

Initial Draft

Bureaucratic Neutrality in an Ethnic Federalism: The Case of Ethiopia

by

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Introduction

Throughout history, the creative nature of mankind has generated an array of political systems derived from just a few foundational political structures. As early as 350 BC Aristotle identified four fundamental political structures in the governments of societies: tyranny, fascism, democracy and oligarchy. Modern day ideologies, including the various types of socialism, communism, and capitalism are political economy interpretations of these same themes. Historical underpinnings, especially religious ones, can also provide contextual differences for these political economy structures. Regardless of the ideological orientation, however, all governing structures share a central operating element that conditions the successful implementation of policy and continuity of governance, namely bureaucracy.

Repeated efforts to operationalize the term bureaucracy have been made by social theorists from John Stuart Mill, Weber, Marx, Lenin, and Michels, through modern day public administration theorists. In spite of the claim that Weber was the first to popularize the concept of bureaucracy, the idea is at least as old as the biblical account of the division of labor by Moses based on the counsel of his father-in-law, suggesting that the idea of division of labor is a prerequisite to the efficient implementation of a task. In current management literature the multisided meanings of bureaucracy embrace administrative personnel, organizational types, and negative and polemic meanings of current trends in modern government such as red tape, redundancy, and decision-making gridlock. (Abrahamsson, 1979).

In this paper bureaucracy refers to the executive arm of any government regardless of political orientation such as capitalism, socialism, communism, or ethnic federalism, the latest of which is a phenomenon that has come into vogue since the end of the Soviet State. In the context of Ethiopia, the term bureaucracy denotes the members of the civil service, which includes the “*non-political*’ or *‘permanent executive*’ that is recruited to serve the government in the implementation of policies through the management and conduct of governmental affairs (Meheret & Chanie, 2000) and excludes elected officials, legislators, judiciary, armed forces or federal police (Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No.../2001, Article 2, Section 1).

Historically, while there is consensus on the necessity of a professional, educated, efficient and effective cadre of administrators serving government, there is no agreement on the political nature of this bureaucracy. In the French, German and Japanese experiences, professional, objective competence ranks at least as high as political allegiance in recruiting civil servants. Scandinavian civil service, slightly less politicized than Germany and France, still emphasizes allegiance more than the Anglo-Saxon/American systems that are considered nearly obsessed with the insistence on neutrality in bureaucracy (Peters, 1996).

The principle of bureaucratic neutrality has gained currency and added dimensions since the fall of the Soviet Union for two primary reasons. First, in the 1980s Britain and the United States made concerted efforts to reduce the role of government and engender bureaucratic competency, accountability, and transparency. The reforms have been both far-reaching and influential in most European countries and other nations such as Australia. Secondly, influenced by these effects, government reform in the global context has been predicated on the values of government accountability and transparency such as those promoted by the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) under the rubric of Good Governance. The World Bank has made Good Governance a precondition for receiving loans and aid, and implies that countries, including developing nations, must demonstrate efforts to streamline and professionalize bureaucracy and civil service systems (World Bank, 1992; Meheret & Chanie, 2000).

The question addressed in this paper is whether bureaucratic neutrality, or the depoliticization of civil service, is compatible with ethnic federalism. This question is explored by reviewing the classic theories of bureaucracy as a foundation for examining the research question and contextualizing bureaucratic neutrality in Ethiopian ethnic federalism.

Theory of Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy exists to implement policy of the executive and assure the continued working of government. The central theme in bureaucratic theory is the concept of authority. Where does bureaucracy derive its authority, and whose interests does the bureaucracy represent? As with Aristotle's four political systems, the various iterations of bureaucracy have expanded and developed over time to encompass new evolutions and devolutions of bureaucratic authority and character. Thus examining the origin, control or autonomy of bureaucracy, and the interface between bureaucracy and the polity establishes the basis for discussing the nature of bureaucracy in an ethnic federalism. Classic theorists on the role of government, such as Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Weber and Michels, discuss different dimensions of bureaucratic theory and provide a useful underpinning for deliberating the synthesis of bureaucracy in modern applications.

Hegel

Bureaucratic authority in Hegel's view stemmed from either religious or secular authority, and the state functioned to represent the common interest. The distribution of power in society was derived from the higher authority of the monarch, but Hegel saw bureaucracy as the link between state authority on the one hand and various groups in society on the other hand (Abrahamsson, 1977). Public officials were servants of the state, not of the monarch, and were "a corps of public servants, independent of the good will of the monarch and his ministry, dedicated to the interest of the state and with a loyalty transcending that to any particular person," (Ibid: 37). The modern link with Hegel is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon/American experience of a bureaucracy as a representative, recallable corps of professionals that are apolitical and who represent civil society while in the service of the current political leader.

Marx and Lenin

Marx and Lenin saw bureaucracy as an instrument of the economic machine of the elite, capitalist ruling class, assuring control over all means of production and enslaving the proletariat to the profit of the wealthy. Authority relies on the power to coerce (law), and existence of the state (legal authority) is an instrument of control either through cooperation with the established rules and accepted norms or by oppression and coercion by the capitalist class. In Marxism bureaucracy ceases to exist when economic forces are freed from capitalist control through the redistribution of wealth and the subsequent increase in education of the proletariat (Abrahamsson, 1977, p. 75). Lenin advocated smashing bureaucracy in order to expunge the philosophical as well as pragmatic influences of prior entrenched thinking and action that was loyal to capitalist interests. The capitalist bureaucracy was to be exchanged for a representative and recallable cadre of government workers composed of the proletariat. However the application of this idea breaks down at the level of administrative capacity to perform with adequate knowledge and professionalism, stability of governance over time, and the apolitical position of bureaucrats (neutrality) who are not schooled in the foundations of bureaucratic administration. The failure of the French Commune experiment of pure democratic bureaucracy was a precursor of larger bureaucratic failures to come. Economics aside, we see the difficult

and final result of smashing bureaucracy in the devolution of the Soviet Union into independent governments that have been without a stable professional core of bureaucrats, neutral to politics yet loyal to the commitment of successful implementation of policy and continuity of governance.

Michels

Michels' oligarchic model suggests that bureaucracy is a natural extension of social interactions within all organizations and that the natural tendency is that a few in any organization will rise to power over the more amorphous mass of its membership, i.e. in Michels model, the elected executive over the employed bureaucrat. Whether or not the concentration of power in the hands of the few is a desired or ignoble quality is a moot point, according to Michels. The emergence of leadership is inevitable and necessary to all of social interaction. Michels bases this reasoning on the several qualities existent in all societies, regardless of economic or political systems, which make direct, individual democratic representation impossible. Without an oligarchic hierarchy the sheer number of societal members to organize in order to provide services, gather ideas or to resolve disputes becomes insurmountable. Michels acknowledges the need for technical expertise and continuity in governance and points out the need for quick decision-making, which neither direct democracy nor bureaucratic organization is capable of accomplishing (Abrahamsson, 1977).

With regard to autonomy of bureaucracy, Michels and Marx are in agreement that autonomous bureaucracy is impossibility, given the authority for bureaucratic existence in each case. For Michels, all bureaucratic authority derives from the oligarchic structure and cannot exist as a "headless," amorphous mass with no direction, while for Marx bureaucracy exists only as a function of capitalist control.

Weber

Weber's pure bureaucratic model incorporates social, political and economic influences in the development of the state and its bureaucratic functioning. Weber acknowledges that too much power concentrated in the bureaucratic machinery of government, however, is to be guarded against. In a legal-rational society, adherence to societal norms and laws provides for consistency, non-partisanship (neutrality), and stability over time and through different changeovers in government. Weber's model of neutral, rational bureaucracy and Michel's naturally-occurring oligarchy are seen as inevitable outgrowths of maturing government and civil society organization, and though they may be smashed through revolution, they will eventually return over time as naturally occurring phenomenon of organizational development (Fry, 1989; Abrahamsson, 1977). In every case, however, partisanship in the civil service system adulterates the neutrality of bureaucracy by mixing the politics of "what is to be done" with the bureaucratic act of "how it is to be done."

In current theory bureaucracy is the predominant organizational form in a legal-rational-based society. Theoretically, predictability, calculability, norms of social, political and legal justice, and the neutrality of bureaucracy derive from the larger society (Fry, 1989). It is this dependency on the social norm that leads to an analysis of whether or not political structures are in some way matched to representativeness and reflectiveness of society as a whole (Abrahamsson, 1977). In contrast to demonstrations of modern bureaucratic applications in line with Weber and Michels, Marx's proletariat bureaucracy that successfully rises after the collapse of an elitist bureaucracy has failed to manifest despite Soviet, Chinese and other attempts to dismantle classism and elitism. It appears that the inevitability of Michels' argument for

emerging oligarchy continues to reappear, while the stability of Weber's neutral bureaucracy is borne out by modern day Britain, France, Germany and North America.

Problems of Bureaucracy

Some of the difficulty in comparing these or any other theories of bureaucracy and their respective characteristics lies in the socio-economic versus phenomenological derivations of the theories. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, that once Marxian/Lenin bureaucracy has been destroyed that a radically different organization of social, economic and psychological set of interactions would successfully emerge, and to date, none has. On the other hand, neither Michels separation of the *elected* versus *employed* executive, which is reminiscent of Wilson's politics/administration or Simon's value/fact dichotomies, or Weber's pure neutrality of bureaucrats has manifested. Some fundamental models have emerged that attempt to resolve the resulting difficulties in the application of classic bureaucratic theories. The following discussion addresses three types of bureaucratic models that have been implemented with varying success. According to Herbert Kaufman in "Administrative Decentralization and Political Power" (1969) three models, executive leadership, representativeness and politically neutral competence, are constantly shifting with various weight and emphasis under different political and economic fluctuations.

Executive Leadership, Political Spoils and Partisanship

The executive leadership model suggests that a country's leader, elected or otherwise, have the authority to appoint those who are capable and disposed to implement the initiatives of the leader. In non-democratic regimes, this means that the leader's vision may or may not correspond to the will of the people. Nevertheless, the populace is subjected to bureaucrats who loyally change and implement policies that may be mere rhetoric, or worse, that reward incompetence while limiting the fulfillment of or abusing the needs of the country.

Other difficulties with the executive leadership model in practical terms are that the number of appointees required may be so great that it is too physically demanding to accomplish. Additionally, the number of qualified appointees available for appointment may be limited, thus assuring questionable quality in some of those appointed, eventually leading to scandals, indictments, and loss of confidence due to public perception of corrupt government (Henry, 1989). The current crisis within the TPLF, accusations and counter accusations of corruption, abuse of power and privatizing national wealth for private instead of public gain, have led to the further erosion of confidence in the EPDRF to govern. This is further evidence to support the argument that there can be no civil service reform until confidence in the government is restored.

In the current global economic context, however, competitive international markets are forcing more leaders to envision efficiency and effectiveness as directions for their civil service systems (Leavitt, 2000). To become or remain competitive in global private markets the government must provide the bureaucratic expertise to assure stability during political change. An elected chief executive has control over policy-making and policy-executing apparatus of the executive branch while bureaucratic loyalists are in key positions to assure these strategies are advanced. The career political executive also provides stability and expertise in the government rather than to strict party loyalties (Henry, 1989). At the same time, in order for executive leadership to accomplish effective governance, there must be the assurance and support of values such as rule of law, accountability and responsiveness.

The American experience with the excesses of executive leadership in the 1800s that led to the "spoils system" after Andrew Jackson's election to President in 1829 is instructive.

Removing many of President Adams's prior appointees to critical bureaucratic positions, Jackson replaced ninety percent of available appointed positions, leaving only ten percent of experienced administrators to carry on as before. The abuses of incompetence, bribery and graft were so great that concerned intellectuals led a substantial government reform which achieved official adoption of values and structural changes including a merit system for selection and pay of civil service employees, the elimination of a permanent administrative class, the separation of administration from politics, an infusion of moral values in government, and managerial effectiveness (Ibid).

In the context of Ethiopia, the bill on civil service reform, which was sent to the House of Peoples' Representatives in May 2001, sets out reforms that reflect progressive movement, that is, prohibition of executives forcing civil servants to engage in political duties other than those established in job descriptions, and "improper" dismissal of workers. The issue at the crux of the policy, however, is encapsulated in whether or not the courts act independently as a check/balance on the executive when ruling on "improper" dismissal of an employee and their subsequent reinstatement, not the mere iteration of policy. In an ethnic federalism and, particularly under an executive leadership model, can the legislature, executive or judiciary deliver unbiased legislation, policy implementation or legal interpretation without a nationally accepted, shared cultural value system rather than a constitution that upholds the right of an hundred ethnicities to enact policy as their *separate cultures* dictate?

The Merit System for Maximum Outcome

Civil Service Merit Systems are now widely accepted as simply the general system under which a federal civil service operates (Henry, 1989). An outgrowth of reform of the Spoils System era, Merit Systems are meant to establish a transparent and equally accessible process of hiring, promoting and remunerating government employees. The system is central to the foundation of neutrality in civil service through independent selection based on education and experience, promotion based on competency, and incremental financial reward based on performance in the job (Henry, 1989, Leavitt, 2000, Meheret & Chanie, 2001). The intended unbiased selection of the best and brightest competitors for civil service positions strives to assure that those who can actually perform their duties professionally and efficiently will promote improvement and further reform through innovation and creativity in accomplishing their jobs.

Such tenets as equal pay for equal work, (Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No.../2001, Article 9, Sections 6-8), promotion based on competency (Ibid, Articles 21-23) and the like, as represented in Ethiopia's new proclamation, iterate the tenets of Good Governance: legality, transparency and neutrality. Implementation - consistent, independent, and equally applied without bias - becomes the challenge for any government.

According to a 1998 report on Civil Service Reform in Ethiopia, the prior four years showed advances in five areas: expenditure management and control; human resource management; top (strategic) management systems; service delivery; and ethics. This broad overhaul is the first in forty-four years and has been slow and difficult to implement. The report discloses that the areas of major difficulty still facing Ethiopia lay in the establishment of ethics, including elimination of corruption, the reform of top management through the prime minister's office, and the deprofessionalization of civil service employees due to poor compensation and pay systems (Meheret & Chanie, 2000, Jembere, 2001). The 2001 Proclamation notwithstanding, the authority to implement these policies appears confused and exceedingly

difficult at the regional level because of the separatist categorization of the Ethiopia as Nations, Nationalities and Peoples instead of a united people living in the nation of Ethiopia

Representative System, Values, Non-Elitism

Concerns for equality are mounting in the global context in terms of human rights, alleviation of poverty, sustainable human development, and the adherence to Good Governance. Participative government is one of nine characteristics identified by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as central to Good Governance and to generating collaborative partnership (Jembere, 2001, p.3, 6). The promotion of an apolitical, professional civil service that is representative of a population through Affirmative Action, rigorous application of voting rights laws, voting districting laws or other applications that assure democratic representation of civil society while avoiding the tyranny of the majority (Madison, Federalist Paper #10), is essential to building an effective civil service.

A value-driven civil service must derive those values from the civil society it represents. Inherently, without the coherent, cohesive representation of civil society in government, there can be no civil system to serve the society. Jembere in "Good Governance: Rule of Law and Democracy," states, "The urgent priority in Africa, therefore, seems to be to rebuild state capability by overhauling public institutions and checking the abuse of state power. Creating closer partnerships with the private sector and civil society will help immensely to enhance the delivery of public and collective services," (p. 13-14). Thus the very nature of a civil service system that is representative of a collective polity must be political neutrality.

Bureaucratic Neutrality and Ethnic Federalism

One paradox of Ethiopia is that the stability and strength of the ancient kingdoms that assured Ethiopia's place as the oldest established country in Africa have been disrupted by modern development that has placed Ethiopia in the status of an emerging nation in the global context. For Ethiopia and its ethnic-based government, the character, function and capacity of bureaucracy pose unique questions in terms of achieving bureaucratic neutrality. The requisite pre-conditions for bureaucratic neutrality and the authenticity of civil service 'reform' in such an environment are problematic. For any ethnic federalism, a crucial obstacle to achieving bureaucratic neutrality is that by definition, *ethnic* implies separatism while *federalism* assures that each ethnicity maintains a significant degree of autonomy with less collective accountability for its actions. The current Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia refers to Ethiopia as, "We the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia..." in the Preamble. In light of the concept of federalism, states bound together to achieve and maintain a shared vision, for a united populace.

Haile Asmerom describes the separation of ethnic identities based on two perspectives, the first one objective and the second one subjective. The objective primordialist perspective assumes that people will associate, trust and cooperate with those of like kinship, language, politic, and geographic identity and will *disassociate* with those unlike their objective identity. The subjective situationalist perspective casts doubt on the ability of cultures with significant differences to resolve their interpersonal conflicts satisfactorily and to come to agreement on social and political power structures (Asmerom, 1996:173-4). Theoretically, the innately unique and different ethnic characteristics are presumed to create a separation from ethnicities that is impossible to overcome. At the same time, these differences are the bases for establishing ethnic

states that remain separated by such things as different traditional laws, cultures, and perspectives on power. In the Ethiopian context, however, a country that has existed for such a long time has evolved beyond clear ethnic distinctions through the cross-fertilization of cultures and through mediated articulations such as marriage. It has become tremendously difficult to establish clearly demarcated differences among the ethnic groups of Ethiopia and, particularly in identifying wholly separate states based on ethnicity and culture, cannot actually be accomplished, contrary to the language of the Constitution. To base the fabric of federalism on these false separations is not only disruptive at the national level, but creates disunity and suspicion at the regional and local levels. This idiosyncrasy of ethnic federalism requires the reexamination of classic bureaucratic neutrality in government and the question whether bureaucratic neutrality can even exist in this context. The insistence on viewing the country as divided by ethnicity is a phenomenon influences the policy participation process, changes the dynamic of civil society, impedes neutral interpretation of societal will, challenges conflict management within the polity, and deflects both interest and monies away from the growing economic gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Conclusion

This paper poses the question whether bureaucratic neutrality, or the depoliticization of civil service, is compatible with ethnic federalism. The answer is to be found through a discussion of bureaucratic foundations, a synthesis of lessons in bureaucracy learned in the global context, and a critical inquiry into the current organization and practices of Ethiopia's federal government in light of those bureaucratic foundations. The idea of civil service reform, as it now stands in the 2001 Proclamation, is a beginning. As with all theoretical discussion, however, application of bureaucratic theory through actual Good Governance practices is the more difficult task. As stated in the body of this paper, the foundations of bureaucracy are missing from Ethiopia's government structure.

Principles of rule of law, participation, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, strategic vision, consensus orientation, responsiveness, and equality (Jembere, 2001), are critical in the application of Good Governance. A national vision based on division by ethnicity without underlying foundational unifying principles assures that Ethiopia is doomed to remain a federation of states artificially divided along separatist ethnic and cultural barriers. Ethiopia is a nation in an increasingly competitive global milieu and facing environmental and public health threats to her very existence. Requisite to Ethiopia's continuance as a nation is the open and straightforward discussion of the mechanisms of governance and civil service reform. The application of policies reached through consensus building, representation and integrity is necessary to assure that the government's actions are on behalf of a nation, not a party.

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