

The Travesty of Scholarship and Zenawi's Crimes Against Humanity

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Meles Zenawi was awarded an MA degree in Business Administration by the Open University in 1995, and an MSc in Economics by Erasmus University in 2004, while perpetrating egregious crimes against humanity. Rumors abound now he has given orders to scholars in the country to provide feedback on a thesis that he is working on for an advanced diploma in tandem with his relentless efforts to promote a policy of genocide by mass starvation [1], and to suppress basic human rights through systematic imprisonment, harassment and killings of innocent civilians [2].

Although dictators are generally known for the extreme measures they take to project a false impression of grandeur and to disguise their crimes and inferiority complex through absurd propaganda, Zenawi's obsession with the ivory tower as a cover for his vices has no parallel in the annals of despots in power. It might come as a surprise that a leader of a country like Ethiopia, which is in the lowest ranks with respect to every conceivable measure of human development, could make time for advanced study. However, time is no constraint for an autocrat, who has no allegiance to the country he rules, who does not abide by any laws, and who subjects the constitution to the service of his selfish interest and those of his cronies.

Institutions of higher learning may not be held accountable for future actions of their graduates. However, it is contrary to reason for a university to claim it upholds the principles of fairness and justice while consciously admitting to its programs of study tyrants and despots with proven records of human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

Ironically, a stated mission of the Open University, one of Zenawi's preferred institutions of erudition, is to promote "educational opportunity and social justice" [3]. His other alma mater, Erasmus University, declares that its "... driving forces are academic curiosity, critical reflection and social engagement"[4].

The lofty ideals of these universities are in sharp contradiction to their decisions to have an association with a despot with well-established records of anti-academic and anti-intellectual campaigns, which include the suppression of freedom of speech and other fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The world first witnessed Zenawi's viciousness against the academic establishment when in January of 1993 he ordered his police to shoot and mutilate hundreds of Addis Ababa University students for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression. Subsequently, Zenawi fired over 42 professors from the same university when the academics expressed opposition to the brutal force the dictator used against the students. On April 18, 2001 Zenawi's special forces police opened fire on a peaceful protest organized by students of

the university, and killed at least 41 people and wounded hundreds [5]. More recently, in the aftermath of his infamous defeat in the May 2005 elections, Zenawi unleashed his special forces to mow down 193 unarmed civilians, and sent thousands of university students to concentration camps [6].

Since he assumed power, Zenawi has used economic deprivation as a tool of repression, and has subjected the vast majority of the people to immeasurable suffering. As the following facts suggest, no dictator in history has so blatantly and effectively utilized mass starvation for the purpose of propagating authoritarian rule to the same degree as Zenawi has done so.

- According to a July 28, 2003 report of the *New York Times*, in 2003 more than 12 million Ethiopians were at risk of starvation, half of those children under 15.
- Based on a recent report of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), eight million Ethiopians are chronically food insecure and at least 3.4 million Ethiopians are in need of emergency food relief.
- The Centre for Research on Globalization disclosed that several million people in the most prosperous agricultural regions have been driven into starvation [7].
- On June 23, 2008, the *Boston Globe* reported: "People have become so desperate for food that they are eating seeds that were meant for their next harvest. 4.5 million Ethiopians are in need right now"[8].

Meanwhile, Zenawi has taken effective measures to perpetuate the famine for political ends, i.e., to penalize ethnic and political groups that did not vote for him, and to send a macabre message to others who may dare challenge his authoritarian rule in the future.

- Remarkably, in a March 18, 2008, address to his rubber-stamp parliament, he unabashedly denied the veracity of drought-related deaths [9].
- Recently, he ordered his Deputy Prime Minister to denounce reports of the current famine [10].
- According to the June 13, 2008 issue of *The Economist*, "he has banned photographs of the starving and has told field workers not to give information to foreign journalists".

As the *Edinburgh Evening News* (26th July 2008) correctly observed: "The catastrophe is not an accident of nature. The squalor and folly of the Addis Ababa regime needs to be corrected."

On the political front, Zenawi has virtually incapacitated opposition parties with brazen use of torture and imprisonment.

- Following his defeat in the May 2005 elections, he incarcerated leaders of the opposition and clung to power illegally [11].
- As recently as last April, he conducted sham elections, excluding viable opposition through systematic intimidation, harassment and coercion. According to a Human Rights Watch report, candidates allied with his party were allowed to "... run unopposed in the vast majority of constituencies across Ethiopia. Local ruling party officials systematically targeted opposition candidates for violence,

intimidation, and other human rights abuses since the registration period began. Particularly in areas with established opposition support, local officials arbitrarily detained opposition candidates, searched their property without warrant, and in some cases physically assaulted them"[12].

With regard to crimes against humanity, the charges leveled against Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic by the International Court of Justice pale in comparison to the crimes committed by Zenawi against the various ethnic groups in Ethiopia:

- In the Gambella area, the Anuaks have been subjected to a government-sponsored genocide, and many more have been displaced from their homes [13].
- In the Ogaden region, Zenawi has committed war crimes, burning homes and property, and firing upon and killing fleeing civilians [14,15,16,17].
- In other regions, including Oromia and Amhara, Zenawi has been waging covert and overt attacks against the inhabitants creating an atmosphere of siege and terror [18].

Zenawi has suppressed freedom of speech and the press, while giving a deceptive impression of an open society to the outside world.

- In a recent report, the Committee to Protect Journalists found Ethiopia at the top of a list of 10 countries where press freedom has deteriorated over the past five years [19].
- The present incarceration of Tewodros Kassahun (a.k.a. Teddy Afro) on trumped up charges is a glaring example of the policy of the dictator to stifle the voices of musicians and singers from reflecting the misery of the people [20].

John Dewey once wrote: *“When men think and believe in one set of symbols and act in ways which are contrary to their professed and conscious ideas, confusion and insincerity are bound to result.”* Thus, it is a travesty of scholarship for an institution of higher learning, that professes social justice, to open its doors to despots and tyrants with crimes so egregious as those committed by Zenawi. Irrespective of the source, the money the tyrants pay to these institutions for their diplomas is money tainted with the blood, sweat and tears of millions of helpless people. The credentials these institutions bestow upon the tyrants are potent weapons used to legitimize the authoritarian rules of the despots and to perpetuate their regimes through terror and repression.

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Cc:

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