Exiting Political Spectrum of Ethiopia: Puzzles and Anomalies

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Prelude

Views of Ethiopia’s existing multiparty politics and the roles of civil societies remind me of a famous statement by Samuel Huntington in his ‘Clash of Civilizations’. Huntington writes: ‘Fault line wars bubble from below; fault line peace trickles down from above.’ In Ethiopia, however, ‘bitter hatreds and animosities trickle down from above, while peace, stability and the fight against destitution bubble up from below.’ In precise terms, the people lead the elites, and not vice versa. This is the hypothetical assumption of this paper, right or wrong. Let me go to the details.

As political sociologists underline, change is a constant factor everywhere. At societal level, change operates within what these scholars call ‘social time’. The two decades of politics in Ethiopia’s past is no an exception to this rule. However, change does not necessarily signify either progress or retrogress per se. Here, limiting the meanings, directions and measuring the intensities of the change stand as the assignments of scholars in a healthy division of labor in society. Hence, there has been, we like or not, change in Ethiopia over the last decades now, be it negative or positive, desirable or undesirable. The change again is pervasive one in the sense that it affects all aspects, sectors and domains of Ethiopian life-politics, economics, culture, and extra.

However, an analyst should seriously doubt the credibility of the above description of Ethiopia’s statuesque if the said changes failed to have remarkable spillover effects on the socio-political map of the country. In precise terms, as an effect of the change, there must be shuffles and reshuffles in the alignments and realignments of social forces and their respective political postures. No matter how it functions and what the levels of its growth might be, ‘failures versus success stories’ prove to be a living barometer of political prominence or regress in an elective politics in the present global circumstances. They vividly serve everywhere for measuring trends in the formation and reformation of social coalitions and constituencies behind political positions of contending parties.

As Peter Joyce notes, all political parties under such systems organically determine their fates into or out of office by the degrees in their alertness to discern and decode these political signals.

Change in the politics of Ethiopia, the focus of this paper, is roughly measurable with the help of a ‘Political Spectrum’ as much as the Growth Curve---the GDP curve, measures

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the economy in Economics. As a standard rule, we have to tolerate inaccuracy, complexity, and disagreements as unavoidably given condition. What matters is the objectivity in the dialogue. This is because conflicts and divergent interests, in Ethiopia, and of course, everywhere, have never been static prisoners of time. Political loyalties and the alignments of social forces behind them are fundamentally fluid and fast changing. Their readings demand, therefore, exceptional politicians as either rulers or opponents. Drawing a crude but well argued political spectrum of Ethiopia may be of help for this to grow.

This paper is an argument against this background. It firmly argues that with the exception of some dominant and vividly describable developments, deep confusions, puzzles and anomalies mark the emerging political spectrum at large in present Ethiopia. What does this mean? Let us stride to ensuing parts.

1. Ethiopia: Dynamics of the Evolving Political Spectrum

The Ethiopian politics of the day has to undergo the plays and interplays of several dynamic factors to have assumed its current morphology and anatomy. These dynamic factors have actually propelled the country’s politics and the concomitant evolution in the alignments of social forces into unprecedented pace of motion. The advent and advance of the Ruling Party-EPRDF takes the biggest and probably the sole responsibility for the political turmoil behind fragmentations versus cohesions, dispersals of opinions versus their retrenchments, above all else, shuffles and reshuffles in political positions within the society at large.

EPRDF’s invocation of the Nationality Question as the main historical sanctuary of social contradictions, the Agriculture-Development-Led Growth outlook, the session of Eritrea, the argument for public ownership of land, Revolutionary Democracy as an alternate inner-party doctrine and the developmental state policy of rapid socio-economic development, etc, have been the key thrusts rocking the Ethiopian politics from its foundations. The aggregate of these views has sharply shoveled into fragmentation of particularly elite politics into, at least, five blocks. While EPRDF and its supporters have been burgeoning at the Center of the national political spectrum to the left, Conservative rightists versus Radical leftists have stood at the two opposite poles-right and left respectively.

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5 The idea has been taken from Samuel Sodaro’s 2000’s Comparative Poltics-Global Introduction
6 The Center, as publicly seen during the election debate in 2010, could progressively attract moderately right and left parties to gravitate toward such generalized principles like Federalism, Parliamentary form of government, priorities of rural development, massification of education with quality heavily doubted, the fact of socio-economic growth and others with the dominant exception of self-determination, up to secession.
7 The idea has been taken from Samuel Sodaro’s 2000’s Comparative Poltics-Global Introduction
The far antagonized ‘Ultras’ of political views have cropped up at the Right/Conservative Extreme pole versus the forces of bitterly opposed views, Radicalized Leftists at the Extreme edge beyond the above three gradations.  

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The Ultras of both poles tend to emphasize and advance programmatic positions of armed solutions, constitutional suspension and regime-break by any means as their political goals. While leftist Ultras pose outright separation of their respective groups as their demand, rightist Ultras pose regime-break as a condition for peaceful political competition. While the Ultras of the left claim centrifugal interests from bottom up, Ultras of the right advocate centripetal interests from top-down, i.e. control of state machinery by all means available. At present, emerging trends controversially demonstrate that the Ultras of both poles have become far balkanized and marginalized both internally and externally to play no meaningful influence on the exiting politics of Ethiopia.

Recent reports and visibly observed success stories of socio-economic development by the EPRDF-led government have gathered momentum to grow as major dynamics of current politics. This factor again has controversially tossed the configuration of social forces at home into undergoing apparent metamorphosis. Election 2010 served as a mirror image of the prevailing political spectrum in Ethiopia due to the development hook. That the election was of a peaceful conclusion, for political scientists of the rational choice school, can never and ever without reasons. It was a smooth event not because voters felt hopelessness or powerlessness but got adequate justifications for the statuesque to continue. For development scholars, popular demand for development served historically to nurture and fatten, leave alone democratizing governments, but also even fascistic and Nazi regimes, at the extreme case.

This change has, reasonably judged, helped the Ruling Party-EPRDF to grow, expand and massively gravitate toward the vacuum Center as well as the left and right flanks of the national political spectrum almost unstoppably. I call it a ‘vacuum’ because the regime’s success did attract almost no opposition party to modify its programs toward the Center. EPRDF’s better performances manifest also by the sharp decline of purges and defections from the ranks of the Party; its membership, according to the Party’s chair,

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8 See Andrew Heywood. 1994. Political Ideas and Concepts. Baskingstoke: Macmillan for a detailed explanation on the formation, pronouncements, alignments and maintenance of political views of differing gradations across the political spectrum of a society regardless of level of socio-economic growth and the major factors that operate at their backgrounds.

9 The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) represents the only social force of the Ultra left pole, as the solely officially admitted case by the Ethiopian government. Other organizations like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) have suffered institutional turmoil and programmatic convulsions that they increasingly lost their political weights. While internal melting down reduced OLF to a force of negligible headache for the national and regional governments, increased political alienations have severed the potentials of OLF to a dying presence in the hearts of Oromo elites in Ethiopia. On the side of the Ultras of the right pole, the only organizational case of existence is what the government black-marks as Ginbot 7.
Haile Mariam Desalegn, bulged out to reach six million, about 1/4th of the average voter population in Ethiopia.

EPRDF as a Ruling Party has been able to earn undeniably a big mass of unquestioned audience and popular trust in its call of national mobilization for megaprojects of national development. Above all else, EPRDF has successfully managed to peacefully deal with the formidable challenge posed to its internal integrity by the death of its chief architect and builder, the late Prime Minister Zenawi. This goes against the expectations of many Opposition leaders across political gradations to the far right and left. In the words of political science, the continued functioning of the post-Meles regime shows that Meles founded it almost on what sociologists call deep ‘impersonality’ criteria. Personalities here after are acutely important as drivers, but less decisive as designing engineers in Meles’s absence.

EPRDF, at present, almost solely hatches and settles comfortably at the broad zone of the Center at the political spectrum of Ethiopia obviously at the expenses of domestic oppositions to the left and right flanks.

However, I hold the strongest view that these Oppositions operating domestically with both conservative and radicalized agendas (if any) are assets to the political process than liabilities. No matter how deep their hatreds might be not only to the Ruling Party but also to one another, they, I believe, represent some kind of interest that EPRDF could not cover and absorb, at least, in principle. As far as they are unarmed and peaceful, there is additional reason to underscore about their significances. They amply serve the cause of democracy, in face of EPRDF’s gargantuan dominance, as government is ultimately a collectivity of human beings who could potentially err. Thus, there should be a watchdog ready to alarm against this with a possibility to win office.

However, EPRDF has no a duty to conserve and nurture the existences and the best operations of its own opposite parties. In principle, Opposition parties have to be their own creations and commitments. That these parties must do the assignments is one challenge. Moreover, all the above rapid pace of economic development, without the slightest doubt, piles up the bricks of bitter challenges to both conservative and left-inclined Opposition Parties. That these challenge is an exceptionally a huge one, I argue, is the reflection of persistent puzzles and anomalies across the political spectrum of Ethiopia. I therefore argue that there are two factors behind this: the cyclic cause-effect correlations because of puzzles and anomalies are responsible for the political spectrum to become presently a confused and distorted diagram as the following discussion shows.

2. Political Puzzle

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10 A group of Opposition leaderS from EDP, MEDREK, ERP, Coalition under Ayele Chamiso, etc, made interviews in June 2010 with the Voice of America together. Lidetu Ayalew expressed his admission in the fairness of the election and EPRDF’s excellent performance as the cause for its victory but bitterly criticized the voter population for contributing to the arrest of plural democracy. He said word by word that he was shocked’. Doctor Merera Gudina, Pr. Beyene Petros and others expressed emotional rejection of the voting process as ‘rigged and substandard’ but failed to attract any degree of popular support as was the case in election 2005.
Despite, experiences of frequent debated and doubted elections in the past with the generalized exception of Election 2010, what has been happening among Political Parties is a clear case of deepened puzzles, anomalies and confusions. More straightforwardly, the trend in the multiparty politics of Ethiopia evidently has continued in a reverse direction against what democracy demands and desires. Let us, for example, see these unusual political puzzles in more details.

**Puzzle one**

A careful examination of the various electoral laws and procedures in Ethiopia adequately guide as to what Opposition political parties should do in order to win political office. Three of these politico-legal conditions include the following:

Firstly, the Constitution¹¹, Oppositions like it or not, provides and encourages a brand of elective democracy, called ‘plurality of votes’ which some scholars call the ‘Westminster Abbey Model’, a ‘single-winner-voting system’, ‘simple plurality’ or first-past-the-post or ‘winner-takes-all’. Ethiopia is not the only country adopting the West Minister Abbey model of election. Historically, this model has shaped and guided elective democracies in Britain, Canada, India and the United States.¹²

This model requires candidates representing political parties to meet three criteria. The first is that the winner candidate should win, at least, a simple majority vote of a specific election district in order to join the legislature. Secondly, the candidate should stand for voter appraisal personally in addition to his political party, unlike what Political Scientists call the ‘Proportional Rule’ of Election. Proportional election makes it a priority for Political Parties and their Political Programs than the individual candidates to run for elections; Thirdly, the aggregate of winning candidates has to remain loyal, disciplined and committed to one’s party once in the parliament, when the form of government is parliamentary. This guarantees a predictable, sober and stable majority government for efficient rule making and undertaking sightseeing functions¹³;

Secondly, the Constitution also provides for political parties to form coalitions among themselves in case they fail to command a majority of seats in the parliament. A political party short of a majority to name the Prime Minister has the chance to flirt and marry with other political parties of some commonality without resorting to another general election. This opens up a chance for parties to search for other more friendly parties of any size to continuously negotiate, bargain, and compromise over a working solidarity before and after elections. This again makes the role of political party decisive in the competition for office, during tenure and after office. Political party is, in short, a democratic institution to survive, at least, in principles, intergenerational succession;

Thirdly, the Ethiopian election rule provides for and encourages the formation and competition of pluralistic parties without restrictions on ethno-linguistic, sex, occupation, geographic and other criteria. Religion and militancy are the most serious restrictions, which political parties should meet in order to run for elections. This helps minority interests and demands of all kind to access political processes and manifest their positions. This is not however the only advantage. These parties could forge a mutually symbiotic coalition with multinational, large and widely known political parties. The small ones cohabit the votes of their supporters with the larger ones and the larger parties share venues in election campaigns. They could also offer them parliamentary seats at winning the required votes.

In addition to politico-economic evolutions, the model has served as a key legal and procedural pressure behind political parties to transform themselves into very efficient bi-party and electoral contestants. Under this model, many political parties in Latin America, Africa and Asia have felt the compulsion to undertake continuous negotiations to come to join coalitions in facing, by far, major parties like EPRDF. The opposite model, proportional election, on the other hand, sets conducive situations for heavily fragmented political parties to win parliamentary seats to maintain their autonomy. This is because the election laws require that every party meeting a minimum of voter percentages (usually 5%) is guaranteed to win seats. That is why electoral politics in Israel and Italy, for example, is too unstable and marked by frequent elections as there occurs lack of majority party..

In Ethiopia, what we have been witnessing however is a source of serious confusion. Directly against what the West Minister Abbey Model demands, opposition political parties proliferate every year. Many parties and political leaders in a manner that is detrimental to their own strategic advantages block open ways for merger of like-minded Oppositions. A slight difference in political program becomes a big boulder of hostility making negotiations impossible. Moderate politicians are marked black automatically as agents of the Ruling Party-EPRDF.

Coalition for Unity and Democracy (Kinijit) arose during election 2005 but soon proved to be a myopic and mechanical alliance only to exploit voting day advantages. The Party evidently showed that it had no any strategically wielded minimum program to lead a country of vast and diverse demands like that of Ethiopia.14

One could also remember that almost all consecutive undertakings to establish a broad based and dynamic opposition coalition still proved extremely fragile since 1994 when the Council of Alternate Forces’ emerged to face EPRDF. All the hopes of legitimate alternate demanding Ethiopians perished with the Council’s demise from inside. Beyene Petrose, the elected chair of the time, indignantly expressed the causes of failure. He affirmed that the Coalition slipped into its fall because of leadership crisis created by

14 Birhanu Nega testified in his post-election monographic book that the fragility rocked the entire opposition camp. Brhanu reminded that his Kinijit requested institutional support from the other fragile Coalition under Merea Gudina and Beyene to coordinate what he calls the ‘popular revolt’. Merea’s answer was automatic: it is difficult for us to have a common pact with a rightist conservative coalition. Realizing the depth of Kinijit’s fragility, I remember that many Ethiopians commented that ‘miracle saved Ethiopia’.
individuals who felt that they had had ‘natural privileges’ to lead the Council. In short, the professor’s message was that internal power struggle led the council to its final collapse. This was probably the only day Beyene admitted internal crises as the cause of his Council’s failure.

The number of opposition parties continued to proliferate still after Election 2010. About 90 registered parties announced decisions to run for election 2002 that helped to fill the gaps created by the collapse of Kinjit. It is again a puzzle how these parties convinced themselves that they could face the dominant EPRDF where their fragmentation caused further and further splitting of votes by their supporters. It is still confusing that these parties failed to understand that their fragmented moves did not live up to the nature of election rules in Ethiopia.

Up to now, there were scarcely any attempts among these parties to curve up coalitions probably in the wish that every one was far larger and more popular than all others were. Confidently speaking, only a few numbers of Ethiopians could identify one opposition party from the other mostly based on the personality of debaters during election events.

Consequently, many opposition leaders make it a tradition to point their fingers to external bodies, including, outside states and civic organizations as either their witnesses or enemies, and as guarantees of successes or scapegoats of failures. Most muster around this strategy while their fragmentation is the structural culprit that denies them chances to win public confidence and adequate votes. The greatest puzzle however here is that the huge number of opposition parties makes the political spectrum of Ethiopia too gloomy to draw clearly defined political positions.

**Puzzle two**

The second puzzle shrouding the political spectrum in Ethiopia is the fact that the fundamental cause for the formation of Opposition parties has tended to be not unheard and unseen social demands among the people, but the weaknesses and political program of the Ruling Party-EPRDF. It is probably only in Ethiopia that an Opposition party has no any clear social base and community of supporters as its defined constituency. In the experiences of young democracies like India, South Africa, Nigeria and others, we learn that opposition political parties emerge because other parties including Ruling Parties fail to absorb the legitimate demands of social groupings.

American democracy tells us that Democrats gravitate toward non-white collar, formerly disadvantaged social groups like women and blacks, the Middle Class and so on because of their strong Redistributive Political Program. In contrast, industrialists in Northern parts of America, the few wealthy segments, veterans, high-income groups and conservative Americans embrace the Republican Party for its political program of reduced taxes, rugged individualism and American nationalism. More or similar pattern characterizes opposite political parties in England, France and others. It would amount to party’s self-image as heavily Angeles to win office through elections without the ample
support of these respective constituencies and winning other more voters through interest swinging.  

In Ethiopia, EPRDF is, unfortunately, the only party that almost accurately defines its social zone of coalition building—the vast majority of the rural farming mass, the urban poor, the progressive intelligentsia (if any), etc. EPRDF openly expresses that it has designed program in the way that it relentlessly supports other groupings than the mentioned ones above but without making them its social basis of coalition.  

For this basic reason, EPRDF is farmers’ and working class’s party. Thus, EPRDF leaders rely on these constituencies of Ethiopians as a source of their guarantee in order to win successive democratic elections.

This approach appears to be dim and displaced among a long list of Opposition Political parties. Some Opposition Parties and their leaders, as previous experiences demonstrate, have depended on gross urban support without identified socio-economic interests and demands. Such solidarity, founded on timely emotions and complaints, usually tends to be a temporary alliance triggered solely by policy and practice mistakes made by the Ruling Party. When EPRDF makes corrections, the alliance breaks down.

Some other Opposition parties have gone a bit ahead in search of such a coalition with, for example, nations, nationalities and groups by contending the ruling party. These include ethno-regional Oppositions like the Hadia Peoples Democratic Party, the Oromo Federalist Party, the Oromo People Congress and others. However, this coalition has proven extremely fragile due to the major reason that its basic approach, liberalism, ignores the fact that nations and nationalities in Ethiopia are at the same time agrarian peasant communities. Communities within this socio-economic category could never benefit from liberal policy prescriptions as a matter of mathematical impossibility.

Similarly, due to their strong assertions of collective rights confused with their principle of individualism, on the other hand, these parties similarly fail to win the hearts of urban-based middle and high-income group Ethiopians. These Ethiopians tend to be liberal unionists with little or no appeal to group identities and rights. They regard these principles as inconsistent with their liberal prescriptions of individualism and civic identity only as an Ethiopian.

Other opposition parties prefer to stick to only liberalism as the foundation of their political program. Precisely saying, almost all Opposition Parties promote ‘Liberalism’ as the scientific world outlook of the present era. As such, all neo-liberal parties in Ethiopia, a country of structurally non-liberal peasant society and a dominant urban low-income community, have no a social landing field to settle and command a majority voter

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15 Frederick Fockuyama. 2008. Origins of Political Order. Harvard University, U.S.A. Though he could not provoke wide scholarly interest and attentions, Fockuyama argues that he also observes elementary levels of coalition building among Chimpanzees apes as a sign of origins of political order.

16 See Revolutionary Democracy. 2002. Written by the late Prime Minister Melez Zenawi as a guide for what he calls the ‘Renewal Movement’ within the ranks of the Ruling Party-EPRDF immediately after the purge of twelve dissenting TPLF former leaders in the same year.
population even by some miracle. These parties prefer to suspend themselves in the vacuum air without a definable and bordered mass base as a nucleus of their enduring constituency. Perhaps, many citizens that are only individuals could support them. These supporters express their heated and warm loyalty to them through the media, in meeting halls and communication outlets but they soon scatter in all directions without coalition during voting days.

As Lidetu Ayalew\textsuperscript{17} writes, most parties failing to accomplish the above assignments of a life and death urgency for a party, resort to external constituencies. They rather desperately depend on refugee Ethiopians within the category of the Ultras of the right and foreigners for financial and political support. Unfortunately, most Ultras, Lidetu comments from his experiences, are too sensational, both physically and spiritually de-linked with the home social fabric, and unwisely eager to see a violent failure of the existing regime. Most outspoken, active and devoted Ultra refugees go to the extents of bending the established political programs to their extremist overtones. They use their financial contributions to the Opposition parties as effective tool to influence them follow Ultra mentalities.

Siye Abraha\textsuperscript{18} has fallen victim to extraordinary Ultra uproar of denunciation for his exclusive position that the Ethiopian Opposition has much to learn from Meles and the Ruling Party. I do not know whether Siye corrected his position in favor of the Ultras obviously to salvage the interruptions of financial subsidies. Merera Gudina had to remain mute about his Oromo nationalist agenda as the Chair of the Oromo Peoples Congress in support of centripetal Ethiopian Unionism to suite the taste of the Ultras at a similar forum, in October 2012. In other words, he surrendered his party program to the Ultras in the guise of MEDREK.

The political puzzle here is this: under which gradation—Conservative, Centrist or Radical— that a researcher has to register these extremely fluid and inconsistent positions?

**Puzzle three**

As I said above, it is trite but true that a dominant party by the proportion of EPRDF is inherently limited to aggregate, systematize and pronounce all diverse interests prevailing across millions of citizens and groupings. Multiparty system is undoubtedly a panacea for such societies. A dominant party rule has nothing to benefit every one without distinction in the absence of contending parties.

Parties are in need not only to represent these unabsorbed demands. Of course, the natural division of labor among parties in any multiparty politics is primarily to assume office

\textsuperscript{17} Lidetu Ayalew. 2010. Medlot, A Third Path for Ethiopia. in this book, Lidetu exposed the mechanisms opposition parties used to solicit contributions from Ethiopian refuges outside. He writes that in addition to inconsistencies in the flow of assistances, the refugees volunteer to assisted usually at periods when there is political controversy and heated issue.

\textsuperscript{18} Voice of America gave a full coverage for the issue in its Tuesday, August 2012, Program where it made interviews with refugees denouncing Siye as a ‘traitor’. Aigaforum also posted comments on the issues later in the month of September 2012. the writer wondered what mistake Siye made to the disadvantage of the Opposition simply by saying ‘we have to learn from Meles.’
through a legitimate popular decision. This does not however mean that this effort is simply a periodic squabble during election campaigns. It goes beyond this that parties have to serve as a channel to disseminate civic education, political consciousness and critical thinking among the people, followers or opponents, about democratic rules of the game. They take these tasks as legal and moral responsibility just within the constitutional framework. The goal of this task is directly and indirectly to influence the ruling party to succumb to the rule of law and socio-economic transformation, in our context, Ethiopia;

When they are losers in an election, it is a democratic requirement that political parties should strive to win as many minority seats as possible in the legislature dominated by a majority party. This helps them and the people, at least, to represent and make known all interests among the people in the process of law making. In a very experienced elective democracy, parliamentarians from Opposition Parties build what scholars call ‘shadow cabinet’ (an alternate theoretical bench of best politicians as a phony Council of Ministers). For some critics, this shadow cabinet has a sufficient depth of knowledge about national and global politics to challenge the actual cabinet in office but without hostility.

The puzzle in Ethiopia’s politics, however, is opposition parties openly wish that the Ruling Party failed in its development missions. They grossly forget that development is a national agenda for which oppositions also should provide all necessary assistances to materialize the goal. In short, opposition parties run to office not because EPRDF is not successful but because they believe that their programs would do much better than what EPRDF succeeds. I could not believe that MEDREK, for example, released its official position on various issues of common development achievements.

In all these communications, MEDREK and its long serving leaders have denounced the Renaissance Dam as a political maneuver by the Ruling Party. They said the project should never be a priority. The message is clear: the priority is EPRDF’s vacation of political power. What do we, Ethiopians, benefit from this? Doctor Merera Gudina also disparaged the massification of education, which he interpreted to mean nothing but only the decline in educational quality. Merrera said this without exposing what his party would do otherwise if assuming office. It is puzzling how Merera, as a senior and almost life long lecturer, failed to understand the grim realities on the ground in developing states and their best experiences in higher education. Ethiopia is, by all standards, a starter country in the area of higher education. As such, Ethiopia faces similar challenges, which India, Malaysia, Singapore, China and others faced. I preferred that Merera told us how these states achieved the present quality of their education.

Doctor Merera is not alone. Other party colleagues also joined him. The all-time earless and sightless neo-liberal, Temsgen Zewude, argued that there was no growth or

See Zemen Magazin, December 2012, the Ethiopian Press Enterprise, for the long interview with Doctor Merera Gudina with particular emphasis on ‘Higher Education and Educational Quality in Ethiopia. Merera appears to voice what he calls ‘the impoverished conditions of teachers’ as the weakness of the current government. He did not however explain how this could happen in a manner that does not affect the principle of income equality.
development in Ethiopia at all but the reverse-inflation, unemployment and booty by party-affiliated companies. I sometimes wonder whether Temesgen was galloping at the back of the fictitious horse of Donky Shote. Temesgen did not worry about undeniable value changes among the people for whom, he said, was struggling. Before 2004, I myself was not happy about the nature of Endowment Funds, which came into being by the legally endowed seed capital of EPRDF. Since the said time, however, these firms proved basic inputs of the overall development effort.

Can Temesgen, for example, mention a single private cement factory? Or, can he cites a bio-fuel farm plant, sickle and fertilizer supplier, automotive plant, medicine manufacturing, etc, complaining about loss of market because of these firms? Whether Temcsen believes it or not, he lost the potential votes of, at least, half a million Ethiopians, for his blind argument in advance of the election. Temsgen should not blame any one for assuredly lost votes of employees, managers, their families, independent observers, construction workers, etc, who very well know the reality in connection with the firms.

On the opposite pole, we have been witnessing other puzzling opposition parties without any meaningful agenda. We saw and heard the ideas of some parties at recent election debates. My impression was that they were in television studio not to furnish other alternate programs but to participate in an evaluation meeting called by the Ruling Party-EPRDF. Ethiopia Vision Party (ERP) for example says it has no reservations about Coble stone projects undertaken by university graduates except that women have been joining it. The other Opposition party SDHPA supported EPRDF. I am not saying he should have opposed but his stature without agenda.

The Ethiopian Democracy Party (EDP) Debater started his dialogue by an introduction saying: ‘We, as Liberal Democrats…’ but frequently failing to offer liberal solutions for the problems tabled for debate. (I am not opposed that the young man from EDP has Liberal beliefs. As an Ethiopian, however, with liters of peasant blood circulating into my veins and arteries as any citizen of the present generation, I feel ashamed to brand myself as a ‘Liberal Democrat’). Worse than this, Moshe Semu, the incumbent EDP chair (though greatly moderate) usually advances puzzling positions. He argues, on the one hand, that the government is responsible for inflation and unemployment problems. Soon, he raises a self-contradicting argument that the government must withdraw from economic and market management.

All in all, these confused and puzzling positions by opposition parties and their leaders greatly mar the political spectrum in Ethiopia colorless.

3. Political Anomalies

Anomaly one

20 A Special coverage through the Ethiopian televisions transmitted the whole debate in the month of December, 2012 on the occasion of the upcoming by-election for local administrations and Addis Ababa City Administration.
Multiparty system is still a fundamental significance in societies like that of ours, Ethiopia, not only to serve as a simple watchdog to check the ruling party but also to help it. Experiences of multiparty democracy in the West tell us that democracy as a functioning regime does not deceive itself with unrestricted liberty. It has to guard itself from inconsistencies due to sudden or timely interventions of what scholars call ‘anti regime’ oppositions, which may earn emotionally backed supporters to the demise of democracy itself. Germany and partly Italy have long made anti-Neo-Nazi and Neo-Fascist election laws excluding such parties from democratic election processes. Many Muslim states, Algeria, for example, legislated at election laws that outlaw Islamic fundamentalist parties, for the rationale that they are anti-regime organizations.

The United States\textsuperscript{21}, the widely cited state as the land of liberty, made similar laws prohibiting Soviet and Cuba financed Socialist and Communist parties. It also tried to illegalize neo-Nazis Americans from forming political parties consecutively from the 1930s to the 1970s. The logic of the American Congress was still protecting the Constitution and the democratic regime from its own possible blow from within in the name of democracy. The American Chief Justice could not rule out the presidential order issued in 1945 following Japanese formidable attack of American naval base at the Pearl of Harbor. By this order, the government discriminated and kept hundreds of thousands of Japanese nationals residing in the United States within concentration camps as ‘potential threats to the security of the democratic regime’. In short, democracy is within the boundaries of the constitutional order and the survival of the regime. No opposition party is allowed to try to change this by any means at all.

Contrarily, whether a ruling party likes it or not, it has to render attentive ears to opposite parties mainly, which scholars identify as ‘loyal oppositions’. Loyalty here never infers to blind adherence to the ruling party but to the state and the constitution, unlike many elites wrongly interpret it in Ethiopia. An opposition political party within the agreed constitutional baseline prioritizes the basic state interest. Its opposition emanates from the commitment to this interest, and from nowhere else. As such, opposition leaders responsibly serve as a mirror to reflect the weaknesses of the incumbent government back to its sight for immediate correction. Oppositions, in this sense, are instrumental to fight bad governance, incapacity, immobility and authoritarian tendencies among the officials of the ruling party. This, in the final analysis, benefits not only the ruling party but the entire nation, too.

Thus, changing the constitution and dissolving the regime have never been part of political party programs, which means a civil war. Even when parties feel the need for the amendments of some constitutional provisions, they prefer to leave them for dialogue and debate among civic associations. In the 235 years of American political history, alternate governments received about 11, 000 proposals for amendment of articles of the rigid Constitution. All these proposals however came from civic demands; only 28 of them got

approval so far. Similarly, history records no Opposition party in Britain that includes in its program such plans to presidentiazize the parliamentary form of government, federalize the Unitary state, etc.

While this is the standard there, it is most likely only in Ethiopia that Opposition parties have the right to oppose to the constitutional order. I remember what Meles replied for questions from outside reporters on this unusual arrangement. He said that restrictions of this type would render the chance for parties to learn from their failures bleak. We recognize the right to oppose the constitution as far as it is peaceful.

Without doubt, whether it has advantages or disadvantages, this right is an anomalous experience. This opened up for opposition parties chances to come up with clearly curved up anti-regime political programs. Almost all oppositions in Ethiopia, therefore, one way or another, are anti-regime parties. The All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) under Hailu Shoule\textsuperscript{22} is, for instance, wholly anti-regime party by its program to reverse the parliamentary and the federal order to Derg time models. It aims at restoring the old national flag, the national anthem, public ownership of land and every thing. This is unquestionably beyond a conservative stance. Other oppositions, likewise, target at one or multiple aspects of the regime as a focus of change if they get chances to assume office.

The question is this: do these parties realize what this anomalous program and situation mean to the state of Ethiopia ultimately? Do they make evaluations about what the existing regime is doing in legitimizing its existence? Do they ever discuss when a regime is judged to be reform demanding while it is an era of peace and rapid development? Do they ask themselves that Ethiopians have experiences of regimes in the past, which they have proposed? Where can we place these anomalies at the spectrum?

**Anomaly two**

Coalition of Opposition parties is always good for reasons we saw above. However, coalition should base itself on intensive dialogue to achieve programmatic retrenchments. This supplies a strategic basis for the internal integrity of parties if they come to office one day. This demand is fundamentally important in Ethiopia’s context where the government is busy with development duties. The basic assumption is that the people vote for a party in which they believe it will smart out other parties in achieving rapid development. Such a government could not spare time on endless chats and dialogues on mending fragile spots in government leadership due to interparty cleavages. Based on this generalized principle and prescription, let us evaluate the coalition called MEDREK in brief, which consists of six autonomous member parties.

The Unity party under Doctor Negasso Gidada is known for its political belief for unitary government in Ethiopia. This party shares similar position with that of Urena Tigray under Gebru Asrat on the question of legally restoring the Assab port. Oromo Peoples Congress under Doctor Merera, the Hadia Democratic Party under Professor Beyene, Doctor Negasso personally and the Oromo Federalist Party however have basic divergence on these two questions. All these leaders believe, except, Merera that the always advance the view that the existing regime could not resolve social contradictions in Ethiopia since emperor Minilk’s time. They argue the ultimate solution for this problem is recognizing the right to self—determination by starting from where emperor Minilk stopped. This position is a bitter enemy for the Unity party.

On the question of Assab again, while Urena-Tigray and Unity advance the above view, all the rest argue that Eritrea’s referendum in 1995 and the various negotiations and treaties before its independence closed the question forever. There is a wide gap even between Urena-Tigray and Unity Party themselves. While Urena-Tigray confusedly advances Ethiopia’s ‘right to access the Assab port’, Unity holds ‘the permanent restoration of the Assab port into Ethiopia’s jurisdiction’. While its clear that Unity Party’s position is this, Negasso’s view or shift of view on the matter, as a chair, is totally hidden and unspoken at all.

Tensions also abound across the coalition of MEDREK on other equally basic questions. Kinjit of Temskegn Zewude, for example, believes in the complete private ownership of land. It also makes part of its political program to nationalize Endowment Funds, which it accuses, have affiliations with EPRDF. Unity Party wholly supports this position. Merera, on the other hand, has reservations on land issue, which, the future government under them, he argues, should deal with it once EPRDF is gone. Amidst this, MEDREK released a position announcement in 2009 in that it would struggle for three forms of land ownership—private, communal and public. Siye Abrha and Gebru Asrat however never made their positions known on the nationalization of Endowment Funds so far.

MEDREK tends to fragment on other basic issues, too. The leaders scarcely agree on, for instance, the tensions between collective and group rights. Unity and Temesgen’s Kinjit are traditionally die-hard opponents to collective rights while all other parties are ethno-nationalist organizations from the start. They have also divergences on the question of language. The former advances language singularity as a national vernacular while the latter hold the opposite view of multilingualism.

Now, a reader can raise two important questions: firstly, how long does this coalition persist in office in case MEDREK attains victory? Secondly, what would be the consequence on the stability of the Ethiopian state if this theoretically happens? Thirdly,
how can a researcher place this mosaic and haphazard conglomeration of political positions on the political spectrum of Ethiopia? For me, it is a puzzle and an anomaly.

Conclusions

One may conclude by spotting at four findings of this paper. The first is that, despite the many challenges, Ethiopia’s political culture is lagging because of puzzling arrangements and anomalies. Secondly, Ethiopians, as electorate citizens have gained little benefits from the multiparty system as emotions and dreaming have dominated its operations on the part of oppositions. Thirdly, the multiparty system in Ethiopia has furnished, which other oppositions in developed democracies could not enjoy—the right to oppose the constitution. However, Opposition parties failed to exploit this wisely. Fourthly, Opposition leaders, despite high levels of education, generally failed to read clear or latent changes at the background specifically the critical issue of winning the hearts of the people—legitimacy. They appear to content themselves with the extremely dogmatic and obsolete political programs they designed before years while EPRDF was fighting for change.

On the contrary pole, the EPRDF-led regime has grown to muster adequate and unquestioned legitimacy since 2005 by undertaking a drastic measure of political correctness. EPRDF had to work and work hard in the previous 19 years, which is a period sacrificed for the full incubation of its present legitimacy. Opposition parties should learn that their opponent, EPRDF, did not acquire this legitimacy over night. Scholars call this brand of legitimacy a ‘derived legitimacy’ as its source is observable praxis over time—changing theories into practices.