

The Raping of Ethiopia: The new way of Bio-Colonialism

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Land is finite. There is so much of it and that is it. So, food-importing countries with scarce arable land but lots of cash, mainly in Asia and the Middle East, are increasingly looking overseas to secure food supplies after the prices of staple foods rocketed last year. They are scouring Africa as a kind of 3rd wave of outsourcing, i.e. agriculture outsourcing. Critics are rightly crying that such schemes hark back to colonial-era "plantation agriculture" where rich outsiders force subsistence farmers off fertile land to grow export crops.

Jacques Diouf, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, has reportedly called the land deals a type of "neo-colonialism". Bless his heart! But, some argue including the learned Prime Minister of Ethiopia that the investments have the potential to increase local food availability and create badly needed jobs. May be if a government of the people, by the people, for the people negotiated such give-away contracts. Otherwise such deals prove disastrous. Example: Madagascar's deal with South Korean firm Daewoo.

There is even a fundamental human right issue in play here. Does the present generation (Meles and co) even have the legal right to mortgage the peoples' land for 50+ years? How could Meles know the legitimate owners of the land (namely the future generation of Ethiopians) may not need the land say 20 years from now?

On many grounds, the Ethiopian government action in fact is blatantly immoral. It is a rape of a nation and its people, pure and simple. Read the following and judge for yourself.

"The Bangalore-based company, which is the world's largest grower of roses, has negotiated an extraordinarily good deal with the government. For its farm in Bako, Karuturi is paying no rent for six years and then only 135 birr (£6.50) per hectare per year for the remainder of the 50-year lease. In Gambella, a remote and sparsely populated region close to Sudan, the rent is only 15 birr per hectare."

Does receiving 135 birr per year for each 10000 square meter of arable land seem to you a good deal for the people of Ethiopia? I don't think so. What is more, like all the foreign land investors in Ethiopia, the company is free to export as much of its produce as it likes. How is it having such a clause in the contract help Ethiopia? In entering to such an unconscionable contractual agreement, the Meles government turns the Bako people into indebted servitude for a long 50+ years.

Land is not an infinite resource. The buyers are coming to Ethiopia not because of compassion but because it makes an absolute good business sense. However, the politicians of the country not only betrayed the people but also proved that the un-attended 'street dogs' would have been better than the present day ministers to rule the country.

Prior to the 1974 popular Ethiopian Revolution, which the Mengistu gang hijacked, land was exclusively owned by the nobility and other members of the few highly-privileged feudal landlords under a system known as serfdom (Gebbar). Under this land management system, everything that the farmer produced on the farm was the property of the feudal landlords, who would then redistribute grains to "their" farmers. The farmers (tenants) were totally under the control of the feudal landlord and would face eviction from the land if they failed to pay

taxes in the form of farm products. The 1974 revolution" (let it be noted Meles and his friends were proponents) with its main slogan of "Land to the Tiller" ended the serfdom.

Three decades later, EPRDF has turned the clock back and is busy handing out farm land under the slogan "land to the land-grabbers". The poor Ethiopian peasants are now losing their farmland to the "land grabbers" through coercion of the corrupt governments; the poor African farmers will then toil on the farmland day and night to only see the grains exported out elsewhere – little to none will be spared for domestic markets. As laborers on the farmland, they will be paid bare minimum wages under deplorable living standards.

Mafa Chipeta, FAO's representative in Ethiopia, told the Washington Post:

"I can't believe Ethiopia or any other government would allow their country to be used like an empty womb. The human spirit would not allow it."

Every body knows that so-called leaders were camouflaged robbers, whose only one objective is to loot the country in various pretexts, deceive their cadres, fool the citizen and speak lies, and talk nonsense most of the time and never do any things good for the nation and people.

Just when colonialism was considered dead and buried, along come neo-colonialism in its latest guise with the collaboration of corrupt leaders. Allied with its close relatives globalisation, free marketeering and lack of transparency, it is currently launching a new offensive on the disempowered population of poor nation such as Ethiopia.

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