two formerly prominent opposition leaders and parliamentarians before 2002 election: Ato Gebru G/Mariam and Ato Temsgen Zewude (I will come back to Temsegen latter; now, Ato Gebrue...)

The reporter asked Ato Gebrue G/mariam as follows:

What is your comment one growth performances in the past during the rule of Derg vis-à-vis that of today?

Ato Gebru G/mariam replied as follows:

I wondered why people deliberately preferred variegating the good works and contributions of Derg's time the darkest. Of course, I agree that Derg's obsession with killing people was not right. I am myself opposed to this part of the Derg. But this does not mean that Derg did not contribute anything at all. Take, for example, the Gambela Bridge..we work in Gambela now crossing this bridge... the Awassa—Moyale asphalt road; Amorate, farm, Beles project, the Bebeka state farm, Mizan-Tepi road, Beko river bridge, Gore-Gocha road, the Military Training Camps which EPRDF now is using, Ormat armsl factory, ...Agarfa farmers training center, Jimma University...all these are Derg's contributions.

Ato Gebru by this answer mistakenly reduced the concepts of growth and development to the simple level of 'projects'. Of course, there is no growth without projects; however, this does not mean that all projects would lead to growth and development. Growth in its redefined understanding in Ethiopia's contexts, development, is basically structural involving changes in values, relations, institutions, traditions and the entire social foundation in a sustainable manner. Gebru however remained at his project phase of understanding, which is difficult to place at a political spectrum as an organized opposition position. All these and similar opposition arguments could however be considered in the task of assuming divergent positions between leaders and followers as follows:

Opposition Parties	The Average Ethiopian
Who Rules Ethiopia?	Who Changes Ethiopia?
Who rises and comes from outside?	Who rises and comes from inside?
Hearing from outside sources is believing	Seeing what is going on at home is believing
Who comes to our public forums?	Who goes to work site?
We say: Growth without inflation.	We need development even with challenges.
No growth before EPRDF goes....	No prospect of Growth if you come...
We are usually divided: this is the meaning of democracy	We are now better united: this is the result of democracy
No peace before the former flag comes back...	No war with the existing flag...
No Ethiopia without Assab port	No Ethiopia if in war for Assab Port...
Most of you were with us yesterday...	All of you are behind us today...
Democracy in Ethiopia's context is who says what, and how...	Democracy in Ethiopia's context is who gets what and how....

3. 'Who is who?' of Ethiopia's Development Politics?

I know many friends who tend to give a second-place position to MEDREK party in its potential for political leadership in Ethiopia next to EPRDF. The results of Election 2010 particularly in Addis Ababa, Tigray and some other parts indicated, of course, MEDEREK was the furthest second party in the voting booth. For many other critics, however, including the private press, MEDEREK is a party shrouded in haze where many questions and doubts revolve around its political position and program. As compared to other parties like the ultra Conservative All Ethiopians' Unity Party (AETU), MEDREK appears to have inclined to leftist tastes in its acceptance of a federal arrangement, ethno-linguistic self-rule, parliamentary form of government and others. This may place MEDERK across the political continuum of Ethiopia at the near right to the left of EPRDF but at the farthest left side on the right of AETU.

MEDREK, however, suffers oblivion of positions in its political program for undertaking broad-based, agriculture-led, and grassroots participatory socio-economic participation. It also wavers, like, for example, Ethiopia's Democratic Party (EDP) over the question of land ownership stating that it would follow mixed ownership titles—state, private and cooperatives. For other more radical Ethiopians, MEDREK is a haphazard collection of individuals united by the common agenda of hatred personally to existing government leaders, and to the late, prime Minister Melez Zenawi. These people criticize MEDREK to be a center of octagerian, vacillating and mediocre politicians with multiplicity of hanged black gown of degrees, as shields against grudge.

The most sensitive spot in the political views and positions of MEDREK is however its articulated stance toward Ethiopia's rise. Let us have a brief look of who said what on this among the tope MEDERK leadership in the formative years of 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 Ethiopia's development by comparing with outside sources.

Ato Gebru Asrat of ARENA-MEDREK speaking to Addis Admas, Voice of America, Reporter---2010- 2011

I do not know why EPRDF leaders mock at the starved people who retrogressively fall below meeting daily basics of life. In stead of trying to decisive the people into such non-priority projects like the Abay Dam or others, they must come back to their sense that the Ethiopian people are dying for lack of food, water and clothing. The EPRDF leaders could not see and hear the people crying and dropping their tears across the streets of Addis Ababa due to the fast rise in the expensiveness of necessities of daily life..... The peasants are selling their cattle to repay unproductive fertilizer and other debts.

Before this interview, Gebru Asrat gave his words for Addis Neger weekly in 2010 whose reporter asked him about his views of the fast socio-economic development in Ethiopia commenting that the ruling party criticized the opposition for failing to appreciate the reality on the ground. Gebru relied the following:

What are saying? Yes, there some projects undergoing here and there. But, do EPRDF leaders want to sit idle? They are at the driver's seat. What is political power then if they fail even to undertake these changes? We are opposed to the poor management of the country's resources which benefits one sector at the expense of another; what we are opposed to is the incapable leadership of the ruling party whose weakness is the sole cause for the worst inflation; the current inflation originated from the poor management of economic sectors in which the ruling party wastes huge sums of money for some specific sectors without coordination with others which pumped more money into the economy than the market could absorb. You will see what messy economic situation will unfold in the country due to this weak management.

What actually unfolded in the economy of Ethiopia has been published through a long list of foreign data and analysis sources. Let us compare what Gebru said and the commentaries of the following official observation of a coalition of independent development agencies.

African Economic Outlook 2012 4 | © AfDB, OECD, UNDP, UNECA

In 2011 (fiscal year [FY] 2010/11), the economy grew at 11.4% marking the eighth consecutive year of rapid growth. Moreover, growth has continued to be broad-based with industry, services and agriculture growing by 15%, 12.5% and 9% respectively. Hotels and restaurants, real estate, renting and business activities, and financial intermediation made the largest contribution to the growth of the services sector. The services sector is expected to continue to grow rapidly, though at a slower pace than in previous years, at 7% and 7.6% in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The strong industrial sector performance of 2011 was driven by rapid expansion in mining and, to a lesser extent, manufacturing. In 2011 mining grew by an unprecedented 48% reflecting the impact of investments in the expansion of mining activities and exports, especially gold. Although Ethiopia's industrial base is still Ethiopia's overall growth prospects in 2012 and 2013 are good, with public investment in infrastructure, commercialization of agriculture and non-traditional exports expected to continue driving growth. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2012 and 2013 is projected at 7% and 7.6% respectively. While these projections are lower than the GTP projections and official GDP out-turn figures, at these levels the Ethiopian economy would still maintain its high growth momentum.

Professor Byene Petros speaking to Reporter (2010)--MEDREK

Many Ethiopian elites know Professor Byene Petros as one of the longest serving Opposition leader in Ethiopia's politics. Beyene had had a staunch fan in his constituency of Hadia, which he lost for the first time in the 2010 election. During elections, 1995, 2000 and 2005, his supporters were proudly photographed carrying Professor Beyene at their shoulders rushing to take lucky turns one from the other. In an interview he held with Addis Zemen reporter at the 1995 election, he was asked about these events. Beyene replied that it was nothing but a show of people's love and commitments. Professor Byene lost the 2010 election but reasoned out that it was rigged in his disadvantages. It was before this defeat that Byene said the following statements

Who says there is growth in Ethiopia? Growth in Ethiopia is the propaganda of the Ruling Party as a way out from its trap of peoples' opposition. If there is

growth also, it is the growth of EPRDF-affiliated business organizations and individuals. We, of course, see these few individuals living better, driving expensive cars, enjoying niceties of life at the expense of the country....the poverty problem of the country especially in the south can never be understood without tracing its historical roots back to the conquest of Emperor Minilk. Elimination of poverty in the south hinges upon the cessation at some point of the history which EPRDF has also allowed to persist.

Doctor Yakobe Wodlemariam also expressed his views of growth without a Port of Assab with which he has been obsessed through out his life as Opposition leader (I do not whether his Party, Unity, joined MEDERK or not). Yakobe reiterated his adamant position that Ethiopia's general growth and Ethiopia's legal right to re-own Assab Port are interdependent. What he emphasizes was that One needed the other. In an interview with Awuramaba weekly, Yakobe warned against what he called 'the interventions of Ethiopia's government in Eritrea and its rebuff of Egyptian nervousness over the Hidase Dam as impolite and detrimental for the national advantages of poor Ethiopia. Doctor Yakobe in his book titled "whose is Assab?", he deeply aggrieved over he failure of Ethiopia's leaders to waste the legal opportunities to restore ownership Assab, which contributed for the deepened poverty in the country.

Now, let us see world impression of Ethiopia's records of achievements on these issues and compare them with what these two opposition leaders said and predicted.

Written by Catherine Grant-Makokera and Itumeleng Rantao
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Diplomatic Pouch

Ethiopia: Underestimated Regional Power

Ethiopia has ambitious plans to improve the infrastructure available for its 85 million people. There are large power plants being built by Chinese and European companies. The Growth and Transformation Plan sees energy and transport infrastructure as priorities. The energy sector presents the greatest infrastructural challenge to Ethiopia. 8700 megawatts of generating plant will be required over the next decade. This is double Ethiopia's current capacity. In transport, there is a need to improve Ethiopia's poor rural accessibility and ensure that recent investments in roads receive efficient maintenance. Better roads to link Ethiopia to Mombasa and Port Sudan are planned. This would reduce reliance on Djibouti for access to the sea and the movement of many goods in and out of the country. In terms of air transport, Ethiopia is a regional leader. Its national airline is one of Africa's three top international carriers, and they have an extensive network across Africa and an excellent safety record. In sharp contrast, however, Ethiopia's rail transport requires major rehabilitation. The rail corridor between Addis Ababa and the Port of Djibouti has deteriorated and fallen into disuse. With the on-going conflict with Eritrea in mind, diversification of options for accessing

the sea is important for landlocked Ethiopia. Looking up from the south of the African continent, we usually perceive Kenya as the driver or anchor economy of the East African region. This reflects in part a much closer economic relationship between South Africa and Kenya relative to Ethiopia (as well as its partners in the East African Community – Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda).

Bulcha Demeksa speaking at a parliamentary forum (2010)--MEDREK

Ato Bulcha Demeksa was one of the outspoken opposition leaders in the Ethiopian Parliament during the pre-2010 Election. I know him as an Oromo Federalist since the 1990s while he was writing on the Ethiopian Review in the United States. In his days as a parliamentarian, he was known as much as the other colleague of his Doctor Merera Gudina for advancing extremely pessimistic views of Ethiopia's growth and development under present political realities. The following is a short abstract of his views:

I always hear you talking about growth in Ethiopia on unprecedented scale. I am an economist...but I could not observe any sign of growth everywhere. I can surely tell you about the Wordeja I represent. Leave alone growth, formerly well to do people whom I know closely are getting fast impoverished....the total federal budget you proposed amounts to the annual budget of a single hospital in Europe. I do not know by your arguments of Ethiopia's fastest growth.

Doctor Merera Gudina mockingly also rejected the report on Ethiopia's growth and prediction of joining the middle income category of states asking this question: you said Ethiopia would join the group of Middle income countries. This heavily astonished me; do you mean that countries of the middle income category sit folding their hands and wait for us until we catch them up with? Of course, it was Merera who should have known by what this means as a lecturer with the knowledge of Standard Measurement as different from Normative Measurement techniques: Ethiopia is to join not countries as in the Normative Measurement model per se but meets objective standards whichever country rises or falls.

Doctor Merera had won millions of ears in his golden days as an Opposition leader until well immediately post-2010 election by his embittered depiction of Ethiopia's hopeless socio-economic position in the Region and the globe in his famous words of the time: first from the bottom. Though new developments in the mean time, Merera retreated only a step or two from his old held position as his interviews with *Fistih Weekly* 2012 shows: look at the largest mass of the Ethiopian people; they are still living in a deplorable poverty situation while the ruling party hits a drum of propaganda for a successful double-digit growth.

Ato Temesgen Zewude is the other pre-2012 parliamentarian from the former Kinjit Party who is known by development scholars as the 'naked neo-liberal modernist' due to his firm positions about the irreplaceable panacea of Adam Smithian Free Market

Economics to miraculously tackle Ethiopia's economic malaise. He complains over the insistence of the ruling party on a 'nameless' development paradigm which causes the lag of Ethiopia behind even its immediate neighbors. He was saying the entire economic calculus of national growth was designed in a manner that would benefit EPRDF-affiliated business firms.

Now let us compare these continued criticisms and pessimistic predictions of by these opposition leaders with one last foreign witness:

African Business, an IC Publication, 45th Year, No. 379, October 2011, Ethiopia-Special Report by Tom Minney

Ethiopia: Return of the African Lion

Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous nation with 85n inhabitants, is the third fastest growing nation in the world, behind China and India. However, the *Economist Intelligence Unit* forecast for 2011 bears out, it (Ethiopia) will outpace both India and china next year....With GDP of \$32bn, currently Ethiopia is Africa's fourth largest economy having surpassed Kenya to become the largest economy in East Africa. The country's spectacular growth over the past six years has been driven largely by the services sector, which has seen substantial investment by government and the Private sector....Ethiopia is one of Africa's brightest sparks for clean energy with potential to generate 45, 000MW of wind and at least 10, 000MW from geothermal sources. ...Ethiopia has signed power interconnect agreements with Kenya, Djibouti and Sudan as part of a six-country east African power pool. It is committed to start and selling and exporting power to Kenya from 2012 and eventually will sell some 500MW of the power from the Gibbe III dam.

I could not adequately extract the magazine's impressions of Ethiopia's existing fastest rate of growth and its dramatic rise to its leading position of Africa, within a matter of a couple of decades or two. Finally, are all these stories by these reputed international journals simply Shakespearean heart-induced fabulous comedies or lip-services?

Conclusions

If these are the sundry truths of Ethiopia's rise, why do Opposition party leaders prefer standing in its ways to applaud so far as it was the real cause for opposition the government? As one could see above, opposition leaders are marked by polarized variations in their level of education, specialties of trainings, experiences and past political backgrounds. They also hold differing views about the political position of one

another; but surprisingly, they adopt similar positions on their adamant refusal of Ethiopia's rise, which one could now prove our assumptions above tend to testify this positively. In short, Opposition demands seem convincingly to have nothing with what changes Ethiopia has achieved but with who continues in office to rule Ethiopia.

What is common to all of them is their sweet memory of wide urban support during the 2005 Election, from what they say at every fora. Of course, before 2004, Oppositions had had observable evidences of slow pace of growth or other social malaises in Ethiopia; for which we, Ethiopians, never hesitated to extend our supports to them at least in denying ears to the Ruling Party. Unfortunately, most of these leaders dangerously misinterpreted this support as religious followership and worship of individuals. And, now, they lingered behind what has happened since then at an incredible pace of transformation.

For us, independent Ethiopians, there is no any reason whatsoever to obstinately persist with past memories of failure and missed chances if things are quickly bent on bringing our long wishes and hopes of starting the journey toward a developed and prosperous Ethiopia. Opposition elements who increasingly got frustrated at the successes of the incumbent regime rather remain with the metaphoric mythology of a woman: a slave sold during Minilik's period remains swearing in Minilk's name.