

Domestic Enslavement and Marginalization in the 21st Century: The Case of Damot Gale Woreda, Ethiopia

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Abstract: This study explores domestic enslavement and marginalization in the 21st century Ethiopia with special emphases in Damot Gale Woreda, Wolaita Zone, South Ethiopia. Three kebeles of the Woreda namely Ade Damot, Gacheno and Wandara were selected. The study area; zone, Woreda and kebeles were purposively selected by the researcher for his contact with the community during secondary education. The researcher employed exploratory research design to disclose the existing enslavement and marginalization in the study area. The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data and narration and description for the qualitative ones. The data was collected from ‘slave descendants’, ‘descendants of slave owning families’ and Woreda higher officials. ‘Slave descendant’ were identified in the snowball method to manage the sensitivity of the issue while ‘descendants of slave owning families’, and Woreda higher officials were purposively identified. The result of the research indicated that ‘slave descendants’ are enslaved and marginalized by ‘descendants of slave owning families’ even to date based on ancestral/family line in the society. The ‘slave descendants’ are owned by different “descendants’ of slave owning families” (usually ‘Goqa’) and attempts to object such situations have serious consequences like burning their homes and displacing them from the community. In the, process government is failed to take actions to protect constitutional rights and religious centers, courts and media are futile to condemn such practices. Therefore, the local administrative bodies have to stick for the observance of the constitution of the country for implementations of provisions stated in the law of the land.

Key words: Slave Descendants, Descendants of Slave Owning Families, Domestic Slavery

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The historian John Keegan as cited in Welton (2008) notes that no one knows how and when slavery and the slave trade began. But, he speculates that it was probably a common part of the social order for early pastoralists and steppe peoples, and it likely intensified with the advent of the war in the second millennium BC. Slavery can be merely explained as the possession of human beings, buying and selling them for the exclusive reason of compulsory and mostly not paid work and sexual abuse (Lodhi, 2014). It results in enslavement of people. Such enslavement implies to the condition that individuals suffer from serious identity and self-esteem issues that become generationally familial, in other words, enslavement and marginalization are passed down in their descendants’ lives, like a curse (Allain, 2006). League of Nations (1926) also defines enslavement as a condition when the natural liberty of self-control owned by someone to give or render his labor or to have power over the fruits thereof or the concern there from is taken from him. It directly refers to the practice of slavery.

Traditionally, most societies in Africa kept slaves as body guards, tax collectors, domestic servants and farm workers. Thus slaves were important indicators of power and wealth. They were seldom sold as chattels but could be given away as gifts to others in position (Lodhi, 2014). Ethiopia has no exception in this regard.

The modern progress of the 2nd half of 19th c. to unify Ethiopia was brought by Emperor Tewodros II. Then, the move turned its attention to the Southern half of Ethiopia with the first attempt to put an end to the slave trade which was endemic in the Society. It was followed by Yohannes IV who consolidated his power base through a loosely united Ethiopia, with autonomous regional rulers under an emperor exercising benevolent political suzerainty and the related commitment to end slavery in the country. Menelik II also sought to modernize the empire through advanced ideas of social reform and decreed the abolition of slavery (Allain, 2006). However, because of the time it was not customary to set up special offices for work of this kind. Their intention became unaccompanied; as it was impossible to observe and enforce the decree on account of vastness of the country (Haile Sellasie I, 1976).

Wolaita is the name of the people and the *Zone* among peoples and *Zones* in South Ethiopia. They are among ancient peoples of Ethiopia with their kinship system. Based on the cast system, there are two broad

categories in Woalita. These are *Goqa* and *Godabusho*. The former are the so called 'higher cast groups' who used to own slaves. *Goqa* by itself subdivided into two major categories namely *Mala* and *Dogola*. *Malas* are usually ruling classes whose powers are transferred from family to family. The *Dogolas* are cultural religious leaders. On the other hand, *Godabusho*, are the so called 'the lower cast groups' in Wolaita society. It includes, 'Blacksmiths (*Wogachiya*), pottery (*Chinasha*), tanner (*Degela*) and Slaves (*Ayilia*). *Aylias* (slaves) are war captives and/or those who failed to pay back their debt. Then they became properties of the owners. The possession of slaves in Woliata culture was among the indication of social status of an individual (Fanchu and Eyob, 2013). These social division and relations which created with power and profession were more crystallized with the imperial system which has sustained until 1974 (Adane, 2015).

However, the constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) article 18(2) stipulates that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude" and Article 17 of also states about the Right to Liberty. The Article 24 also describes that "everyone has the right to respect for his human dignity, reputation and honor". This extends to "the right to the free development of his personality in a manner compatible with the rights of other citizens and the right to recognition everywhere as a person" (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995). According to the constitution, everyone has the right to protection against inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. With this purpose, article 25 of the FDRE (1995) constitution states that

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection without discrimination on grounds of race, nation, nationality, or other social origin, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status (p:25).

Most importantly, the constitution explains about freedom from slavery and servitude by imposing obligations on the government to follow up its effective implementation. For this reason, the preamble of the constitution explains its full commitments for full respect of individual and people's fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination. Following this, Article 9 of the constitution asserts "all citizens, organs of state, political organizations, other associations as well as their officials have the duty to ensure observance of the Constitution and to obey it" (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995).

Yet, the constitutional history of Ethiopia indicates that constitutions are more of paper tiger than being effective in the country and it is especially ineffective in combating social discrimination. Therefore, social exclusions and marginalization's are common and persistent here and there in different parts of Ethiopia. For example the *Mana* people in South Ethiopia such as Dawro, Gofa and Basketo, *Hadicho* in Sidama (Kemal, 2007) and *Hawada* in Burji-Konso (Ambron,1978) areas are stigmatized by social discrimination (Dubale, 2012). Therefore, these people constitute subordinate social, economic and cultural status in their respective societies (Haberland, 1978). To its extreme, enslavement and marginalization exists in *Damot Gale Woreda of Wolaita, South Ethiopia*. This enslavement is by tracing to lineage or ancestral line of 'descendants of slave owning families' over 'slave descendants'. In this case, parents and children of 'slave descendants' still are serving the interest of 'descendants of their family owners' in all domestic duties. This implies that 'slave descendants' were denied their basic human and democratic rights enshrined in the constitution of the country. Furthermore, little researches were made on the issue and hence it is hidden from the public. Therefore, this research is to disclose the problem to the public where all responsible bodies would help the 'slave descendants' of the study area.

Thus, the study was guided by the following objectives.

1. To describe the nature of social relations that exist between 'slave descendants' and 'descendants of slave owning families' in *Damot Gale Woreda*.
2. To assess manifestations of enslavement and marginalization of 'slave descendants' in *Damot Gale Woreda*
3. To examine actions of political and social institutions in combating enslavement and marginalization in *Damot Gale Woreda*

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Exploratory research design was employed to disclose the problem. Similarly, both the qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to gather the data. Self-developed questionnaires, interviews and observations were used as data collecting instruments. To further enhance the study, literatures were also referred as secondary sources. Three Kebeles of the Woreda namely, *Ade Damot, Gacheno and Wandara* were purposively selected for pervasiveness of enslavement and marginalization in the areas. By using the snowball method, questionnaires were filled by 105 'slave descendants'. Since, 'slave descendants' do not have separate census in the society; the researcher collected from 105 respondents so as to get representative data from purposively identified and secretly communicated respondents outside the locality. Additionally, 5 'slave descendants' were interviewed separately one by one to keep the issues confidential. At the same time, 10

‘descendants of slave owning families’ were interviewed to cross check the information gathered from ‘slave descendants’. Furthermore, Key Informant Interview was also held with purposively identified two higher officials of the *Woreda* (local) government to assess government concern and action on enslavement and marginalization in *Damot Gale Woreda*. Moreover, observations were taken by the researcher on how social relations and communications were made. The quantitative data was analyzed using the descriptive statistics and qualitative data was analyzed through narration.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data used in the analysis of the study were collected from ‘slave descendants’, ‘descendants of slave owning families’ and *Woreda* officials in *Damot Gale Woreda* of *Wolaita Zone*. At the beginning, the researcher planned to get filled and returned 110 questionnaires. But, 5 persons were denied to return it. Therefore, the researcher used the returned 105 questionnaires for analyses. Regarding interviews, the researcher interviewed all interviewees as per the plan without difficulty except some reluctance from *Woreda* officials. All data collection processes were administered by the researcher himself. Here the analyses begin with socio-demographic characters of the respondents.

3.1 Socio-Demographic characteristics of respondents

In this section, socio-demographic characters of ‘slave descendants’ were discussed in relation to sex, educational level, social position and religion. Such information was important to understand the context in which the findings were obtained.

Table1: Socio- demographic Characteristics of respondents

Sn	Variables	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Sex	Male	84	80
		Female	21	20
		Total	105	100
2	Educational status	Never attended	25	23.81
		1-6	27	25.71
		7-12	34	32.38
		Vocational education	23	21.90
		Diploma	3	2.86
		First degree and above	3	2.86
		Total	105	100.00
3	Social position	Farmers	76	72.38
		Government Employees	6	5.71
		Private employees	10	9.52
		Church leader	6	5.71
		<i>Edir</i> leader	5	4.76
		Other	1	0.95
		Total	105	100.00
4	Religion	Orthodox Christian	21	20.00
		Protestant Christian	84	80.00
		Muslim	0	0.00
		Other	0	0.00
		Total	105	100.00

Source: Own survey data, 2019

As shown in the table above, among the total respondents 84(80.00%) were male and the remaining 21 (20%) were females. This implies that males have better access to public arena unlike females since questionnaires were distributed outside their home in a confidential manner. The table also shows that from the total respondents, 25(23.81) have never attended education while 27 (25.71) have attended 1-6 and 34 (32.38) have attended 7-12 grades. Furthermore, 23(21.90), 3(2.86) and 3(2.86) have attended to the level of Vocational education, Diploma, First degree and above respectively. This has the implication that ‘slave descendants’ have limited access to education. The table also depicts, that from the total respondents, 76(72.38) were farmers who have little access to government offices to bring the enslavement and marginalization issues into attention. Religious wise, 84(80%) of respondents are protestant Christians where Protestantism is not only religion but it is the guiding principle of the way of life of the people of the study area.

3.2 The Nature of Social Relations between ‘slave descendants’ and ‘Descendants of Slave Owning Families’

Social relations are socially-constructed objects mostly binary predicates. They have a strong contextual dependence in that they own their definition to the social context in which they are interpretable (Mika, 2004). In order to understand social relations between ‘slave descendants’ and ‘descendants of slave owning families’, questions in the table were forwarded for ‘slave descendants’; and the corresponding answers were given as it is depicted in the table below.

Table 2: Social Relations between ‘slave descendants’ and Owning Families

S. Number	Questions	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		undecided		Total	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	You can exercise your natural freedom of will against your owning family	76	72.38	27	25.71	2	1.90	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100
2	You feel that you are enslaved and marginalized	0	0.00	2	1.90	0	0.00	103	98.10	0	0.00	105	100
3	You can marry a girl/boy from descendants of slave owning families	84	80.00	21	20.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100
4	You can sit and take the meals together with descendants of slave owning at the same place	97	92.38	8	7.62	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100
5	You can take leadership position in the community	76	72.38	21	20.00	8	7.62	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100

Source: Own survey data, 2019

Table 1 item 1 shows that, from the total 105 ‘slave descendants’, 76(72.38) of them strongly disagreed and 27 (25.71) of them disagreed about exercising their natural freedom of will. This directly implies that each of the owner has unlimited right over their respective ‘slave descendants’. The finding from interview of one of the ‘slave descendant’ was consistent with this idea. He said “what I have to do, with whom I should be affiliated, where I have to sit and how and what I have to eat is determined by my owner”. The other interviewee ‘slave descendent’ said “we have no freedom of speech and assembly”. This implies that even the aged/senior ones cannot share their ideas in the meeting or other public areas while the youth of ‘the owners’ have full freedom to do so. This is clear indication that there is superior subordinate relationship in a society.

Related to this, item 2 of table 2 indicates that from the total 105, 103 (98.10) ‘slave descendants’ feel enslaved and marginalized in the society. The result infers that slave descendant have no freedom to act as part of society. They are stigmatized, excluded and marginalized in the society. Interview response of ‘slave descendants’ also favored this idea. They spoke, “we have no social rights and almost in every social issue, we have no place and attention from the society”. These findings generally show that ‘slave descendants’ are not there to take part in decision making process in social and administrative issues. They are decision implementers.

The 3rd item in table 2 shows that, from the total 105 ‘slave descendants’, 84(80.00) of them strongly disagreed and 21 (20.00) of them disagreed. This indicates that, ‘slave descendants’ cannot have marriage relation with individuals from the ‘descendants of slave owning families’. As it is also explained in the interview with ‘descendants of slave owning families’ as follows

It is almost unthinkable to marry a girl or a boy from ‘slave descendants’ and vice versa. But, if it happens, serious punishment would be taken on the family of the ‘slave descendants’ and we would mourn for the girl/boy officially by declaring that the girl/boy is no more alive. And actually, we would not visit and see her/him and his/her children for life.

Item 4 of table 2 also shows that from the total 105 ‘slave descendants’, 97 (92.38) strongly disagree and 8(7.62) were disagree on the possibility to sit and take the meals together at the same place with ‘descendants of slave owning families’. This implies that they have distinctively different social status and cannot share such togetherness. One of the interview participants from ‘descendants of slave owning families’ has also complemented this idea. He said that “in all places such as house construction, cultivating farm land or on wedding or any mourning events where public are gathered, ‘slave descendants’ sit apart from others. They do not even use utensils used by ‘the slave owners’ regardless of age and gender”. The researcher also clearly observed this fact in mourning during the time of data collection. All ‘descendants of slave owning families’ are eating and cheering inside the home, while the ‘slave descendants’ sit outside the home with no attention and respect on the occasions.

In table 2 above, item 5 depicts that from the total 105 ‘slave descendants’ (72.38) were strongly disagreed, 21(20.00) were disagreed and 8 (7.62) agreed on possibility of taking leadership role in the society. This is to imply ancestral inferiority of ‘slave descendants’ relating them as with absence of capacity to take leadership position in the society. The result of the interview with descendants of slave owning families complements this fact. He said that “‘slave descendants’ have no experience to rule and to lead. They are naturally created to be ruled”. This goes with Aristotelian dictum as cited by that some people were born natural slaves and ought to be slaves under any circumstances. Other people were born to rule these slaves, could use these slaves as they pleased and could treat them as property (Schlaifer, 1936).

3.3 Manifestations of Enslavement and Marginalization of ‘slave descendants’

Aristotle as cited by Schlaifer (1936) says a family consists of husband, wife, children, slaves and property. It involves three types of relationships that of the master and slave, marital (between the husband and wife) and parental (between the father and the child). The master, Aristotle held, rules the slave; he rules the wife, and the father rules the son. This classical philosophy of Aristotle persists even today in different forms. Therefore, the table below demonstrates manifestations of enslavement as owning slaves as their own possession.

Table 3: Family category slave descendants belong

Sn	Questions	Yes		No	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Do you belong to some descendants of slave owning family?	105	100	0	0
2	Which one is the owning family you belong?	Owning Family category		Frequency	Percentage
		Wojo		20	19.05
		Wolaita Mala		24	22.86
		Zambocha		15	14.29
		Bubula		14	13.33
		Tigre Mala		18	17.14
		Others		14	13.33

Source: own survey data, 2019

The above table item 1 shows that all of ‘the slave descendants’ were belonging to different ‘slave owning families’. As researcher observation in the field in May 2019, this was not because they were bought currently from market as slavery taken in the past. Rather, they are forced to continue enslavement because of their ancestral social position. Item 2 of the table enumerates some ‘descendents of slave owning families’ such as *Wojo, Wolaita Mala, Zambocha, Bubula and Tigre Mala* groups in the society. This shows that ‘slave descendants’ were owned by such ‘owning families’ resulting as ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ among slave owning families in the society. In the interview with ‘slave descendants’, all of the respondents indicated that they are forced by ‘descendants of slave owning families’ to perpetuate enslavement. Other Interviewee from ‘slave descendants’ confirmed that “we are forced to take ourselves as slaves of the owning families. Our social, economic and political fate in the area is determined by our owners”. The researcher also interviewed some ‘descendants of slave owning families’ on such family based categorization and respondents confirmed such categorization in the society. They also boasted as if they are providing special protection for their respective ‘slave descendants’. One of respondents from ‘owning families’ for example, said “if there is conflict between

our slave descendents with others, it becomes conflict between ‘we’ and ‘the others’. Therefore each of us are giving due protection for our slave descendents and thus we have all ultimate right over our slaves”.

The other manifestation of enslavement is engaging in unpaid labour. Lodhi (2014) clearly states it that slavery is the ownership of human beings for the sole purpose of forced and mostly unpaid labor. Here are some forced labors ‘slave descendants’ involve.

Table 5: Some of Activities ‘slave descendants’ forced to carryout

Question	Duty	Yes		No	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
For which work you are forced by your owners?	Cultivating land	105	100	0	0
	Chopping tree	105	100	0	0
	Fetching water	105	100	0	0
	Rearing animals	105	100	0	0
	Cooking food	105	100	0	0
	Others	105	100	0	0

Source: Own survey data, 2019

As we have seen from the table, all of the ‘slave descendants’ indicated that they are forced by ‘descendants of slave owning families’ to carryout different domestic duties such as cultivating land, chopping tree, fetching water, raring animals, cooking food and any other type of duties ordered by the ‘descendants of slave owning families’. This was also physically observed by the researcher during his field visit for data collection. On the other hand, one participant of the interview from ‘descendants of slave owning families’ said that, “most ‘slave descendants’ admit that they are servants of their owners and it is their duty to take care of our agricultural and other domestic activities. They have to do so without reluctance not to see punishments at group and at individual level”.

The other manifestation of enslavement and marginalization is the absence of way-out to challenge and object such subjugation in the study area. The following table clearly shows why slave descendents are upholding enslavement.

Table 4: The reason to uphold enslavement

Question	Choices		Frequency	Percentage
Why do you maintain enslavement and marginalization?	A	We are naturally inferior	0	0
	B	We want to maintain and respect the social status of our families	5	4.76
	C	We have fear of possible reactions and related consequences	98	93.33
	D	We have no protection from government	98	93.33
	E	We have no such type of relation	0	0.00
	F	Others	2	1.90

Source: Own survey data, 2019

As the table 4 shows in the above, from the total respondents 98(93.33) are upholding enslavement for fear of possible reactions from ‘descendants of slave owning families’ and related consequence. The same amounts are also upholding enslavement for absence of protection from government. Some of interviews with ‘descendants of slave owning families’ were also substantiated previous experiences such as burning houses of ‘slave descendants’ and evacuating them from their land for objecting enslavement and marginalization. However, in the interview with Woreda higher officials, they said “no report on the case of displacement and burning of houses for the objection of enslavement. The information is somewhat exaggerated than the reality”. Yet eventually, both informants concluded their idea by promising to work more on the issue with religious and local leaders in which the latter has more legitimacy and acceptance in the society.

At the same time, very few, 5(4.76), were indicated that they want to maintain and respect the social status of their families. Some other ‘slave descendants’ in the interview said that “agricultural land is overwhelmingly possessed by the ‘descendants of slave owning families’ and thus, we are economically forced to serve our masters to get some spare of products”. From this we can infer that, constitutional statements are not protecting citizens existing social problems in the study area and that there is no government commitment to enforce the constitution of the country.

3.4 Actions of Political and Social Institutions in Combating Enslavement and Marginalization

Political and social institutions such as government, churches, prosecutors and media are expected to play some roles in cultivating the way of the life of the society into the normal track. Here are reactions of ‘slave descendants’ on the issues.

Table 7: the role government, churches, Medias and courts to combat enslavement

Sn	Questions	Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage		Frequency		Percentage	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage		
1	Local (Woreda) government combats enslavement and marginalization in protecting the constitution	95	95	10	9.52	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100
2	Churches combat enslavement and marginalization in the area	89	89	0	0.00	16	15.24	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100
3	Prosecutors brings violations committed against ‘slave descendants’ to courts	86	86	19	18.10	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	100
4	Media plays roles in working against enslavement and marginalization in the area	90	90	15	14.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	105	100

Source: Own survey data, 2019

The FDRE Constitution (1995) article 18/3 says that “no one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor”. It is worded as “government shall have the duties to support, on the basis of equality, the growth and enrichment of cultures and traditions that are compatible with fundamental rights, human dignity, democratic norms and ideals, and the provisions Constitution”. This implies that government has the responsibility to cultivate healthy traditions and to shape unhealthy ones. But, responses in table 7 items 1 in the above indicate that government bodies are not giving protection for ‘slave descendants’ from enslavement and marginalization in the society. In relation to this, the researcher interviewed two higher officials of the Woreda. Both responded that they know and understand about the ongoing marginalization and enslavement in the study area. They confirmed that such social stratification and related enslavement and marginalization in the community of the Woreda are deep-rooted since so long.

In the meantime, interview was held with Woreda officials. They have the fear that it may create some further social crises and may be more politicized by other groups. Officials clearly said that “when you underline on such issue more, it leads to social division and even more severe conflicts”. Therefore, they preferred to overlook the case than emphasizing on it. Side by side, they said, “such issues are getting improved and will be improved through time”.

On the other hand, the researcher observed that churches are more influential in social relations in the community. However, table 2 item 2 indicates that churches play insignificant role in combating enslavement and marginalization among their members. As discussed during the interview with one of ‘slave descendants’, religious teachings are so as to support the existing social system. He said that churches are wrongly referring the context of the Holy Bible statement which says “slaves must be obedient to their masters” thereby ignoring the content that talks about “all mankind are from Adam and Hewan”. Three of the interview participants from the slave owning families also justified same fact. They said, “‘slave descendants’ cannot take main roles such as church leadership, yet they can be singer or play only some servant roles”.

In addition to this, item 3 of the table above indicates that prosecutors are not discharging their responsibility. Interview participants from ‘slave descendants’ said that prosecutors are silent and looking order from government. This implies that prosecutors are not independently functioning as institutions to secure

justice in the society. The same is observed from the roles of the media. Out of the total 105 ‘slave descendants’, 86 were responded strongly disagree and 19 were said disagree and this all implies that media has not played roles to fight enslavement and marginalization. However, Heywood (2002) said that media has the ability to shape political attitude and influencing public perception about the nature and importance of issues and problems.

Therefore, as we have seen from table 7, government, churches, prosecutors and media altogether played insignificant role in fighting and combating enslavement and marginalization in the study area.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The traditional cast system is so dominant in *Damot Gale Woreda*; Ethiopia. The finding indicates that ‘slave descendants’ because of their family line are continued to live under enslavement and marginalization. Even to date, ‘slave descendants’ are serving ‘descendants of slave owning families’ by tracing to ancestral line. ‘Slave descendants’ have no chance to entertain human and democratic rights endorsed by the constitution and other laws of the country. Therefore, it is recommended that local administrative bodies have to stick for the observance of the constitution of the country and other laws. It was also noted that Medias have to work to expose such facts to the public beyond mere entertainment programs. Moreover, Prosecutors have to be strong and independent to bring violations to the court.

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