**The making of a ‘beggar nation’:**

**The case of Ethiopia**

 **Part 1**

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**INTRODUCTION**

For the past four or five years, I have been mostly writing about the dangers faced by Ethiopia –a nation in which war serves as a means to resolve political disagreements, massacres are planned in order to boost tribal identities and mass-population displacement is enforced a means of reminding citizens who wields real power in the country.

I began to miss my sociological, educational, and psychological analysis of the Ethiopian matters. In my early 20s, I used to hang out with a German aid worker who once told me ‘Girma, Ethiopians have become ungrateful takers’. I argued with him passionately, defending Ethiopia or Ethiopians. He thought I should research or write something about it. It took me 30 years to understand him. He worked as an aid worker for 25 years and consequently knew Ethiopia’s three regimes well (monarchy, military regime and the EPRDF era). I have been thinking of him and his ideas about how gentle, polite, and descent Ethiopians turned into passive and ungrateful takers.

My paper is based on reflective thinking and autoethnography. Reflective thinking involves “consideration of the larger context, the meaning, and the implications of an experience or action. Reflective thinking is the ability to look at the past, that is our past as a nation, and develop an understanding and insights about what happened in that proud and historical country and use this information to develop a deeper understanding or to choose a course of action. Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis and Bochner, 2000)[[1]](#endnote-1). Under this broad rubric of autoethnography, a number of similar approaches (methods) e.g., ethnographic short stories, personal narratives, complete-member-researcher, auto-observation, reflexive ethnography, ethnographic memoir, and opportunistic research are included. Although various methodological strategies have been developed in connection with autoethnographic projects, they may be applied to other forms of qualitative research as well.

As a teacher of research methodology, I am well acquainted with the concept of generalizations both in quantitative and qualitative research. I should also mention that I teach subjects on Ethnicity, Race and Education, and while this limits my willingness to use stereotypes regarding population, race, or cultural groups, I am also keenly aware that stereotypes often hide a kernel of truth. In social psychology, a stereotype is a fixed condition, an over-generalized belief about a particular group or class of people.

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURE OF UNGRATEFUL TAKERS IN ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY**.

[This report is a systemic, well-thought and longitudinal documentation that spanned three decades, and it is impossible to write all my experiences, reflections, and facts in this short text. I want to start my reflection on what Mohammed Hussein](https://www.quora.com/profile/Dale-Gamble%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**[Al Amoudi,](https://www.quora.com/profile/Dale-Gamble%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)** [a globally successful international entrepreneur and businessman who was born in Ethiopia to an Ethiopian mother and a Yemeni father. Al-Amoudi grew up in Saudi Arabia and over time rose to become the largest individual investor in Sweden. He once said in a private meeting that he was troubled by what he called](https://www.quora.com/profile/Dale-Gamble%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) *[rich beggars](https://www.quora.com/profile/Dale-Gamble%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)* [–wealthy Ethiopians who courted him for some favour, approaching him in an embarrassing manner and morally appalling style. He mentioned that it was not the Ethiopia he knew during his upbringing and wondered about what has happened during those few decades. He was not referring to genuinely poor and disenfranchised segments of the population. My reflection here is perfectly in line with this multimillionaire who is currently under house arrest in Saudi Arabia.](https://www.quora.com/profile/Dale-Gamble%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) People are obviously trying to use him. I came across thousands of incidents that forced me to think about our current dominant culture, about issues related to asking for favour, *begging,* and dependency. We also know that millions of people live off their relatives’ money. We are aware that lots of people consider their relatives abroad as means of living. All this got me into thinking about us and our attitude towards dependency or aggressive action to get favours. Why is it okay for us to live off other people, and bother everybody who appears to be in some position to help them facilitate their wish whether the favour costs hugely or puts the giver in danger? On many occasions, people approached me to write for them a recommendation letter to join further education. These guys were never my students. Many approach me to facilitate their kids’ or relatives’ admission into higher education in some unacceptable way. I tried numerous times to explain the procedure and the formal process of application. Many thought that I am complicating the process to not help. They ask me: is not very Ethiopian to help one another? Is not our golden culture? I would reply that ‘Of course, I help you guys in a legally defendable, proper, and ethical manner’. I further explain to them that it is corruption and inappropriate to favour an individual or a group in a system where a competitive meritocratic system is standard practice.

That is not the only problem I face with my fellow countrymen and women both in Ethiopia and abroad. An endless request for something –*can you send me this or that? Can you arrange a short visit abroad for my daughter’s honeymoon?* Why don’t we consider this sense of dependency shameful as a person, as a family, and as a country? Which part of our history, lifestyle, and culture thought us bothering others for favour constantly is an ok lifestyle?  Somewhere I read that as Ethiopians we claim to take our pride and independence a little too seriously. Our ‘history’ says that our fathers chose death instead of being enslaved or rather than being considered anything but human. I still want to emphasise that my description is about those who have the means to take care of themselves and make it a habit to get an advantage of others. I was once told one of the reasons that millions died in the great famines in Ethiopia in the 70s was because people chose to close their doors and die rather than go out and beg for a piece of bread. How come that nowadays receiving aid or grant from foreign countries is breaking news in Ethiopia? Some people react when I express concern that soliciting aid or favour almost as a profession is becoming a symbol of our culture. They tell me that even the government is active in that work of dependency. And this dependency and ‘help me’ attitude is increasing at an alarming rate with sophisticated style. How can I politely cut off someone who asks for too many favours? What do I say to this person?

One person told me that perhaps a simpler word for having those negative qualities was being a “taker.” How do you recognize takers? These are difficult questions. My experience from years of documented experience is that they act entitled to whatever they’re taking from you. They treat you as an extension of themselves. When they hurt or disappoint you, they don’t experience [guilt](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/guilt), [shame](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/embarrassment), or remorse. They believe their problems are someone else’s fault. They believe that you and everyone else are in this world to make them happy. When you give to them, they don’t feel compelled to say thank you or be grateful. If you say No, they become outraged and entitled to become enraged. They don’t regret taking from you, but they regret not taking even more from you. They feel as if they are never wrong to ask for favour. This list can be discouraging. For some comparisons to international studies read **Mark Goulston work[[2]](#endnote-2).** the author of the book Just Listen, is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute.

Having difficulty completing his thesis, I have been supporting a guy for 10 years. The work should have been completed in one semester. He exhausted me by asking the same questions year after year. I might have raised my voice on two occasions because I was upset by his request, and endlessly and boring work. After several failures in his examination, he finally passed. He never told me the outcome. I called him to find out what happened to his thesis because I don’t want to engage in his never-ending work for another ten years. His response was ‘yes I passed’. Why did not you tell me? I asked. He replied, ‘you offended me by not treating me nicely’. I said, ‘thank you’. He is not only an ungrateful taker he even wanted to let me know that I was not assisting him with full vigour and utmost kindness. Why did he not mention it during the process of writing? Why wait until he made it? Perhaps helping others isn't really about those people and whether they have some sort of advantage over you. It’s part of the character I wish to portray. If I can't assist or don't want to, I can always say no. I can respect my own boundaries. When I choose to assist other people, I do so because I want to assist. I don't expect them to return the favor. Sure, it is always appreciated when someone does. But in the above case, he expressed animosity. That became my paycheck! I read somewhere *do not help anyone for the payback* because you will invariably be disappointed. Help because it makes you feel happy. Help because it sets a good example. Help because it makes the world a better place when we help each other.

There are, however, a lot of ungrateful people out there, Ethiopians abroad and at home. They would rather insult you for the one thing you didn't do for them instead of thanking you for the plenty of things you have done for them. Previously, I followed the precept that never let one person's character affect how you behave toward another. Over time, this precept is crumbling over as I became confused by the behavior of many Ethiopians. Was my German friend right already in the 80s?

Another Ethiopian friend of mine, who is a computer technician and a physicist, has suffered more by being too helpful. Neither of us hates doing favors in general: we simply hate doing for others what they could and should do for themselves. One shouldn’t ask for a favor unless you are truly unable to do something or if it would legitimately be too much of an inconvenience for you. One guy went to a computer shop to have his laptop repaired. He found out the cost of the repair was too high for his budget. He asked my friend for a favor and my kind friend spent 6 hours repairing the computer with no token pay or a thank you gift. On two more occasions, a similar ‘computer crash’ happened. Altogether my friend spent 12-14 hours with no charge. After a year that same guy came back, and my friend turned him down because he was on his way abroad. The guy got resented. He never called him back. That is a true story. Tens of people ask my friend to help them repair computers or facilitate bureaucratic matters with the Swedish authorities for free. He has a family and a job to take care. It became unbearable for his health. I can list my own tiring and unending ‘please do me this or that’ request from the community members and beyond. With some cost to our relationship with these ungrateful takers, we managed to minimize the burden on both of us. We are still struggling.

Doing a favor to someone needy is not a wrong thing or a sin. Denying someone in need of your help will put you in the naughty book of your community and bring you some pain

I and my friend have begun to be prudent and selective in our deeds. I have reached the point that whenever an Ethiopian, with a minimal acquaintance, calls, I automatically think: what will she/he ask for now? I usually defend myself by saying ‘it's not me declining a request, but circumstances beyond my control making it ‘(or too costly) to comply at that moment. Only last year I received several Ph.D. thesis manuscripts from people I don’t know asking me to edit their dissertations and comment on some substantive matters. They complained that their supervisors are lazy or incompetent. Although I tried to help, I found the request extremely scary. I don’t want to disappoint aspiring young Ethiopians but at the same time, the workload is killing me. This has been dragging on for 15 years. The requests are very diverse. Even highly educated ones softly ask if I could arrange for them a sabbatical leave abroad.

I used to help an Ethiopian mother and her son with schoolwork for two decades. The story is long. As a human rights activist, I voiced the suffering and plight of the Amharas, which upset the mother. A few times she implied that the dead bodies of the victims are photoshopped. Besides, she resents my engagement to bring to the international forum the Amhara genocide. We are not speaking at the moment. I know she belongs to another ethnic group. I reflected on all the good things and support I provided to her family unselfishly. One key point is that neither she nor her son mentions all the paperwork, homework and mentoring I invested in them. In fact, they seem to be ashamed of mentioning the input. They want to impress others that they did it on their own. This is just one example. Several times the receivers or takers avoided me or my friend, almost distancing themselves from us

According to a separate study I conducted, the ungrateful takers minimize the support they were offered free. I am not generalizing here. This problem is not uncommon even in our family circles.

My support was never based on ethnic affiliation, gender, age, disability, religion, or race. All these made me question my basic tenets about solidarity, mutual engagement, and empathy. We are all born with the capacity for aggression as well as compassion. Which tendencies we embrace require mindful choice by individuals, families, communities, and our culture in general. I am fascinated by the fact that the takers hate the givers once the giver’s role or contribution is no longer needed! The key to overcoming hate is education: at home, in schools, and in the community. This wisdom appears to be disintegrated in most parts of Ethiopia and among Ethiopians, of this otherwise proud and culturally rich ethnic mosaic. I prefer to apply the concept of collective stupidity permeating the culture and institutions. Our collective intelligence can be limited to our family, tribe, and social group, or can be expanded to include greater wisdom that we are all connected. What some groups lack in this wisdom is, I believe, collective stupidity. It seems to me that the ‘ungrateful takers’ mentality’, corruption, nepotism, and favouritism is a manifestation of collective absurdity.

I am convinced that nepotism (favouritism granted to relatives, friends, and political benefactors in various fields) coupled with ‘ungrateful takers’ is one of the worst forms of corruption. It is not only the root or foundation of corruption in Ethiopia; it is also the fuel that feeds graft, impoverishes the nation, and sets off one section (those who are benefiting from the nepotism and the culture of ‘takers’) against the others (those being made to lose out). It is one major contributor to national disunity and instability. This new culture and the politics feed on each other.

It seems that our collective stupidity, in particular, within the leadership circle is driving us to the brink of catastrophe in Ethiopia. There is a lack of collective intelligence (high IQ), a strong ability to influence people on an emotional level (high EQ), and a strong positive character (high CQ) at the leadership level, which leaves room for: 1. Egoism; 2. Machiavellianism; 3. Moral disengagement;4. Narcissism;5. Psychological entitlement; 6. Psychopathy; 7. Sadism; 8. Self-interest; and 9. Spitefulness. Ethiopia has witnessed an inflation of these behaviours.

**INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS AS FACTORS FOR THE CULTURE OF “UNGRATEFUL TAKERS”**

I believe that the ungrateful taker mentality and the form of beggary I described above have a systemic origin. The period after the revolution (1974) belittled the importance of spiritual aspects of societal life, dismantled the old way of life in the name of “cultural revolution” and created a soulless generation. According to [Rev. Michael P. Orsi](https://www.cnsnews.com/user/906#_blank) (September 9, 2020)[[3]](#endnote-3) the truth is this: wherever socialism has been tried, invariably it has turned into communism. And because communism is atheistic, the end result has always been tyranny, suffering, and death. Some 100 million people have been killed over the course of communism’s march through Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and other parts of the world. Why such a high death toll? Because communism recognizes no higher moral principle than raw power. Without God to limit human action, any action considered necessary to achieving ideological goals is acceptable. Human beings become nothing more than expendable pieces to be used in pursuing the utopian society that communism promises to create. I agree with Orsi to a certain extent. Ethiopian rulers shaped by this ideology have caused a culture of favouritism, ungratefulness, and inhumanity to flourish in that ancient country.

The Derg claimed to be communist; and the TPLF claimed to be communist, of the Albanian variety. According to the above, the EPRDF was guided by the so-called revolutionary democracy. This platform created a fertile ground for the depletion of the nation’s intelligentsia pool (in the positive non-pejorative sense). Meritocracy, credentials, and talent were secondary criteria. They established and presided over a ruthlessly backward social system, in accordance with whose organization people were chosen and moved into positions of success, power, and influence not based on their demonstrated abilities and merit — criteria which became, in particular under post-Derg regimes, irrelevant things of the past.

**CONCLUSION**

Without morality, humankind is stripped of the restraint necessary to maintain social harmony. The traditional spiritual practice’s principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance were antithetical to the atheistic rule of the communist regime. Communism and socialism in Ethiopia were able to step into the breach and provide social control by dominating even the most minute corners of our lives. Without tradition, people forget their heritage, their culture, and the ways of life that make them human. And without religion, people lose the path through which they could temper their inner character and save themselves from spiritual destruction[[4]](#endnote-4).

I argue that the grave leadership incompetence and a cultural excess of the so-called communist and socialist regimes [including the present ethnic apartheid system] have contributed to the current crises in Ethiopia because people with low moral intelligence grabbed power. Beheshtifar, Esmaeli, and Moghadam (2011)[[5]](#endnote-5) claim that moral intelligence is the “ʻcentral intelligence’ for all humans.” It is considered a distinct form of [intelligence](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence#_blank), independent of both emotional and cognitive intelligence. Lennick and Kiel, authors of **Moral Intelligence** and the originators of the term, identified four competencies of moral intelligence: integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion[[6]](#endnote-6). Ungrateful takers in Ethiopia lack these skills and values, and their ethics scores are shockingly low.

It is difficult to fully point out where the selfish ungratefulness comes from and that is why I need Part 2 to map out major credible causal factors based on empirical evidences, in more convincing narrative. I hereby call Ethiopians to return to our old values of being considerate to others and gratefulness to God and kind to people. Unless we return to the basics and fight to get back to our pride, we may become shameless and surely end up being the beggar nation.

Once a cat met a fox in the forest. The fox greeted the cat and invited her to have a chat. But the cat said that it was not a safe place because the hunters usually came that way. The fox did not care for the warning of cat and boasted of his knowing many tricks to dodge hunters. He inquired the cat how many tricks she knew to dodge the hunters. She simply replied that she only knew how to climb a tree in the time of danger. The fox looked down upon the cat. Just then, the cat noticed a hunter approaching with a pack of hounds. She at once climbed up the nearest tree and saved her life. The hounds came upon the vain fox very soon. The fox ran for his life but the hounds overtook him and tore him into pieces. (Morals: Vanity is self-deception. Pride hath a fall[[7]](#endnote-7)).

**References**

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3. https://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/rev-michael-p-orsi/communism-and-christianity-cannot-coexist [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/20022022-get-dirty-or-die-trying-analysis/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
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7. #  Story on Moral Pride hath a Fall. Pride hath a Fall

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