

The Question of Land Ownership and its Implication on the Economic Development in Ethiopia

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Ethiopia is the creation of the Abyssinian King Menelik II at the end of 19th century. He was the only African leader to participate in the scramble for Africa with European states. He expanded his territory to the countries of his southern neighbouring nations and colonized them as the Europeans colonized the rest of Africa. After the occupation, land in the colonized territories was divided between the Abyssinians. The landless subjects, particularly Oromos, were forced to farm the land and handover up to 75% of their agriculture products to the new landlords. The people struggled to regain their stolen land for many decades. The slogan “land to the tillers” of the student movement was coined in the 1960s in support of the landless. This culminated in the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. One of the results of the revolution was a land reform in 1975 which destroyed colonial landlords. As Horowitz (1985: 8) wrote about the 1974 Revolution “in Ethiopia, a major effect of a land reform was to take land from Amhara and distribute it to the Galla [Oromo], and for a time the revolution is suspected of being a Galla plot.” However, as the military government nationalized the land, the state became the only landlord in the country. In the 1970s and 1980s the military government projected to destroy the Oromo national movement for self-determination by settling millions of Abyssinians on Oromo territory and moving the Oromo people to new villages to control them. The collective struggle of the oppressed peoples destroyed the military government in 1991. The current regime which is led by Tigrean Liberation Front (TPLF) has the monopoly of military, political, ideological and economic power in the country. It is collaborating with the new super-class of the world (Rothkopf 2008) and is selling the land of the colonized peoples to commercial farmers from foreign countries. The paper discusses land ownership under the Haile Selassie, Mengistu Haile Mariam and Meles Zenawi regimes and will try to answer the question why Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries of the world whereas it has abundant water resources, fertile land and manpower?”