

# Ethiopia: An Alternative Approach to National Development

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## *Abstract:*

*The existing Ethiopian constitution that is based on ethnicity should be discarded and replaced by another constitution that recognizes territorial nationalism, which manifested itself in historic Ethiopia as regionalism or provincialism. The historically established status of the provinces of Arussie, Bale, Gondar, Harar, Shoa, Sidamo, Tigrai, Wollo, Wollega, and so on, would have to be restored. A federal constitution which corresponds to Ethiopia's historical experiences, but modified to suit its present conditions, and based on such principles as the rule of law, state secularism, a bill of rights, a system of checks and balances, political and economic pluralism, including the legalization of political parties that are organized on the basis not of ethnicity, but on political philosophies and ideologies, should be presented to the Ethiopian people. An Ethiopian state organized in such a manner would be stable. It would also be in a much better position to conquer poverty, to solve its problems with Eritrea, its former province, and to intensify development cooperation with all of its neighbours in order to help speed up sub- regional economic integration.*

*Why an alternative approach to national development? What is wrong with the existing system? Why should the present constitution be discarded? Since Eritrea was an Ethiopian Province, how did it become independent? These and similar other questions will have to be addressed first before proposing what measures should be taken to ameliorate the situation. For this reason, a brief account of the country's history needs to be provided.*

## **Language Groups and National Unity**

Given its geographic location, physical size, population composition, and resource endowments, Ethiopia could have played a crucial role in the economic transformation and integration of the countries of the Horn of Africa. However, its relative underdevelopment and the tenuous nature of its national unity have kept such a possibility out of its reach. At the root of its underdevelopment, which is itself the root cause of civil conflicts, is the lack of an enlightened and informed leadership which could have taken timely and decisive measures to address the country's developmental problems and guide its transition from one stage of development into another. Conflicts over power and resources are driven principally by economic interests and are sustained by them. The uneven distribution of resources and of infrastructure, as well as environmental degradation and widespread poverty, creates propitious ground for violence. Given state repression and politically motivated sociology, including the policy of divide and rule, economics is overlaid on ethnicity, and economic problems pass for ethnic conflicts.

The people of Ethiopia have more in common that unites them than is commonly understood. They have had centuries of experience of a common history and culture, which they enjoyed within a shared geographic space. Besides, the concept of kinship

and ethnicity has little meaning as a guide to the grouping of peoples in the country. Rather, one has to talk of peoples using a language and culture of Hamitic, Semitic, or Cushitic origin, or sometimes of a mixture of cultures.<sup>1</sup> Almost all scholars now agree that for at least 3,000 years and probably longer, Semitic, Cushitic, and Hamitic languages, all of which are related, have been spoken in the highlands of Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup>

The country's population of 53 million is diverse in geographic, religious and linguistic terms. According to the national census, the Oromos and Amharas account for 32.15%

### **Population of Ethiopia by Ethnic Groups:**

<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>Size of Population</u>	<u>% of Eth. Pop.</u>
Afar	979,367	1.84%
Agaw (Awingi & Kamyr)	555,722	1.05%
Amhara	16,007,933	30.13%
Ari	155,002	0.29%
Bench	173,125	0.33%
Gedeo	639,905	1.20%
Gumuz	121,487	0.23%
Gurage	2,290,274	4.31%
Hadiya	927,933	1.75%
Jebelawi	118,530	0.22%
Kaffacho	599,188	1.13%
Kemant	172,327	0.32%
Kembatta	499,825	0.94%
Kembatta Alaba	125,900	0.24%
Konso	153,419	0.29%
Koyra	107,595	0.20%
Oromo	17,080,318	32.15%
Sidama	1,842,314	3.47%
Somale	3,160,540	5.95%
Tigreans	3,284,568	6.18%
Wolaita	1,269,216	2.39%
Gamo	719,847	1.36%
Goffa	241,530	0.46%
Kulo/Dawro	331,483	0.62%
Yemsa	165,184	0.31%
Other Groups	1,413,318	2.66%
Foreigners	105,000	0.20%
Not Stated	5,827	0.01%

<sup>1</sup> Spencer Trimingham (1952). *Islam in Ethiopia*, (London: New York, Oxford University Press), P.5

<sup>2</sup> Donald L. Donham (1985), *Work and Power in Maale, Ethiopia* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press) p. 31.

Total (80)	53,132,276	100 %
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Source: CSA (1994)

and 30.13% of the population respectively. Others include the Tigreans (6.18%) and the Somalis (5.95%). The remaining groups represent only 25.59% of the country's population. While 60% of Ethiopians are Christian, 40% are Muslim.<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that there are more speakers of Amharic, probably some 75%, than those who ethnically would be considered Amharas.

The Ethiopian state grew organically out of history by cultural, political, military, administrative and economic processes. Indeed, a study of the political history of Ethiopia also shows that there has been very little antagonism between the various language groups. In the majority of times, the problem has been between the rulers and the ruled irrespective of the ethnic origin of the rulers.<sup>4</sup> Donald Levine, a widely recognized scholar of the Horn of Africa, maintains that Ethiopia with its political, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, should be considered a single cultural region for the following reasons: For the last two millennia at least, the peoples of Ethiopia have been in more or less constant interaction through trade, warfare, religious activities, migration, intermarriage, and exchange of special services, and that integration into a single polyethnic imperial system was brought about through the efforts of the Axumites, and later the Amharas, so that stability and unity in diversity find ready expression in Greater Ethiopia. He acknowledges what the Tigrean contribution has been to Ethiopia's unity, how the Tigreans maintained continued loyalty to the Ethiopian state, and how the Oromos who live throughout the country, revitalized the state, and provided the necessary social cement as well as the leadership, to connect the diverse peoples of Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup> Having examined what trait the three major language groups, i.e., the Amharas, Oromos, and Tigreans share in common, Levine concludes that by virtue of sharing similar cultural traditions and a common national heritage, the Ethiopians managed to survive the forces of internal disintegration and remain the only part of Africa not colonized by the Europeans. More recently, he noted that the peoples of Ethiopia are more similar and historically more connected than the different nationalities that composed the Soviet Union, that the evidence of their deep affinities is simply overwhelming, that Ethiopians outside the northern highlands need to have their traditions respected and their deprivations acknowledged, but the sense in which they belong to a common cultural area needs to be appreciated.<sup>6</sup>

The German ethnographer, Eike Haberland, also emphasizes that as a result of migrations, interactions, conquests, trade, intermarriage, and so on, the diverse peoples of Ethiopia have created a single geographic and cultural unit<sup>7</sup> Markakis too confirms

<sup>3</sup> The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, Central Statistical Office, Addis Ababa.

<sup>4</sup>.Solomon Terfa (March –April 1997) "Frustration –Aggression or What?" Ethiopia Review

<sup>5</sup>.Donald Levine (1974) Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press), PP.92 – 112.

<sup>6</sup>. Donald Levine (August 1992) "Greater Ethiopia Reconsidered", Ethiopia Review.

<sup>7</sup>. Eike Haberland (1963) Galla-Sud-Athiopians (Stuttgart:Kohlammer for Forbanins Institute).

that since the traditional Ethiopian conception of ethnic identity centres on religion, social distance in the south, as in the north, is primarily determined by religious differences. Where religion is not a factor, ethnic differences pose no great barrier to contact and even to integration. Markakis further contends that considerable integration has been achieved between Amharas and the other Ethiopians living in Shoa, Wollega, and Illubabor Provinces. Intermarriage here, he says, is not uncommon, even for members of the royal family.<sup>8</sup> But he could have also included Wollo, Gondar, Gojjam, Harar, and the other provinces, where integration has been going on for centuries. Loyalty for Oromos, for example, like for most Amharas, has been more regional and territorial, than ethnic. This is so because regional identification has had the first claim on people's loyalties. Every Gurage, Oromo, or Amhara who lives for example in Wollo would say "ine ye wollo liji negne", I am a citizen of Wollo. Every Oromo or Amhara who lives in Harar would say the same- I am a citizen of Harar. That is how the primary identification of Ethiopians has been formed.

Lipsky also affirms that there has been a great deal of intermarriage between Amharas and Gallas/Oromos. In Shoa province, for instance, he says, by the 1920s, observers reported great difficulty in telling the difference between Amharas and Gallas, and that the process of amalgamation has continued since then<sup>9</sup>. In fact, there is no region or province that can be said to be pure,<sup>10</sup> except perhaps the Ogaden and the Afar region.

If Robert Hess, Levine and others describe Ethiopia as a country that has preserved its nationhood and independence for more than 2,000 years,<sup>11</sup> and as an ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities,<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, there is, for instance, Herbert Lewis, who claims that the Ethiopian Empire was formed during the period that the British and French Empires were, and with many of the same means: through a series of conquests, some of them quite brutal<sup>13</sup> Merara Gudina, too, claims that much of the land that is inhabited by Oromos was incorporated into Ethiopia only during the reign of the Emperor Menelik.<sup>14</sup> Such misconceptions and distorted historical interpretations that are devoid of genuine scholarship have been repeated with deadening regularity. Before correcting the misconceptions, we must review the country's history, even if briefly.

### **Brief History**

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries of the world. Its ancient and modern history has been the history of the survival of a people who maintained their identity through stubborn conquest and reconquest of their neighbours or invaders, absorbing the better part of their culture, and producing a culture which could be called their own. Ethiopia

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<sup>8</sup> John Markakis (1974) Ethiopia: Anatomy of A Traditional Polity (Oxford: The Clarendon Press) P. 135-136

<sup>9</sup> George Lipsky (1962) Ethiopia, its People, its Society, its Culture (New Haven: HRAF Press) pp.30-35.

<sup>10</sup> . See "Ethiopia: the Federal Sham", The Economist, August 16, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hess (1970), Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy (London: Cornell University Press), pp. 30-50.

<sup>12</sup> Levine, Greater Ethiopia, P.26

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Lewis in Crawford Young's The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?

<sup>14</sup> See Tobia (Amharic Weekly) Addis Ababa, number 7, Megabit 1987=March 1995.

has been described as an “ethnic museum”.<sup>15</sup> But, the idea of Ethiopia is also bigger, larger and deeper than the sum total of its contradictions.

A Semitic language called Geez or Ethiopic, (still in use as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church), served as the official language of the first Ethiopian state of Axum, which flourished from 5 B.C. till 8 A.D.<sup>16</sup> With the decline of Axum, there arose a significant upheaval and migration of populations. Some stayed in the north, and others moved south. Those who stayed in the north developed Tigre and Tigrigna languages from Geez. Similarly, those who moved south developed Amharic and Guragegna languages from Geez. Civil disorders and the absence of even minimum standards of security are certain to have prevented social intercourse remote from one’s home and thus to have created regionally water-tight compartments<sup>17</sup>

Even if Geez had held a position in Ethiopia, which is similar to that of Latin in Europe in the Middle Ages, by the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was definitely transformed into Tigre and Tigrigna in the north, and Amharic and Guragegna in the south. Tigre and Tigrigna are as mutually unintelligible as Spanish and Italian. But if Geez is compared to Latin, then Tigre, which is spoken in present-day northern and western Eritrea, takes the place of Spanish, and Tigrigna – the language spoken in central Eritrea and Tigray, can assume the role of Italian, and Amharic, the national language of the country, can take the place of French. At a basic level, the bifurcation of the people into Tigreans and Amharas has not altered the overlap of values, consciousness of historical relationship, religious affiliation, and social organization. They stand relatively united in facing the pressure of other intermingling and surrounding people.<sup>18</sup> They take great pride in their history, deriving political and social unity from their historic role in the creation of such centres of civilization as Axum, Adulis, Yeha, Lalibela, and Gondar, and that though often rivals in the past for political supremacy, they have always maintained awareness of their common religion and descent from common Semitic forebears.<sup>19</sup>

With the decline of Axum, however, power shifted to the south, and with it began a southern expansion. The Ethiopian Kingdoms of Lalibella (1137-1270), of Shoa (1300-1600), and Gondar (1632-1885), became militant exponents of Axum’s culture. Amde Tsion (1314-1344), Negus Yeshaque (1414-1429), Zere Yacob (1434-1468), and Serse Dingil (1563-1597), could be described as the leaders who laid down the foundations of the Medieval Ethiopian state.<sup>20</sup> In their days, Ethiopia was well provided with iron, and its soldiers were armed in much the same fashion as European early medieval soldiers. The country also impressed travelers by the people’s skill in the arts and architecture and

<sup>15</sup>.Conti – Rossini (1928), *Storia d’Ethiopia*, Milan, Chapter 1.

<sup>16</sup>For the history of Axum, see J. Kobishchankov (1979) *Axum* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press); see also Munro – Hay (1991) *Aksum: An African Civilization of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

<sup>17</sup>. Edward Ullendorff (1955) *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia* (London:Taylor’s Press), p.8

<sup>18</sup> Lipsky, Ethiopia: its Peoples... P.35.

<sup>19</sup>IBID, Lipsky, P.35.

<sup>20</sup>See G.W.B. Huntingford Oxford: (1965) *The Glorious Victories of Amde Seyon*. See also J. Perruchon (translator), *Les Chroniques de Zar ‘a Ya’ eqob et de Ba eda Maryam*, (Paris: 1893). For Serse Dingil see C.F. Bechingham and G.W.B Huntingford *Some Records of Ethiopia* (London: 1954).

by the piety and learning of its churchmen.<sup>21</sup> It was also a vast country. In the north, it extended as far as Massawa and the Barka lowlands overlooking the Sudan plains. The southern provinces included the former kingdoms of Ifat, Fatajar, Dawaro, and Bali. Negus Yeshaque, for instance, who conquered the port of Zeila in 1415, also conquered the rich and fertile southwestern provinces including Kembata, Welamo, Sidamo and Kefa.<sup>22</sup> In a series of brilliant military campaigns, Serse Dingil, in turn, put an end to Harar as a military power, and to Ottoman Turkish expansion in the Red Sea coast of Ethiopia, except for the Port of Massawa, where the Ottoman Turkish presence was heavily fortified.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the foundations of the modern Ethiopian state were laid down by the Emperors Tewodors II (1855-1868), Yohannes IV (1872-1889), Menelik II (1889-1913), and Haile Selassie I (1930-1974).

That the Emperor Menelik<sup>24</sup> “conquered” – re-incorporated would be more appropriate, the southern and eastern provinces of today’s Ethiopia is a fact. However, a selective interpretation of the country’s history that is provided by such individuals as Herbert Lewis and Merara Gudina conveniently overlooks another fact, i.e. that these provinces were part and parcel of Ethiopia before the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and before the Muslim plunder and destruction of the country led by Ahmed-ibn-Ibrahim or Gragne (1527- 1548),<sup>25</sup> and before the Oromo migration from the Bale province of southern Ethiopia, to central, western, eastern and northern Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup> Herbert Lewis himself admits that the Oromos are to be found everywhere stretching from the Tigray Province of Northern Ethiopia to Kenya and from the Sudan border to the Somalia border, and recognizes that they occupy much of the best fertile land in the country.<sup>27</sup> But how was the land acquired? Wherever Oromos went, they raided and burned down settlements. In fact, as early as 1555, the Governor of Bale, Hamelmal, fought and resisted their expansion. Serse Dingil, who had built the churches of St George in Jimma and that of St Mary in Damot, in what is now called Wollega, defeated

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis H. Gann etc. Africa and the World (2000) Lanham. New York. Oxford: University Press of America) p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> Levine, Greater Ethiopia. Pp.73-76.

<sup>23</sup> Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, PP.70 – 79. See also Stephen Longrigg (1945), A Short History of Eritrea (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), P 86.

<sup>24</sup> See Harold Marcus (1975) The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1849 – 1913 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press).

<sup>25</sup> Trimingham describes the Muslim plunder of Ethiopia in these words: “The conquest was devastating in its destruction, irresistible in its ferocity, and appalling in its cruelties,” see Islam in Ethiopia, PP. 76 – 89. For an eye-witness account see Shihab Ad-Din in Futuh-al-Habasha (1559). It is slightly biased in favour of Muslims. It has been translated to French by Rene Basset as Etudes Sur L’ Histoire d’Ethiopie (Paris: 1882).

<sup>26</sup> For the origin of the Oromos and their expansion throughout Ethiopia, see BAHREY, History of the Galla (a) in E.A.W. Budge, A History of Ethiopia, 2 vols. (London:1928) (b) in C.A. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646 ( London, 1954), See also Herbert Lewis, “The Origin of the Galla and Somali, Journal of African History, VII, I (1966) PP27-46. According to him, the Galla/Oromo migration began in about 1530.

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Lewis, “Ethiopia Beginning Again”, (Sept. – Oct. 1991) African Report, Vol. 36. No. 5, PP.59-62.

them in Zewai in 1570.<sup>28</sup> The uprooting and displacement of non-Oromos during the course of Oromo migration and expansion in past centuries, which was fiercely resisted, and which is amply documented, seems to be overlooked. In the process, old Geez or Amharic names were replaced by Oromo names. For example, “Melza” became Wollo; “Mekane Selassie” changed to Woreilu; “Damot” became Wollega; and “Inarya” changed to Illubabor. While liberals condemn some of Menelik’s re-incorporation policy, some of which was brutal, right-wing nationalists would say that what Menelik and the other leaders of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia did was to recover land that belonged to Ethiopia in the first place, and may even add that the application of the principle of self-determination for Oromos cannot be different from the way other Ethiopians should exercise it.

By taking advantage of the exhaustion of the country that fought a fifteen-year defensive war against Ottoman supported Gagne, and driven by population explosion and by the cycle of the gada system, Oromos plundered Ethiopia. The Amharas, Tigreans, Agews, and Gurages in turn plundered the Oromos. So what? Getting into a debate as to who was the villain and who was the victim is a dead end. It would take the discussion nowhere. It must not be forgotten that war, conquest, enslavement, destruction, pillage, and massacre, make up all too much of the wretched chronicle of human history. Besides, which conqueror in history ever cared for the welfare and dignity of the vanquished? Ethiopian history cannot be an exception. Why should the present generation of Ethiopians be responsible for what happened four hundred or even one hundred years ago? There is no such thing as guilt by birth or by association. Bloodshed and destruction is to no one’s interest. The challenge for Ethiopians is to establish a system where the people can live in peace and in circumstances of equality of opportunity, and where they care for one another. There are enough sane and rational Afars, Amharas, Gurages, Oromos, Somalis, Tigreans, and so on, who can provide the necessary leadership. Certain regularities in human actions and certain laws in human behaviour have led to certain truths, which have now become universal: That there is a difference between what the individual wishes to become and what society permits him/her to be, and that gifted individuals come to the helm of leadership through the

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<sup>28</sup> Tekle Tsadik Mekuria (1960) Ye Ethiopia Tarik Ke Atse Lebne Dingil Eske Atse Tewodros, (History of Ethiopia from Emperor Lebne Dingil to Emperor Tewodros) (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education, 1968) p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> W. Connor (1972), “Nation-Building or Nation –Destroying, World Politics 24, 3 pp.319-355.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Nairn (1977) The Break –up of Britain: Crisis and New-Nationalism, (London:NLB), PP.306-328. Ethnicity and nationalism can be identified as strong attachments for any group of people who set themselves apart from other groups with whom they interact in terms of some distinctive criteria such as language. When taken to the extreme, the norms and values of ones own culture becomes the basis for judging others. The more so when individuals are born and raised in a culture which is the only one accessible to them, they lack the exposure to other cultural perspectives. Such ethnocentrism contribute to irrational prejudice and encourage hostility towards outsiders. Benedict Anderson (1991) Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. (London: New York, Verso), argues that nationalism and nations are inventions either of rulers or intellectuals who cannot justify themselves without getting their history wrong. Both tendencies, he says are ideologically constructed from sometimes arbitrary assumptions and unverified facts and obvious falsehoods.

normal channel if society has ways of discovering them. The challenge for all Ethiopians is therefore to devise such a system, which will permit the discovery of such individuals from whose integrity, modesty, intelligence, creativity, insight, and vision the country can benefit.

Responsible leaders recognize that “knowledge” in most cases is an assortment of facts, assumptions, interpretations, and conclusions. So, they are careful to limit their claims to certainty. In fact, they make a conscious effort to minimize the temptation to snap judgment and over statement. As a result, they do not attempt to express opinions on matters they know little or nothing about. Before they express their views, they take the trouble to be sure that it is responsibly framed. When they face challenging problems, they weigh and consider all possible options. If they do something wrong, they refuse to compound the mistake by pretending that what they did was “wise.” When they hear a valid argument, they accept it – even if that means rejecting a cherished personal view. Greatness to such people comes from admitting their limits. They know that to be human is to be fallible. They also avoid stereotyping and selective perceptions.

### **The Integrative Dilemma**

If the diverse people of Ethiopia have indeed succeeded in creating a single geographic and cultural unit, how is the present situation to be explained? Given the global reality, from the ethnic point of view, out of 185 states only 9.1% can be described as being homogenous.<sup>29</sup> So what is wrong if Ethiopia is multi-ethnic? History demonstrates that “ethnicity” and “nationalism” has always been the preoccupation of the intelligentsia.<sup>30</sup> The intelligentsia provides the historical, philosophical, ethnographic and geographical basis of ethnicity and nationalism. If necessary, the re-interpretation and invention of history will be carried out in such a way so as to stress and recreate the putatively “distinctive” and unique cultural heritage of the ethnic group that they want to mobilize. In the process, despite the available evidence, history will be rewritten to suit the purpose. To that end, the intelligentsia of minority ethnic elites have fought to fix nation-state boundaries around themselves, or to obtain self-determination for themselves, only to deny it to others.<sup>31</sup> If the intelligentsia feels alienated, it will not also hesitate to take power by other means, including ideological trickery for the creation of a secessionist state. Secession – a challenge to the orthodox interpretation of self-determination - has frequently been used by the intelligentsia to exercise its right to self-determination by breaking away either to join another state, or more often to establish an independent state of its own.<sup>32</sup> The world has yet to see an instance in which ethnic elites have established a new social order that does not duplicate the injustices of the old that they have displaced.<sup>33</sup> “National independence” means for them very good jobs and the creation of a national unit whose frontiers are closed to outside talent - a magnificent job monopoly for them.<sup>34</sup> If the truth has to be told, in a country like Ethiopia, it is not the

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<sup>31</sup> .Daniel Moynihan (1993) Pandemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics (Oxford: New York, Oxford University Press), PP. 107 – 126.

<sup>32</sup> . John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (1994), Nationalism (Oxford: New York, Oxford Press), p. 273.

<sup>33</sup> . Ayenew Ashagre (April 1966) “The Ethnicization of the Ethiopian State”, The Ethiopian Review.

<sup>34</sup> .ERNEST Gellner (1964) Thought and Change (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press),

peasants and workers of Eritrea, Tigrai, Wollo, or Wollega who brought all the social tension to the country. It is the so-called “educated” elite, whose “education” was supposed to have cultivated the innate goodness of man, but who have failed to live by what was expected of them. The great majority of the masses, especially the workers and peasants, are the last to be affected by ethnicity and nationalism.<sup>35</sup> The integrative dilemma comes not from tribal animosities or masses in revolt, but from conflicts among and within the various elites.<sup>36</sup> These conflicts are products of competition between ethnic elites for state power in which state centralism encourages alienated elites to raise ethnic demands.<sup>37</sup> The Ethiopian student activists of the 1960s and 1970s who have influenced current trends in the country, may have been motivated by egalitarian considerations. However, the solution they provided to what was called “the question of nationalities”, has led to sowing the seeds of divisive sentiments in today’s Ethiopia.

Forty years ago, for instance, Eritreans were not Eritreans, but Hamassien, Akele-guazaie, or Seraie. Thirty years ago, Oromos were not Oromos, but Mecha, Tulema, Arussie, or Borana. Likewise, ten years ago, Amharas were not Amharas but Gondere, Gojame, Bulge, Sainte, or simply Wolloye. Similarly, twenty years ago, Tigreans were not Tigreans, but Tembien, Agame, Enderta, or Shire. By identifying with a sub-culture, and by using it as a power base, some members of the intelligentsia have therefore attempted to climb the political ladder because the system blocked their ascendance to power.

In this regard, despite the historical, demographic, cultural and other factors which the people of Eritrea share with the rest of Ethiopia, there has been an attempt to re-write Eritrea’s history and in the process to distort it.<sup>38</sup> That what is now called “Eritrea” was the cradle of Ethiopian civilization, culture and statehood cannot be disputed. No professional anthropologist or historian has argued otherwise. After its occupation by Italy for some fifty years, the victorious world powers established a fact-finding mission and dispatched it to the former Italian colony in order to ascertain the wishes of the people. Accordingly, the Eritrean people freely expressed themselves to the Four Power Commission of Investigation (1946-1947),<sup>39</sup> and to the U.N. Commission on Eritrea (1950-1952).<sup>40</sup> On both counts, the majority of the Eritrean people expressed their

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PP.169-170.

<sup>35</sup>. Eric Hobsbawn (1990) Nations and Nationalism Since 1870: Program, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp,5-13.

<sup>36</sup>. Donald Levine (1965) Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press), p.150

<sup>37</sup>.See Brass, P. (1991) Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison (London: Sage Publications), PP. 8 – 9.

<sup>38</sup>. See for example Bereket Habte Selassie (1980) Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa (New York: Monthly Review Press). For comments on the distortion of Eritrea’s history by Eritrean political activists, see Patrick Gilkes (October 1999) “Eritrea Historiography and Mythology: African Affairs, The Journal of the Royal African Society, 90, No. 361.

<sup>39</sup>.See Four Power Commission of Investigation, Report on Eritrea, Chapter IV, 13 (reprinted) 10 March, 1959, PP. 13 - 92.

<sup>40</sup>.For the U.N., see Resolution 390 (V), Final Report of the U.N. Commission for Eritrea (GAOR).

desire to re-unite with Ethiopia. Similarly, during the British supervised elections of 1952, the Unionist Party - a party which did not campaign for federation or confederation, but for unconditional re-union with Ethiopia - won together with its allies 47 out of 66 seats of the Eritrean Assembly<sup>41</sup> These are the facts. But the conclusions made by several Eritrean writers in which they describe Ethiopia as a “colonialist” state, is, to say the least, highly speculative, without serious foundation in the available evidence. Such writers are politically motivated. They practice what is called “advocacy scholarship.” They pay little attention to the need for evidence. In fact, they often form their views first and then seek support for them later.

The great majority of Oromos take great pride in their Ethiopian identity. They have played and should continue to play distinguished roles in the peace and development of Ethiopia. Some of the Ethiopian leaders like Iyoas, Tinishu Ras Ali, Leji Eyassu, the Emperor Haile Selassie, and the various other kings and queens who ruled Ethiopia from Ankober, Debre Birhan, Gondar or Yeju, had Oromo lineage.<sup>42</sup> Despite this fact, some Oromo political activists recently wrote a letter to the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, claiming among other things, that out of the 400,000 square miles of the land mass of Ethiopia, some 375,000 sq. miles belongs to Oromos (see map), that their land produces 65% of the Ethiopian government revenue, and that they have been “colonized” by Ethiopia.<sup>43</sup> But the fact of the history is just as we discussed it earlier. The raids, the burning down of settlements, and the uprooting and displacement of the original inhabitants by Oromo expansion seems to have been totally overlooked.

The Emperor Haile Selassie is to be credited for helping liberate Ethiopia from the yoke of Italian Fascism, for establishing the educational system of the country, and for bringing to an end the isolation of Ethiopia by making it a member of the League of Nations (1923), the United Nations (1945), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), and for making Addis Ababa the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (1959), and the Organization of African Unity (1963). But in social terms, Ethiopia experienced no substantial changes during Haile Selassie’s fifty years of autocratic rule. He did introduce western education and elements of western bureaucratic structure and military organization. However, the changes that he brought about had only a limited effect in the rural areas where most Ethiopians lived. In fact, a United Nations study based on 1965 data showed that in education, Ethiopia’s ratio of primary school pupils to total population was only 1.68%. Similarly, in health care, the ratio was

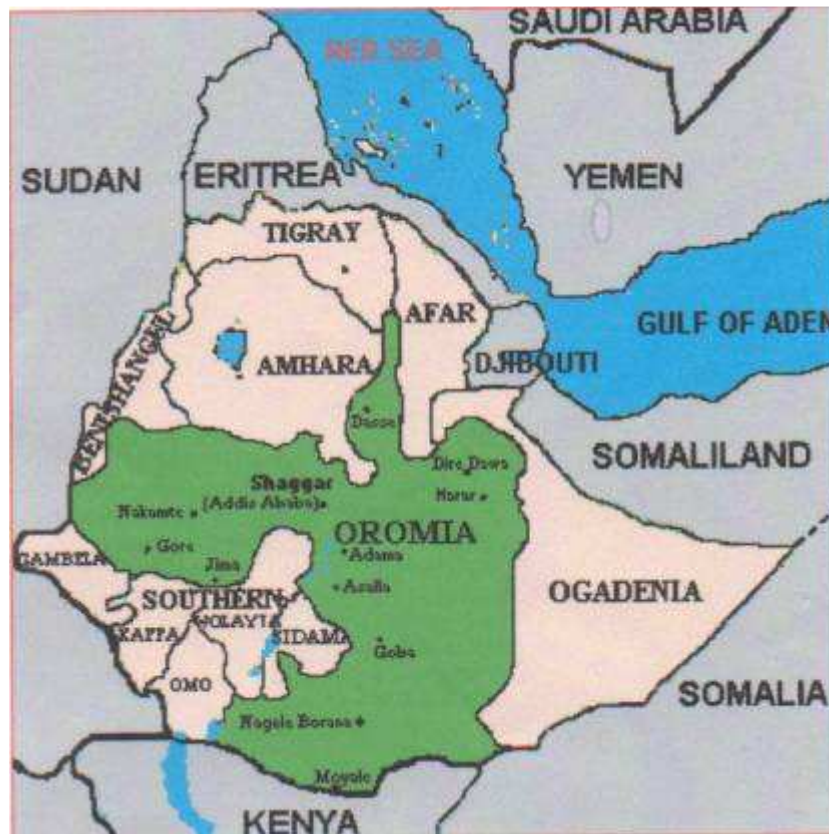
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<sup>41</sup>. Pankhurst E.Sylvia, and Pankhurst, Richard (1953) Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Last Phase of the Reunion Struggle, 1941-1952 (Essex:Woodford Green) p.281

<sup>42</sup>. Lej Eyassu’s father, Mohammed Ali was an Oromo chief from Wollo. Having renounced Islam, he was baptized and given the name Mikael by the Emperor Yohannes. Subsequently, he became one of the key provincial governors. He was married to Menelik’s daughter, Shewareged. Their son, Lej Eyassu succeeded Menelik. Likewise, Haile Selassie’s Oromo lineage can be traced to his great grandfather, Guddessa. Haile Selassie had also Tigrean lineage through his father, Ras Makonnen. See also H. Weld Blundell, The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769 – 1840 (Cambridge: 1922).

<sup>43</sup>. The information was collected from the Internet. See [www.oromo.org/org/osg/oromap2.htm](http://www.oromo.org/org/osg/oromap2.htm).

0.34 hospital beds per 1,000 populations. Life expectancies at birth were 34 years in 1960 and 38 years in 1975.<sup>44</sup>



## MAP OF OROMIA

Source: <http://www.oromo.org/osg/oromap2.htm>

Yet, the little that was done created a new set of challenges, which eventually overthrew both the Emperor and the old social structure, which he represented. As Bottomore notes: The actions of the dynastic elites have made attempts to bring about social and economic changes from above, but their actions are seriously restricted by the interest which they have as a class in maintaining the existing state of society. In order to carry out reform, they would have to permit and to encourage, much greater social mobility, to extend education rapidly, and to make their own elite positions more easily accessible to individuals and groups from the lower strata of society. It is doubtful if they can do this or counter the influence of the new elites, which are competing with them for mass support.<sup>45</sup> It is precisely because their elite positions were not made more easily

<sup>44</sup> .Cartwright, J. *Political Leadership in Africa* (1983) (St. Martin's Press: New York), P.257, see also *World Bank, World Development Indicators*, (World Bank, Washington D.C., 1978) Table 17.

<sup>45</sup> .Bottomore, T.B., *Elites and Society* (1964) Basic Book, Publishers: New York), P.90.

accessible that a destructive form of primordialism has gained currency in today's Ethiopia. To borrow the words of President Kennedy: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, will make violent revolution inevitable."

Haile Selassie's government was overthrown in 1974 and replaced by a leftist military junta led by Mengistu Haile Mariam. The new regime established a tightly organized monopolistic party structure and refused to tolerate other social forces which advocated political pluralism. Old patterns were systematically destroyed, traditional values and institutions were replaced with a new set of institutions, laws and standards largely copied from Eastern Europe, but in the main irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the Ethiopian masses. The post 1974 Ethiopian state simply copied a number of models from the USSR, and made it a law, as if it was an obligatory model for building socialism. Such institutions, which Ethiopia largely copied from the USSR, were characterized by a single command centre and by the absence of any mediating institutions between the citizen and the state. In effect, the autocratic and absolutist monarchist state was overthrown, only to be replaced by another absolutist state. Tenant/landlord relationships were abolished, only to be replaced by a system in which the peasants became the tenants of the state. Furthermore, the military regime banned political parties, independent trade unions, and the free press. Since it called itself "socialist", the major means of production, including rural land and urban houses, became state owned. In such a set-up, whatever the ruling military officers did went to increase the extractive capacity of the state, and to diminish the productive capacity of the population. The result was the establishment of a state whose abuse of power had no parallel or precedence in the country's history. Widespread arbitrary arrests, torture, summary executions, mass displacement, long-term detention without trial, and harsh prison conditions became the order of the day.<sup>46</sup>

But to its credit, the military government also expanded elementary and secondary school education at unprecedented rates. The massive literacy programme in which it took the initiative, involving some seven million adults, or nearly half of the adult population, was awarded a UNESCO prize. The defeat and eviction of the invading armed forces of Somalia from Ethiopian territory that they had occupied in 1978, and that of the EPLF and its eventual confinement to the mountain stronghold of Nacfa (1978-1982), should also be recognized. Medical care and provision of water supplies to rural areas had also been dramatically improved. The land reform programme too needs to be mentioned. There was some degree of urbanization and industrialization. Against this background, however, we need to note the fact that some 60 of the leading government officials, including the Emperor Haile Selassie, Prime Ministers Aklilou Habte Wold, and Endalkatchew Makonnen, as well as General Aman Mikael Andom were murdered by the regime. Some 40,000 educated Ethiopians were forced into exile.

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<sup>46</sup> .For a historical approach to the study of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, see Andargatchew Tiruneh (1993) The Ethiopian Revolution 1974 – 1987, a transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). See also Teferra Haile-Selasie (1997) The Ethiopian Revolution 1974 – 1991 from a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy (Kegan Paul International: London and New York). See also Amnesty International Reports of 1977, 1978, 1980 and 1989.

The death of some 5,000 – 10,000 youths supposed to have been involved in the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and the disappearance of some 10,000 to 40,000 people into political prisons, should also not be forgotten.<sup>47</sup>

Since the regime lacked even a semblance of legitimacy, it wanted to solve all social, economic and political problems with the iron fist, which resulted in ever-mounting military expenditures. In 1974, Ethiopia’s defense budget was U.S. \$51 million. By 1988, it had reached a level of U.S. \$724 million – a fourteen-fold increase. Debt servicing was \$24.8 million in 1974. However, by 1988 it had increased to \$256 million – a ten fold increase-making it almost impossible for the country to accumulate capital. During the same period, agricultural production dropped by 16.3%.<sup>48</sup>

For seventeen years, Ethiopians endured one of the most appalling and horrendous dictatorships ever. The overthrow of that dictatorship by a protracted people’s struggle in May 1991 was hoped to bring the long awaited peace, democracy and reconciliation.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it was also hoped that a genuinely democratic system of government would make law constitutional and institutional rather than personal. It was hoped that the future government would be based on the separation of powers, accountability, a bill of rights, state secularism, political and economic pluralism, and respect for human rights, and that, individuals and groups would be free to differ, and to organize themselves around differing ideas to enhance their legitimate individual and collective interests, that nationalized property including land and urban housing would be returned back to the original owners, and that political parties would be legalized to contest elections. Many Ethiopians honestly believed that such a democratic system of government would also restore Eritrea’s federal status, and extend the same status to the other provinces of Ethiopia and make the country a genuine federal republic. By means of such a political and administrative structure, it was also hoped that the country’s unity and territorial integrity would be maintained and development efforts intensified.

### **The Unexpected Regime**

To the dismay of most Ethiopians, however, an unexpected regime, which is still busy tearing down the fabric that holds the country together, came to power. The organization which bases itself on ethnicity, and which calls itself the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which came to power in 1991, had its background in Marxism/Leninism in which the constitution of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) even made it a regulation that members submit written applications to be allowed to express new ideas.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Historical Background**

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<sup>47</sup>. J. Cartwright (1983) Political Leadership in Africa (St. Martin’s Press, New York). P. 275.

<sup>48</sup>. World Bank Report 1989 ; World Development Report 1989. See also United Nations Economic Commissions for Africa (1971) Economic Survey of Africa, Vol. III, PP.15 –16.

<sup>49</sup>. Solomon Terfa, “Why Another Civil War ?”, Ethiopian Review, September 1992.

<sup>50</sup>. See Berhane Kahsay “ The National Movement in Tigray: Myths and Realities”, Feb. 1991, and unpublished essay by a former TPLF member.

In 1972-1973, a group of Tigreans had created a clandestine association known as Mahber politika, or political association, which shortly came to be known as the Tigray Liberation Front. Its members were largely trained and armed by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)<sup>51</sup> Shortly thereafter, well-known individuals within the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) became actively involved in organizing what was to become the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The EPLF provided the necessary military training and the arms. In fact, a well-known long time EPLF operative, Meharie Haile, otherwise known as Mussie Barake, became a member of the Central Committee of the TPLF, and its real military commander. Subsequently, other EPLF functionaries infiltrated the organization, slowly, but surely.<sup>52</sup> The involvement of both Eritrean movements in Tigray was not by accident. For cultural and political reasons, the two Eritrean organizations were at loggerheads with one another. The political and military need for enlisting allies outside of Eritrea seems to have been uppermost. The urgency to split the Ethiopian army, to diffuse its area of military operations by engaging it in various regions, and to sap its energy, in so far as the two Eritrean organizations were battling it, were some of the motives. Whether pressured or inspired by unbridled opportunism, the TPLF echoed the EPLF position and began to present the Eritrean conflict as a "colonial question". The 320-page book titled Kalsi Hzbi Ertra, Kabey Nabey, that Meles Zenawi wrote supporting Eritrean independence, would be enough to show the extent of the commitment of the TPLF to the EPLF.<sup>53</sup> As if that was not enough, the TPLF also added that it was similarly fighting against "Ethiopian colonialism" in Tigray, and therefore struggling for the establishment of the "Democratic Republic of Tigray".<sup>54</sup>

Having liquidated the TLF with the assistance of the EPLF, the TPLF had now to compete with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), whose largely Tigrigna-speaking leadership pursued a non-ethnic revolutionary programme. In the late 1970s, with the support of the EPLF, the TPLF fought pitched battles against the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRP), and prevailed with its ethnically exclusive programme in Tigray.<sup>55</sup> It was also after defeating the EPRP, that the TPLF was now fully involved in cooperating with the EPLF to defeat the ELF and to marginalize it militarily in Eritrean politics. That done, both organizations now mobilized their efforts and energies to battling the Ethiopian army. This was demonstrated in Enda Selassie in Tigray, on February 19, 1987, when the EPLF forces

<sup>51</sup>. Christopher Clapham, Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia (Cambridge, 1988), P. 209.

<sup>52</sup>. The ELF was established by Egypt in 1959 for advancing Cairo's geo-strategic objectives at Ethiopia's expense. The EPLF in turn emerged in the early 1970's with the discreet support provided by Haile Selassie's Government to counter the persecution of Eritrean Christians by the Muslim dominated ELF. The ELF and EPLE fought thereafter pitched battles. The support provided by the TPLF to the EPLF was crucial in the defeat of the ELF.

<sup>53</sup> Kalsi Hzbi Ertra, Kkabey Nabey (Tigrigna) Eritrean People's Struggle: From Where to Where?, An Assessment TPLF, 1979.

<sup>54</sup>. For the relations of the TPLF and EPLF, see John Young (March 1996) "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: a history of tensions and pragmatism," in the Journal of Modern African Studies (Cambridge), 34, 1, PP. 105 – 120.

<sup>55</sup>. See Tesfya Wassy, (March, 1995) "EPRDF's Quest for Legitimacy", Ethiopian Register.

fully participated in the fight against the Ethiopian army.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, the TPLF fought in Eritrea in support of the EPLF, most notably in 1982, when many Tigreans perished in Nakfa. As an acute observer of the scene, Alem Abay, noted:

The price the Tigreans paid for Eritrea remains unappreciated. It would not be too difficult to imagine the course of the Eritrean revolution had the ELF not been pushed out of Eritrea. When the EPLF was pinned down by Mengistu's army in Nakfa, the Tigrean fighters arrived for its rescue twice. During the "Red Star Campaign" of 1982, for instance, Tigreans fought in Nakfa on the Eritrean side, for nine months. Furthermore, without the supreme sacrifice of the Tigreans, the demand for Eritrean independence would have been little more than a bargaining chip for a negotiated settlement.<sup>57</sup>

### **How the TPLF came to Power**

Why did the Tigreans pay the supreme sacrifice for Eritrea's independence?

Some observers argue that judged by its record, the TPLF was commissioned by the EPLF to thwart the consolidation and emergence of a modern and unified Ethiopian state on the southern flank of the Red Sea. The ambition of the EPLF leadership, they say, is to destroy Ethiopia, and to make Eritrea the successor state, and that the TPLF, and especially its Secretary General, Meles Zenawi, is nothing but a satellite lackey of the EPLF.<sup>58</sup> It is the same TPLF, they say, that has declared war on Ethiopian nationalism, which refuses to acknowledge the reality of Ethiopia's historic existence as a multi-ethnic state, that has repudiated the symbolism of historic Ethiopia, and that has now taken power in the country. Many Ethiopians seriously believe that its mission is to destroy the country from within. And how did it come to power anyway?

The USA had been seeking a renewal of its ties with Ethiopia – a country that was once Washington's most important client on the African continent, and despite its close relations with the Soviet Union, still considered the most attractive of all the countries of the region. Among the reasons cited were the following: Ethiopia's large population and economic potential, the historic nature of U.S.-Ethiopian ties, the ability of the Ethiopian bureaucracy to get the job done, a strategic location bordering the Red Sea, a Christian heritage that could serve as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalist movements, and Ethiopia's role as host to the headquarters of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).<sup>59</sup> To that end, in an

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<sup>56</sup>.<sup>1</sup> See the Press Release of the TPLF, 22 February 1989 in the Horn of Africa Bulletin 1, No.2, March 1989.

<sup>57</sup>. Alem Abay (1993) "An Unappreciated Gift Horse in the Mouth", The Ethiopian Times, March/April 1, No. 2

<sup>58</sup>. Meles Zenawi remains a controversial politician. Ethiopians are not particularly fond of him. Nor is he trusted. For instance, he is alleged to have instructed the authorities of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia to transfer 1.3 billion birr to the authorities in Asmara without the knowledge of the Council of Ministers is indicative of the extent of his commitment to the EPLF. The respect and devotion Ethiopians have for their flag is proverbial. Meles called the flag "a piece of rag". Despite the fact that Ethiopia is considered by historians as one of the ancient civilizations in the world, he claims that its

effort to find a peaceful settlement to the civil war in Ethiopia, former President Jimmy Carter was involved as a mediator. The then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in the Bush administration, Herman Cohen, too visited Addis Ababa in August 1989. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Irvin Hicks; Robert C. Frasure, a member of the National Security Council; and former Senator Rudy Boschwitz were also in Addis Ababa in 1991 for the same purpose. In the June 1989 meeting between Herman Cohen and Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin, Ethiopia figured prominently.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, thanks to arrangements made for him by the USA and Canada, Mengistu Haile Mariam fled to Zimbabwe on May 21, 1991. Following the June 1991 U.S.-brokered London peace talks composed of the representatives of the Ethiopian Government, the EPLF, the TPLF, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a conference which was chaired by Herman Cohen, who advanced the idea of Eritrean independence, units of the TPLF were given the green light by the USA Government to enter Addis Ababa. According to Newsweek:

Throwing stones and wielding clubs, demonstrators blamed the United States for installing new rulers in the capital and supporting the separation of Eritrea, Ethiopia's Red Sea province. More than 2,000 people stormed the U.S. Embassy, waving placards and chanting anti-American slogans. When the crowd charged a car flying a U.S. flag, Tigrean rebels opened fire, killing a demonstrator and wounding several others. At the heart of the Ethiopian rage was the feeling that the U.S. was abetting the break-up of their country. Angry marchers in Addis Ababa complained of being cut off from their country's future. The real bombshell that day came out of London, when Cohen, a 35-year veteran of the foreign service, had to jettison original plans and reverse decades of U.S. policy by calling a referendum on independence for Eritrea. Cohen spoke with Tigrean rebel leader Meles Zenawi (telling him) that rebel forces should move on the capital as soon as possible. Still, U.S. involvement in Ethiopia has not exactly been a model of artful diplomacy.<sup>61</sup>

Why the U.S. had to reverse its established policy regarding the maintenance of Ethiopia's territorial integrity, or in whose interest the country was being broken-up, or why, as Christopher Clapham put it, "everyone who counts in a deeper sense in Ethiopia has been left out of all this,"<sup>62</sup> is still quite a mystery. In fact, Tesfaye Dinka, the Ethiopian Prime Minister of the time and delegate to the London talks, who was enraged

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history as a state was only one hundred years old, and that the obelisks of Axum have no relevance to the people of Wollega. His critics firmly believe that by declaring war on Ethiopian nationalism and its symbols, he is a planted agent operating from within to disintegrate the country.

<sup>59</sup>.Peter Schraeder (1994): United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), PP.174 - 183

<sup>60</sup>.IBID, PP.165, 255.

<sup>61</sup>.See "Cohen's Coup in Ethiopia", Newsweek, June 10, 1991, P. 33. See also the Proposed Agreement of the US Government and the Counter Proposal of the Delegation of the Ethiopian Government in Tefferra Haile-Selassie (1997) The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991 (London and New York: Kegan Paul International,), pp. 315-317.

by the decision, said: “Residents of Addis Ababa would violently resist any rebel advance,” and in protest, he pulled out of the talks.<sup>63</sup>

Serious errors and misjudgments made by the Western Powers, particularly Germany and the USA, helped to ignite the break-up of Yugoslavia. Similar errors of judgment on the part of the USA and Britain contributed to the present tragedy in Ethiopia.

Why were not the Ethiopian people allowed to participate in charting their own destiny? Does the rule of law proclaim that Ethiopians should be governed by a different set of standards than the rest of the world? Why were not they allowed to exercise their right to self-determination? Was the “red flag” of the so-called EPLF and TPLF a convenient mask designed to deceive the public? Were the two organizations being rewarded for the role they played in destabilizing the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam? Many Ethiopians are now constantly asking such questions.

### **Eritrea’s Independence**

It was, in this capacity, that the “transitional” government of Ethiopia, exceeding its mandate, took measures that continue to endanger the peace and security of the Ethiopian state. Among other things, the following is what the regime wrote to the U.N. Secretary General:

The future status of Eritrea should be decided in a referendum. Both the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and the Provisional Government of Eritrea have registered their commitment to respect the results of the referendum. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia wishes to bring to your attention the need to initiate appropriate measures to enable the U.N. to play its role and to supervise the referendum.<sup>64</sup>

By definition, a transitional government can only serve a temporary agenda. It means that it has no mandate to engage itself on questions of a fundamental nature that can affect the population on a long-term basis. Moreover, the United Nations had already disposed itself of the Eritrean problem in 1952. Does it have the mandate to supervise again another referendum? Why is not that done in several other countries and places like Puerto Rico, which were disposed of by the U.N. in circumstances similar to that of Eritrea? If the TPLF regime were truly Ethiopian, it would have been guided by Ethiopia’s national interest. What was most astonishing was that, apart from independence, the people of Eritrea were not given other choices, including federation, confederation, or autonomy, for which the EPLF itself had campaigned for years. The actions taken by the so-called Transitional Government of Ethiopia indicates how much influence the EPLF has over the TPLF. As the one time editor of The Ethiopian Commentator, Haile Mariam Abebe pointed out: “Before anything else, the people

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<sup>62</sup>.IBID, Newsweek.

<sup>63</sup>.IBID, Newsweek

living in the region called “Eritrea” are, Tigreans. The idea of “Tigreans” and “Eritreans” as separate peoples, was never ours...”<sup>65</sup>

In 1992, the “transitional government” forcefully annexed seven fertile districts from Gondar and Wollo and incorporated them to Tigray. These districts have never been part of Tigray Province. They include Humera, Tselemt, Wolkait and Tsegede, which historically belonged to Gondar. The others are Raya Azebo, Alamata and Ofla, which were part of Wollo Province. In order to change the demographic composition of the annexed districts, Tigrean refugee returnees from the Sudan and demobilized TPLF soldiers were settled in them. The language of instruction in primary schools also changed from Amharic to Tigrigna. Eventually, the Amharic speaking natives of the districts were forcefully evicted from their lands. They became either cheap farm labourers on their own farms, or street beggars in such towns as Gondar, Dessie and Bahir Dar. Some joined a peasant armed uprising called "Kefagne," that continues to struggle against the regime in power.<sup>66</sup>

In early January 1993, the TPLF regime brutally suppressed demonstrations which were designed to protest the involvement of the U.N. in the Eritrean independence process. The demonstrators were challenging the mandate of the so-called TPLF and the EPLF to initiate the referendum. None of them are democratically elected by the people to be entrusted with such a responsibility. Even if the referendum was to be accepted as an “expression” of the will of the people, it is still a product of essentially guerrilla organizations – unelected and self- appointed at that, on whose initiative much depended. A future democratically elected government of Ethiopia can raise the Eritrean question on perfect legal grounds.

### **Bantustanization**

As if its stand on Eritrea was not enough, the regime, which, many Ethiopians describe as “mercenary”, came out with its ethnic agenda. No government in the world has devolved powers on ethnic basis. Nor has any government explicitly granted its constituent parts the legal right to secede. In fact, ethnicity-based parties are banned in many countries of the world. Even the leading democratic countries like the USA, Britain, France and Sweden, do not carry such provisions in their constitutions. Groups which entertain such ideas are considered dangers to public peace and security. South Africa, for instance, has tried to take ethnicity out of politics. But in Ethiopia, ethnicity is openly accepted and encouraged, to the extent that the regime insists that it be the basis of all political affiliation.<sup>67</sup> And this is happening in a country where there are millions of Ethiopians who are not even aware to which ethnic group they belong, where millions of Ethiopians are products of mixed marriages, and where there are millions who have broken down the barriers of ethnicity and evolved into Pan-Ethiopian patriots

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<sup>64</sup>.Some observers argue that by going out of its mandate, the TPLF wrote such a letter in order to help the EPLF. See David Pool “Eritrean Independence: The Legacy of the Dargue and the Politics of Reconstruction”, *African Affairs*, 1992 / 1993, pp.389-402.

<sup>65</sup>.See the editorial, (December 1993) *Ethiopian Commentator*, Haile Mariam Abebe.

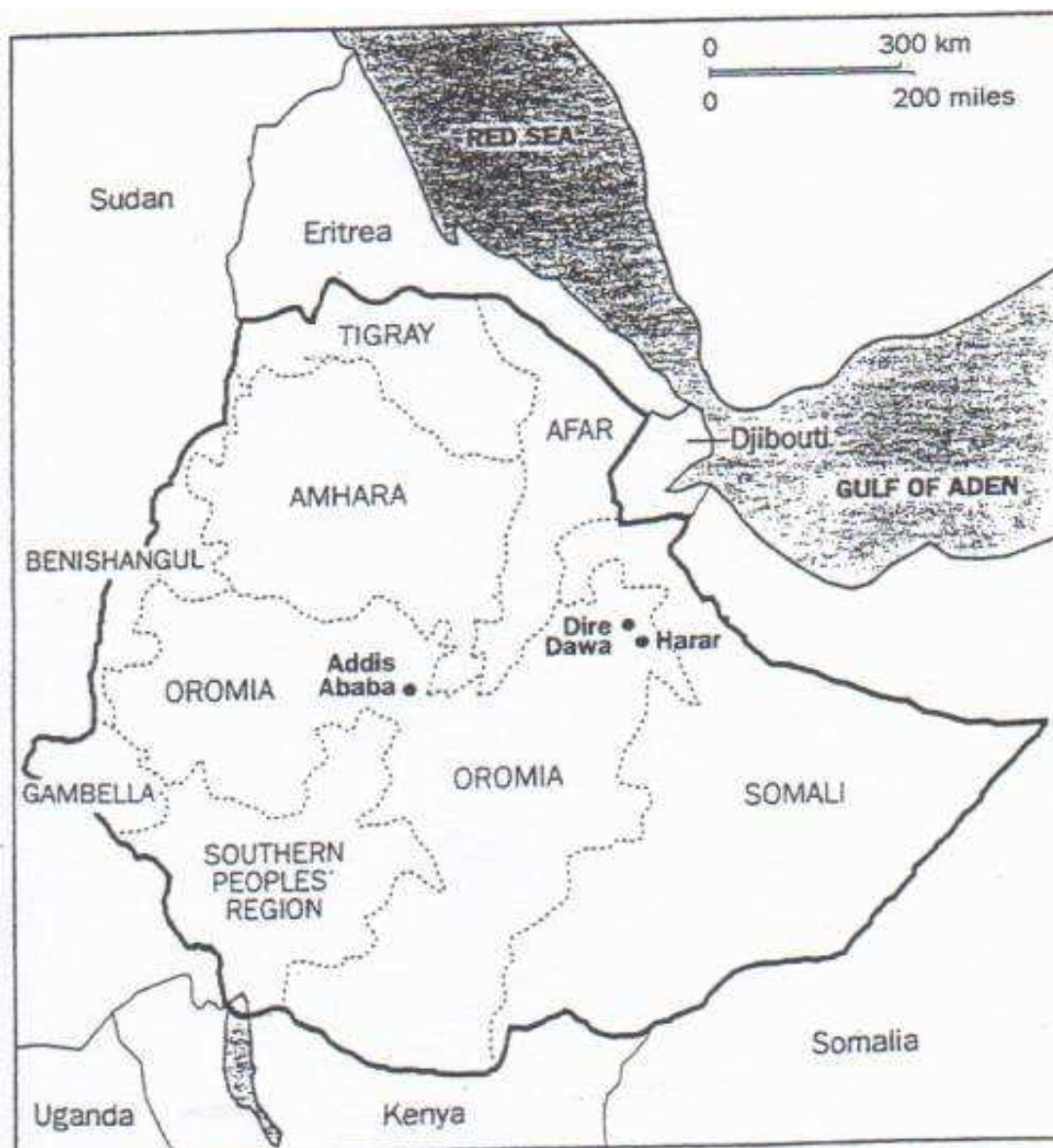
<sup>66</sup>.*Ethiopian Register*, vol. 6, no.5, Avon, Minnesota, January 1999, p.3

or nationalists. To which state do these millions belong? The only state they know is Ethiopia. The regime used language as the basis of ethnic affiliation and has re-drawn the boundaries of administrative regions along language lines. It created eight ethnic-based states, with the promise that new ones may be created when necessary. Here too, it should be noted that the setting up of internal administrative boundaries is too important a national question to be decided upon by a government that was only “transitional”, and without the people’s mandate. In any event, the new constitution couched in the old Soviet terminology, established the so-called Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, comprised of eight ethnically based regions or states, namely: Afar, Amhara, Ben-shangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Oromia, Somali, Southern Ethiopia Peoples and Tigray. Language was the major criteria utilized in drawing up the boundaries. Article 39 of the constitution states:

Every nation, nationality or people in Ethiopia shall have the unrestricted right to self-determination up to secession; shall have the right to speak, write and develop its languages...<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>.See “The Caravan Passes On”, The Economist, May 6, 1995, p.42.



### **THE TPLF CREATED ETHNIC ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS**

Yet, with the exception of the Afar and Somali regions that are relatively homogeneous, all have significant minority ethnic groups. These include Amhara ( Agew, Kimant, Felasha, Oromo, Tigrean); Oromia ( Amhara, Gurage, Tigrean, Sidama etc.); Tigray (Amhara, Oromo, Kunama, Erob). In the Southern Nations alone, there are over fifty tribal groups. If the TPLF practices what it preaches, it would have allowed the Kunama and the Irob of Tigray Province, as well as the people of Northern and Northwestern Gondar and Wollo, whose territories have been forcefully annexed to Tigray, to exercise their right to self-determination. Likewise, its mentor, the EPLF, could have done the same to Afars, the Kunama, the Tigre, the Ben Amir, Bilen and the other nationalities in Eritrea. But more fundamentally, the use of the linguistic criterion, to the virtual

exclusion of others is, to say the least, a disaster. In drawing the boundaries little attention was given to such fundamental questions as history, geographic size, population density, economic and administrative viability, agriculture and resource base, level of development of the infrastructure, ability to generate tax revenue, and administrative capacity.<sup>69</sup> While a consolidated democracy like France or Belgium can live with some uncertainty regarding the future boundaries of the state, such uncertainty can only be fatal for a country like Ethiopia. Until the coming to power of the current regime, Ethiopia used to be one of the few stable countries in the region. However, once the regime started to divide the people into ethnic-based enclaves, each purposely pitted against the other, tensions among ethnic groups began to increase dramatically over the past several years.<sup>70</sup> The ill-conceived policy has generated internal violence because ethnic majorities in some states have become intolerant towards minority groups in their jurisdictions, as has been the case in the Southern Peoples' Administrative Region and in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Regional-based ethnicity is also a development risk because it limits the movement of capital and labour required to take advantage of economic opportunities, creates entitlement that can block development, and leads to irrational use of energy and other resources.<sup>71</sup> The farms in Humera and the Awash Valley for instance used to provide employment opportunities for 100,000 and 150,000 workers respectively. The workers came from all over the country. The ethnic policy of the present regime discourages labour mobility. It would in fact perpetuate and even aggravate regional and ethnic inequality. The manner with which the TPLF government was going about it suggested not so much a genuine desire to address the wishes of the various ethnic groups, but to sow and fan discord among them,<sup>72</sup> which would greatly please Machiavelli. Indeed, what is going on in Ethiopia today is not multiculturalism, but a means of promoting divisiveness along cultural lines.

In point of fact, what has been done has led to disputes, often violent ones, among various groups over territorial boundaries, often showing the insufficiency of using a single criterion such as language to define these boundaries and, sometimes, indicating the hegemonic ambitions of the ethnic leaders of some of the groups. Persons judged to belong to the "wrong" ethnic group are being expelled from their lands, robbed of their properties, and dismissed from their jobs. The only people who are above such persecutions are the members of the ruling elite.

The drawing of ethnic boundaries and the associated fanning of intra-ethnic hatred have created the sad situation in which many Ethiopian citizens find themselves. They are made to suffer for no other reason than they happen to speak the "wrong" language. Individual citizens who claimed Amharic as the only language that they spoke suddenly became suspect, real "threats" to democracy and justice. Many others who claimed mixed ethnic parentage found themselves in the impossible position of having to disown one half of their heritage in order to survive TPLF's ethnic cleansing. As a result, entire

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<sup>68</sup>.The critics of the regime claim that this article has been incorporated into the constitution to justify Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia, and to encourage other regions to do so.

<sup>69</sup>. John Cohen (1995) "Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia", *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.2, No.2. P.164

<sup>70</sup>. Donald Levine, "Paul Henze and the EPRDF", *Ethiopian Review*, January-February, 1997.

<sup>71</sup>.John Cohen, "Ethnic Federalism", P.164.

communities, long settled, and in many ways indistinguishable from the local community, have been wiped out.

According to Human Rights Watch, the causes of the ethnic disputes are to be found in the new ideology of self-determination, which has encouraged an upsurge in ethnic nationalism [expressed] in local disputes over land, water, and grazing rights. The displacement of 60,000 Amharic-speaking Muslims from the Diba Tena and Mandura Guanga woredas of Gojjam province following an attack by the Beni Shangul ethnic group is a case in point.<sup>73</sup> The 1995 Conflicts between Gujis and Sidamas ended up with the intervention of federal forces. In the 1995 and 1999 Oromo- Somali conflicts, numerous people were killed. In 2001, the so-called Oromo-Amhara conflict in Eastern Wollega, in reality instigated by the regime, resulted in the death of many lives and in the displacement of 12,000 Amharic speaking Ethiopians. Another case in point is the attack on non-Oromos in Arussie in which 60 people were killed, 60 were wounded, 6205 heads of cattle were looted, 64 houses were destroyed, and crops on 247 hectares of land were set on fire, and 3,000 persons of Gurage ethnic background were displaced and hundreds of them killed.<sup>74</sup> In Arba Gugu region, 320,000 Amharas were displaced and hundreds of them killed. Villagers were burned alive. Some 150 Christians were killed in Arba Gugu and a further 46 were murdered in Harar.<sup>75</sup>

A conflict between the Geri and Jaarso clans displaced 125, 000 people near Jijiga, while 45,000 were affected by the fighting between the Yabere and Issaq. In the far south of the country, there has been fighting between the Borana Oromo and the Marehan Somali. Other local ethnic groups, such as the Guji, have also been drawn in. The fighting caused tens of thousands of refugees to flee to nearby Kenya. In the west, ethnic Annuak and Nuer have clashed and Amhara settlers have been attacked in Wollega. An unknown number of highlanders were also killed in a Nuer attack on a market place.<sup>76</sup>

For example, in the Oromiya State in 1999, the regional government required that all primary schools adopt Oromiffa as the language of instruction. This drew protests from groups that reside there, but whose mother tongue is not Oromiffa and who believed that their children would be at a disadvantage. Those who protested, including teachers and government workers, have had their employment terminated.

Similarly, in May 1999, local administrators in the Southern Nations and Nationalities informed elementary and high school teachers that new textbooks would be used in the North Omo zone, which merged four closely related languages spoken in the zone: Welayita, Gamo, Goffa, and Dawro. Neither local communities nor teachers had been

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<sup>72</sup>.See the extremely interesting analysis provided by Fikre Tolossa, "A Historical Explanation as to Why Members and Supporters of the TPLF are Ethnocentric", *Ethiopian Review*, January – February, 1997.

<sup>73</sup>.See *Human Rights Watch Annual Report*, 1993.

<sup>74</sup>.IBID. See also *Human Rights Watch Annual Report*, 1994, 1996, 1999,2000.

<sup>75</sup>.IBID, Human Rights. 1993.

consulted before the decision was made to introduce the new textbooks. Subsequently, police arrested those teachers who objected to the new language. The arrests led to widespread demonstrations and rioting in the town of Sodo, during which police killed ten people, injured hundreds, and arrested and detained as many as 1,000 others. Most of those arrested were released, but some 20 elders, teachers, and civil servants were charged with subversion and remained in prison at year's end because they could not make bail of between \$6,000 and \$12,500 (50,000 and 100,000 birr). As a result of this conflict, Welayita was used as the language of instruction in schools during the year, and Welayita became its own zone in November.

There were also reports of clashes between the Oromo Borana community and ethnic Somali Garre pastoralists in the southeast, which reportedly resulted in the death of some 40 persons and the theft of hundreds of livestock. There were reports of a clash over grazing and watering rights between the two communities, which reportedly resulted in the killing of at least 150 people and injuries to many others.

Let alone political parties, even civic organizations cannot be allowed to function unless they are organized on an ethnic basis. It has become illegal for Ethiopians to register as Ethiopians and to vote. Individuals who identify with Ethiopia, and who insist that they can only vote as Ethiopians since they do not belong to any ethnic group, cannot vote. The truth is, Pan-Ethiopian nationalism and ethnic nationalism cannot co-exist in the same political space for a long time. The latter does not foster a sense of loyalty to the larger political community.<sup>77</sup> As an acute observer of the scene notes: Ethnicization has literally blurred the distinction between Ethiopian and Tigrean interests. If you happen to be an Amhara, no matter how much you cherish justice and democracy, you cannot represent Tigreans. To assume that all members of an ethnic group, be they peasants, workers or capitalists, think alike is not rational.<sup>78</sup>

As a result of the politicization of ethnicity and the destructive policy of bantustanization that the TPLF has introduced in Ethiopian politics, ethnicity is fostering parochial relationships. It is interfering with the development of rational and efficient forms of political and economic administration. Ethnicity is also impeding the optimum harnessing of human and non-human resources, and has become a serious barrier to factor mobility.<sup>79</sup>

The creation of ethnic boundaries for the Afars, Somalis, Oromos, Tigreans, Amharas, and so on, has ominous implications for the peace and development of not only Ethiopia, but also of Eritrea, the Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and beyond, where common ethnic groups straddle across common borders. To advance the type of policy on ethnicity, as the TPLF has done, is to be totally irresponsible. Ethiopians cannot make economic and social progress in the absence of basic security. Security in turn is threatened by a policy promoted by a regime that gambles in calculated chaos, and that

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<sup>76</sup>.IBID.

<sup>77</sup>.Alemante G.Selassie: "The Pitfalls of Ethnic Federation", Ethiopian Register, June 1995.

<sup>78</sup>.Messay Kebede, "Ethnic Politics and the Cracks in the Dry Ground of the TPLF", Addis Tribune, 04/27/01.

is not accountable to logic, fair play, or sense of decency. Whatever happens to Ethiopia is not going to take place in a sealed territorial container. It will take others down with it.

The explanation provided by the regime's critics is that the TPLF's obsession with the politics of ethnicity and its determination to alter the structure of the state is designed in such a way that nothing remains of what they perceive as the domination of the Amhara over the rest. Every policy or lack of policy is measured in terms of its impact on the perceived level of Amhara representation in state bodies, institutions of learning and cultural fora.<sup>80</sup> But it would be more accurate to say that the ethnic policy of the regime has been created to keep the TPLF in power. The Machiavellian trick of divide and rule was not born yesterday. It might have also been designed so that if the scheme failed, the TPLF would secede from Ethiopia and establish an independent Tigray state. It might also have been conceived to safeguard Eritrea's independence by weakening Ethiopian nationalism. Nevertheless, and to that end, the differences between the various ethnic groups are highlighted, while values, experiences, principles and goals that they share in common are played down. Instead of capitalizing on what the people of Ethiopia have in common and building on that, as most scholars who have studied the country have recommended, the TPLF regime has found it convenient to emphasize their differences, to sponsor the independence of Eritrea, and to contain the country's diversity through ethnic confederations, rather than through the integration of all people into a united Ethiopia.

Dr. Beyene Petros, Chairman of the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia, characterized the system of rule of the present regime as vindictive, and cited examples which included the disbanding of the armed forces and police of the country, the mass lay-offs of skilled workers on the basis of their ethnic and political affiliations, the discriminatory land redistribution in the rural areas, and the harassment and detention of the members and leaders of opposition groups and trade unions.<sup>81</sup>

The TPLF is also labeled as an organization dominated by Eritreans, and working in the interest of Eritrea. It is strongly alleged by many Ethiopians that in the 1990s, the EPLF set up a clandestine parallel government in Ethiopia whose sole purpose was looting. It was heavily involved in contrabands, money laundering, extortion, tax collection, kidnapping and other illegal activities. In fact, it is widely claimed that the idea of internal "tribal" restructuring of Ethiopia came from the EPLF leaders. Although Eritrea is a microcosm of Ethiopia because all the ethnic groups that inhabit Eritrea are extensions of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, the EPLF leadership has gone on record to declare that the Ethiopian system is not suitable for Eritrea. As The Economist put it:

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<sup>79</sup>.Daniel Kendie (1994) "Which Way the Horn of Africa: Disintegration or Confederation?" Northeast African Studies, Vol. I, No.1 p.153.

<sup>80</sup>.Ashagre Ayenew, "The Ethnicization..." See also Tsehai Berhane – Selassie, "The Map of Ethiopia: Not to be Drawn and Re-Drawn at Whim", Ethiopia Review, March-April 1997.

<sup>81</sup>. See the Ethiopian Register, "CAFDE and AAPO hold Mass Rallies", May 1997.

<sup>82</sup>. "The Caravan Passes On", The Economist, May 6, 1995, p.42

<sup>83</sup>. IBID.

The rulers of Eritrea have no intention of permitting political parties that are based on ethnicity to function in Eritrea.<sup>82</sup>

The EPLF leadership which is facing serious opposition because of its dictatorial policy, but which claimed to have been fighting for Eritrean independence because Haile Selassie's government had banned political parties, and suppressed independent newspapers, has not done any better. There are no political parties in today's Eritrea except the ruling party. In fact, the EPLF has gone on record and declared:

Political parties in Eritrea will not be allowed to have any ethnic, regional or religious basis. Basing politics on ethnic, clan, and nationality lines definitely has its negative implications. It will lead to more friction and it might lead to some kind of disunity. It would be difficult to govern a country that is organized along ethnic and nationality lines.<sup>83</sup>

Unless guided by sinister motives, why then recommend it to Ethiopia? It is the same EPLF leadership which was given the green light at the London Conference in 1991 to take over Eritrea. It is also the same EPLF from whom the 15-Member European Union is forced to withdraw all of its ambassadors in Asmara. While the act could be considered commendable, why limit it to the EPLF? Why not extend it to the TPLF? One without the other is only half necessary. Besides, what is the difference between pepsi cola and coca cola?

#### **Education**

While it has been asserted that any thought can be expressed in any language, it is well to recognize that the majority of the languages in the world probably do not possess vocabularies adequate for higher and especially technical education. For example, in the early 1960s, the West African state of Guinea, had tried to do what the present regime in Ethiopia is doing today. Guinea conceived the use of six local languages, including Malinke and Sossou. However, at the end of the day, it could only appeal to French as a unifying factor and abandoned the whole scheme.

It can hardly be denied that a major proportion of positions open to educated persons in countries like Ethiopia require precisely that sort of information transmitted by complex technical vocabularies. The TPLF authorities that have proclaimed that education should be provided in the various languages of the country should have taken account of this fact. Despite suggestions that a child is more comfortable if first introduced to school in the native language, recognition must be given to the difficulties implied in the assumption that each child be educated fully in the mother tongue. Creating different educational institutions for each language group, and providing educational materials in all the vernaculars, is too expensive and inefficient in the light of the demands made on the individual in the adult world. On top of that, many Ethiopian languages like for instance the languages spoken in Abobo and Godere districts of Gambella, lack-writing systems. Many are not readily useable for typewriters, typesetting machines or the computer. They lack adequate technical vocabulary for teaching such subjects as physics and chemistry. Responsible leadership cannot side step these problems. Can Ethiopia, one of the least developed countries of the world, provide education from elementary to the university level in so many languages? Even the U.S., the richest

country in the world that has had a democratic system for more than 200 years, and where there are some 327 different languages, has not attempted to provide public education in any language other than in English.

Susan Hoben of Boston University, who spent some time in Ethiopia studying the educational system, says: During the literacy campaign of the 1970s, the military regime designated fifteen languages for use, encompassing the mother tongues of 90% of the population. While the military regime used a non-formal vehicle not meant to be a permanent part of the educational system, the present regime is promoting their use in the formal, permanent school system. The Dergue used the Ethiopic script exclusively for all languages. Now the Latin alphabet is being used for non-Semitic ones. The military regime had brought down the rate of illiteracy in the country from 94% in 1974 to 63% in 1984. But since the present regime came to power, the literacy campaign has been brought to a halt<sup>84</sup>

Hoben further points out that in a large town like Jimma, there were streams for Amharic-medium and Oromo-medium instructions. On the other hand, in Natri, a hamlet on the road to Jimma, the school had received Oromo materials, though the local populace was Gurage, Amhara, Hadiya and Janjero. At this school, enrollment had plummeted, going from 357 students in 1991 to 281 in 1992 and to 133 at the start of 1993. In other schools, students showed us their brand new Latin script books with some consternation. “We have been studying in Amharic up to now, and all of a sudden, they expect us to use these,”<sup>85</sup> they complained.

Many Ethiopians were also upset that instead of schools teaching in their language or in Amharic, which would have been most useful, their children were suddenly being asked to learn in a regional language that was not theirs and that they might not even speak. Their only recourse in the short run was to vote with their feet. At the same time, teachers who came from other parts of the country, and who could not speak the local language adequately, were being dismissed. In fact, in September 1995, the regime’s party paper, Abiotawi Democracy, reported that 300,000 students had not been registered in schools throughout what is called Oromia, because 6,000 of their teachers did not speak or understand the Oromo language.<sup>86</sup> The Ado Shakiso School in Borana had 340 students. Of these, only 30 are ethnic Oromos. In spite of this, the Oromo language has been imposed as a language of instruction on 98% of the Amharic-speaking students. Mesfin Bedada, the director of the school, himself an Oromo, confessed that the students are not learning because they are unable to understand instructions in the new medium, and so they have left school.<sup>87</sup> As if that was not enough, the regime does not allow newspapers and other publications originating from Addis Ababa to be distributed in the regions.<sup>88</sup> According to Marina Ottaway, the

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<sup>84</sup>. Susan Hoben, “The Language of Education in Ethiopia: Empowerment or Imposition?” A paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, September 1994. PP.182 – 196. See also Susan Hoben (1988) “Literacy Campaigns in Ethiopia and Somalia a Comparison”. Northeast African Studies, vol. 10, No. 2/3.

<sup>85</sup>. IBID.

<sup>86</sup>. See Abiotawi Democracy, September 1995.

<sup>87</sup>. Salem (Amharic Monthly) vol.2, No. I June 1993.

restructuring of Ethiopia along ethnic lines was an obstacle to democratization and human rights in other ways as well. The independent press, for example, found it increasingly difficult to distribute publications outside the capital city. The reason, the government explained, was that each nationality had the right to its own language, which would be violated by the distribution of Amharic-language publications in regions where the mother language was different. Language rights were twisted into a repressive instrument to limit freedom of speech and information.<sup>89</sup>

In spite of trumpet blast, and contrary to what is being claimed, 72% of school-age children do not have access to formal education in Ethiopia, and just 15% of eligible students attend secondary schools.<sup>90</sup>

The dismissal of 42 university professors from their faculty positions, for no other reason than they happen to belong to different ethnic groups than those in power, the prevention of the teaching of Amharic in many parts of the country, including in the Amharic-speaking regions of Gondar and Wollo which were forcefully annexed to Tigray, the drop in the number of students attending schools in Ethiopia in excess of one million since the TPLF came to power, constitutes the track record of the regime. In contrast, the regime has built in Tigray an impressive number of schools and colleges, including the introduction of computers at all school levels.

But as far as literacy goes, where alphabetization ends, proper schooling begins. If the relevant literature that can sustain interest in education is not provided, people generally go back to sleep again. Reading material on agriculture, public health, marketing, history, geography, and the like, which in some measure can bring betterment of their material conditions is crucial. The recommendations of the 1972 Education Sector Review are still valid. That the educational system be Ethiopianized to help in blending indigenous cultures into the rich national culture, that national consciousness be strengthened by cultivating values that are appreciative of religious and cultural diversity, and that the teaching of Amharic as a medium of instruction at the various levels be carried out, without suppressing vernaculars for initial exposure to education, and as an important task that is fundamental to national integration.<sup>91</sup>

### **Human Rights**

Ephraim Haile expresses the feelings of many Ethiopians when he says: The lack of concern for the common good; the violation of Ethiopia's territorial integrity; the sacrifice of the national interest; the wide-spread violations of human rights, including extensive torture, disappearances and assassinations; the trimming of the civil service by one fourth, in which the most experienced and qualified civil servants were fired for political and ethnic reasons; the repeatedly rigged and fraudulent elections; the imprisonment of human rights activists, leaders of political parties, educators, newspaper editors and reporters; the banning of the trade unions, teachers associations, and student

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<sup>88</sup>. Alemante G.S. "The Pitfalls ...".

<sup>89</sup>. Marina Ottaway, Democratization and Ethnic Nationalism: African and Eastern European Experience, Policy Essay No.14, Overseas Development Council, (Washington D.C. 1994), P.48.

organizations; the massacre of religious worshippers and more, constitutes the track record of the most sinister traitors in all of Ethiopian history.<sup>92</sup>

In this regard, the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists reported:

...Opposition to basic government policies is not permitted. Opponents who have been in exile are categorized as war-mongers and any representative who dares to return to Ethiopia does so at his jeopardy. The facts do suggest that the government's commitment to human rights and democratic values is more rhetorical than real. The rhetoric is useful to tranquilize donor governments, with respect to the continuing signs of abuse of power, but the substance of the declared human rights is available only to those who support the government's policies.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, the Solidarity Committee for American Political Prisoners, among other things, reported: "In Ethiopia killings by the official security men and the government are on the rise, and that the number of prisoners is increasing." Some sources claim that there are some 24,000 political prisoners in the state called Oromia and another 40,000 in Tigrai.<sup>94</sup> In fact, from 1992 - 2,000 over 10,000 government opponents were detained without charge. Today the figure is said to have doubled. Likewise, the constant harassment of independent-minded journalists, extra-judicial killings, political imprisonment, involuntary disappearances, torture and detention without charge, ran rampant as documented by Amnesty International. By using the so-called "Structural Adjustment" Programme as a convenient cover for ethnic cleansing, the regime has also systematically dismissed non-Tigrean Ethiopians from their jobs. These include, 10,000 school teachers, 10,061 employees of the Ethiopian Building Construction Authority, 3,400 employees of the Rental Housing Authority, 56,000 civil servants, 300,000 members of the Ethiopian Armed Forces, and so on.<sup>95</sup> On March 21, 1997, some 200-university students who were protesting against government land policy were also arrested. In violation of the provisions of Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, many of the students were tortured.

Similarly, the police attack of April 2001 on Addis Ababa University's largest campus left 41 students and other protesters dead and 250 injured. About 2,500 were also

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<sup>90</sup>.Shantayanan Devarajan (editor et. al) Aid & Reform in Africa, The World Bank, 2001, P.189.

<sup>91</sup>.A Challenge to the Nation: Report of the Education Sector Review (1972), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, III-3

<sup>92</sup>.See the Letter to the Editor, by Ephrem Haile, "Why is the Swiss Ambassador so enraged?", The Ethiopian Register, June 1995. See also Human Rights Watch Annual Report, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000. See also Amnesty International Reports, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2000.

<sup>93</sup>.The American Association for the International Commission of Jurists, April 18, 1995. See also The Reports of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> report.

<sup>94</sup>.See the Newsletter of 8.18.1995. See also Wolde S. Asfaw, "Can Meles Fight Corruption?", Ethiopian Commentator, July 17, 2001.

arrested. Ethnic politics has polarized teaching at the university to an extent that it has lost its original mission of charting the country's development strategy.<sup>96</sup>

### **The Economy**

The TPLF Leaders had claimed that they took power in order to eradicate poverty from the face of Ethiopia. But ten years after their coming to power, Ethiopians remain amongst the world's poor, with more than half of the population below internationally recognized poverty levels, and dependent on foreign aid every year to combat famine. The only ones from whom poverty has been eradicated are the influential members of the leadership, their families and their friends. The average Ethiopian is poorer today, than he was thirty years ago.

The government owns the land. Almost 40% of farm households have less than 0.5 hectares of land, and more than 60% have less than 1 hectare from which to support a family of six or eight people. They now also pay more for fertilizers and other inputs, while receiving lower prices for their crops.<sup>97</sup> If farming is not transformed, there cannot be a genuine economic development. If agricultural production increases, the population can be fed adequately. The surplus can be transferred to other sectors. The farmer can still be better off than he was. Prosperity will also enable him to provide a growing market for manufactured goods. In this respect, the excess labour force in the overcrowded highlands could be settled in the south, west and east of the country where the land: man ratio is favourable. Holdings could also be enlarged and private ownership encouraged. Land distribution is not simply a matter of egalite judiciaire, but of rescuing the peasant from the domination of the state. It is the central pillar of the structure of social privilege. However, given the existing system of ethnic enclaves, neither the enlargement of the farms nor the resettlement of farmers elsewhere is feasible. The regime is in power to provide land to its supporters and to take away land from those who oppose its ethnic policy.

The constitution of 1994 prohibits political organizations from engaging in profit-making activities. Yet, many of the influential members of the TPLF are engaged in monetary scandals and fraudulent practices. They have established business enterprises which include manufacturing industries, banks and insurance, and whose assets are estimated between 1 billion and 2 billion birr. Other sources claim that the TPLF has created a business empire worth 3.3 billion birr. For example, out of government controlled 44 companies that run 3.5 billion birr, the TPLF owns 32 of them. Most of these companies were state owned, but they were sold by the Privatization Agency to the TPLF below their market price.<sup>98</sup> Some 200 state-owned enterprises have also been sold at a cost of \$357 million, no doubt, again, below the market price, the buyer and seller in all this being the TPLF. Another 110 state-owned enterprises are to be sold soon.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>.Assefa Negash, *The Pillage of Ethiopia by Eritreans and their Tigrean and Eritrean Surrogates* (Adey Publishing Co. : Los Angeles, 1966).

<sup>96</sup>.See "Academics in Ethiopia are Again Under Seige", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 18, 2001.

<sup>97</sup>. See *The Elimination of Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa*, A Strategy for Concerted Government and U.N. Agency Action, FINAL REPORT, 30 September 2000.

<sup>98</sup>.IBID, *Aid & Reform in Africa*, p.207

Since there is no accountability, in the midst of mass poverty, instant millionaires have emerged. Mismanagement, inefficiency, greed, non-payment of taxes, resale of products in the domestic market which were intended for export, and more, have all become the order of the day. The authorities have never presented reports of their accounts. They have never been audited. In fact, TPLF businesses and government businesses have never been separated, just as in Eritrea. It is claimed that TPLF business firms have preferential treatment over private-sector companies with respect to government contracts, custom clearances, government controlled credit facilities, and export and import licenses.<sup>100</sup> There is also the official policy of ethnic bias which prompts the leaders to allocate disproportional amounts of public resources to the favoured region – Tigrai.<sup>101</sup> Billions of dollars raised from the international community through loans and aid grants for Ethiopia have been diverted for the exclusive development of Tigrai. These include highways, airports, factories, telecommunication networks, dams, electrification of towns, hospitals, and so on. But the question is: What about the other regions of the country?

Ethiopia has received over \$7 billion in grants and loans in the last ten years. Yet, the cumulative investment capital of the 200 approved projects (1993-1999) was U.S.\$1.1 billion. However, only 21 projects with an investment capital of U.S.\$400 are currently in operation.<sup>102</sup> So what happened to the rest of the funds? The country's average annual population increase has reached 3%. The implication of this is that in order to meet domestic demand, food production has to increase by at least 6.5%. Inflation stood at an average annual rate of 15%, pushing basic food stuffs beyond the reach of the poor. Because of the very small tax base and the widespread poverty, most of the newly created ethnic regions cannot raise their own revenue. As a result, they have started setting up roadblocks to collect excise duties. The deficit which grew from 7.1% of GDP in 1993 to 10.2% in 1994, increased to 16.9% in 1995, and has continued since then. The current \$642 million deficit is expected to be covered through external funding. As of 1992, the birr has also been devalued by 147.8%, making the country's

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<sup>99</sup>.Pan African New Agency, May 22, 2001.

<sup>100</sup>.IBID, Aid & Reform, p.221. See also "Ethiopia: Corruption Campaign May Backfire", The Indian Ocean Newsletter No.955, 23/06/01. An agency has been established to check corruption in the government. In a system that has no checks and balances, where the opposition and the private press are persecuted, corruption is to be expected. However, many Ethiopians have a cynical view about it. They say that the Prime Minister himself has no moral authority to talk against corruption. They refer to his family businesses and overseas investments. His wife, Azeb, and his brother Nikodimos Zenawi have become immensely rich. Benyam Mesfin, son of the foreign minister has also become very rich, thanks to his father's position. More particularly, they claim that the attempt to counter corruption was raised now by Meles as a means of destroying his political enemies. See also Wolde Asfaw, "Can Meles Fight Corruption?" Ethiopian Commentator, July 17, 2001. According to the author, contrary to the interview Meles gave to Abiotawi Democracy, claiming that he does not possess anything except books and the suits he wears, he is a joint signatory with Berhane and Seyume, Tewolde Agame and Seyume, and others of the multi-million dollar deposited in the bank account in some of the countries in Western Europe and America. Money donated by the international community to the people of Tigrai in the last twenty-five years is deposited under private accounts in London, New York, Washington, Rome, etc. The annual budget of the Relief Society of Tigrai was well over \$100 million in the 1980s. Today it is deposited under the joint account of the above named officials.

<sup>101</sup>.IBID, p.195.

exports correspondingly cheap. The challenge is to raise the investment rate from 18% to at least 25% of the GDP.<sup>103</sup> But without carrying out the necessary reforms regarding public administration, land use, taxation, banking, infrastructure, accumulation, and so on, it will be an impossible task. Confiscation, inflation, forced saving, government bonds, foreign aid, foreign investment, and the creation of export of industrial and agricultural products are all means of saving. The curtailment of luxury spending by the privileged ruling elite can also help in the accumulation of capital. At some point, the savings made will result in more consumption later. But at the beginning, there is no other way except tightening ones belt. When savings is expanded, productivity can also increase. When the surplus is re-invested, further expansion is made possible. All this requires exceptional leadership that has insight and vision, as well as considerable education and administrative skills. Developing a democratic system that is genuinely pluralistic, discouraging ethnic politics that is by definition divisive, investing in people, effective regulation in key sectors of the economy, accountably in public-sector management, diversification of the economy, promoting private-sector activity and improving economic management could galvanize economic performance. But the TPLF is ill-equipped and ill-prepared to do all this. There is nothing in its background that has prepared it for this type of responsibility.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are providing assistance. But it is contingent upon austere structural adjustment programmes that include wholesale privatization, removal of trade barriers, diminished protection for national industries, reduced corporate taxes, elimination of state subsidies on food, fuel, education, health and transport, devaluation of currency, and the scaling back of bloated bureaucracies.<sup>104</sup>

No doubt, the World Bank and the IMF promote a market-oriented approach to economic management that rests on the assumption that economic “rationality” is constant across all societies, regardless of the level of development of any country. It is also argued that controlling budget deficits and money supplies, and liberalizing the foreign exchange regime, which, in turn, would ensure that the market was given freedom to allocate resources within the economy, would rectify the distortions created by undue and inefficient state intervention in economic management.<sup>105</sup> However, this is contrary to the historical experience of the now industrialized countries.

Some of the World Bank/IMF prescriptions include the following: shrinkage of government bureaucracies, deregulation of the economy, removal of government involvement from economic activities, cut-backs in government expenditures, especially in social spending and subsidies, introducing user fees in education and health care, increasing food prices, cutbacks in or containment of wages, privatization of state-owned enterprises, devaluation of the currency, elimination of or reduction in protection

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<sup>102</sup>.IBID, p.178.

<sup>103</sup>.IBID, p.201.

<sup>104</sup>.Daniel Kendie (Spring/Fall 1998) “Africa’s Major Development Obstacles”, UFAHAMU, Journal of the African Activist Association (UCLA), vol.26, No. 2 & 3, pp.18-48.

for the domestic market, fewer restrictions on the operations of foreign investors, and so on.<sup>106</sup>

As a result, state enterprises are passing into private hands, protectionist barriers on imports are being eliminated, restrictions on foreign investment are lifted, and export-first policies are implemented with quasi-religious zeal. Since the government is forced to reorient the economy towards exports in order to earn the foreign exchange required for servicing the national debt, Ethiopia has become correspondingly more dependent on the global economy. In the process, the power of the government to provide necessities to the population is being reduced.<sup>107</sup>

There is also the problem of privatization. The debate on privatization has been stimulated by the budget maximization thesis because of the alleged ‘inefficiency’ of public enterprises, which need constant state subsidy. However, it is a reflection of the shift in values among governments in Western Europe. It has now been extended to Africa and elsewhere as part of the general spread of ideas and policy conditions attached to assistance. But if one studies the economic history of some of the technologically advanced countries, one can see that governments set in motion all the major industrial projects of the first break-through, and that national development requires not just a state, but a strong state. In fact, the less developed, the greater the need for strong state intervention. The powerful role played by states in the economic transformation of the countries of Southeast Asia can be mentioned to illustrate the point.

The assumption that public enterprises are “inefficient” is also dubious. In many ways, one cannot ignore the interest of foreign capital in preaching this self-serving ritual, which is likely to increase damaging inequalities. This thesis advances the interests of central and policy-level officials at the expense of jobs, worsens the conditions of rank and file state employees, and reduces the services the state should provide to the masses. To claim that public enterprises are “inefficient” when compared to private enterprises is not supported by empirical evidence. When an industry is privatized, the managers and the workers are the same as those who managed the old public firm the day before. Thus, any change that may occur is not because of the structure of ownership, or the character and abilities of management, but of constraints in which the firm operates. Moreover, public enterprises and services have public duties and are not meant as merely profit-making instruments. It would be inappropriate to judge the performance of an enterprise by the simple test of the market because society’s needs are too complex to be reduced to that criterion. Competition between the private and the state sector could determine efficiency. Nevertheless, instead of state assets being sold to investors, it would have been much better if shares could be given to citizens.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>.IBID, p.19.

<sup>106</sup>.IBID, p.29.

<sup>107</sup>. IBID, p.29. There are those who argue that market reforms proposed by the World Bank are designed to prevent the economic transformation of the less developed countries. See for example Samir Amin (1993) “Don’t Adjust – DeLink!” Towards Freedom, (April/May).

<sup>108</sup>. Kendie “Africa’s Major Development”, p. 30.

However, many countries like Ethiopia have been subjected to structural adjustment programmes. Governments are being forced to cut spending on social services in order to save money, which can then be used to repay external debts. Faced with the threat of a cut-off of external funds needed to service the mounting debts, countries like Ethiopia have no choice but to implement the painful measures. But at the end of the day, these countries like Ethiopia have not been transformed. The prescriptions have brought neither growth nor development. Ethiopia still remains mired in poverty, social dislocation, unemployment, malnutrition, homelessness, diseases, and environmental degradation. One may even argue that in theory reducing the size of the government would open up opportunities for alternative employment opportunities. But there is no guarantee that a robust private sector will automatically be created to fill the gaps. In the meantime the people suffer.

### **Will it Work?**

While the architects of the system that prevails in today's Ethiopia see it as a creative and innovative solution to the country's developmental problems, others maintain that it is reactionary and anachronistic. They argue that it is a system whose days are numbered. They say that since it refuses to bend in the face of changed reality, it cannot hope to survive very long. And actions based on it, cannot hope to be successful even in the long run. The TPLF, they say, has survived so far not on account of its legitimacy, but because of the weakness of the opposition. Let alone Ethiopia, it cannot even administer the Province of Tigray. Its critics are in favour of dismantling it, and replacing it with a unifying Pan-Ethiopian nationalism that transcends ethnicity. The more so, Ethiopians have no prior experience of government by ethnicity. Since political legitimacy must be based on a broad constituency, a single ethnic group cannot govern in a multi-ethnic country. Ethnicity may be a viable organizing force for an ethnic guerrilla movement like the TPLF, but hardly for a political party that hopes to govern a multi-ethnic state. If history were a guide, successful governments concentrate on national issues which cross ethnic, religious, and provincial boundaries and aggregate support based on common concerns.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, can meaningful devolution be delivered in time to offset the potential anarchy embedded in an ethnic-based federal system with a weak centre? Many observers say that it probably cannot.<sup>110</sup> Some have already concluded that what the regime is engaged in is a frightening experiment<sup>111</sup> Others argue that no one can be sure whether the experiment with ethnicity will work. Meles Zenawi himself has said that he does not know if it will work.<sup>112</sup> Whatever it achieves in the long run, ethnicity is making economic, social and political life difficult now. It is testing an administrative

<sup>109</sup>.IBID. Joireman (1997) "Opposition Politics" pp.406-407.

<sup>110</sup>. OP.CIT, John Cohen, "Ethnic Federalism", p.176.

<sup>111</sup>. See the report of Donatella Lorch, "Ethiopia Holding Elections in Federal Systems", The New York Times, May 1995.

<sup>112</sup>.See The Economist, August 16, 1997.

<sup>113</sup>. From the radio broadcast of Wendy Belcher, Pacific Network News, December 9, 1997.

<sup>114</sup>. Michael Bratton (Spring 1997) "Deciphering Africa's Divergent Transitions," Political Science Quarterly (New York) 112,1,pp.67-93.

structure already weakened by years of war and an economy battered by periodic drought. While bitterly resenting Western support to the regime, opposition groups in general dismiss the whole notion of devolution and democracy as prescribed by the regime as a sham. All these tendencies point to a dangerous trend, which is pushing the<sup>1</sup>Ethiopian people on the same fatal political course witnessed in the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Wendy Belcher of the Pacific Network News, who was in Ethiopia, has the following to say: “After years of ethnic federalism, Ethiopia’s experiment is in real jeopardy. Rather than helping Ethiopia’s smaller groups to feel more secure, it threatens to balkanize the country<sup>13</sup> It has not been easy setting up even permanently based administrative structures in territories whose inhabitants are largely nomadic herders. These include Somali, Afar, Gambella, and Ben Shangul Gumuz provinces.

The truth is, there is no congruence between “national self-determination” and democratic and accountable government. The art of politics lies in maintaining levels of integration and cooperation as high as could be made compatible with the consent of the governed, and in reaching agreement on the optimal locus of decisions in making for particular areas of policy.

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**ETHIOPIA'S PROVINCES 1952 – 1980**

The frightening experiment has failed because of the following reasons:

First, the very boundaries that were supposed to solve “ethnic problems” are in dispute everywhere. The Amharas, Tigreans, Gurages, Somalis, Sidama and the Southern People’s for instance, do not accept “Oromia”, or the land claimed by the Oromo Liberation Front. In so far as the Oromos have the right to live anywhere in Ethiopia, the right of other Ethiopians to live even in provinces where the Oromos constitute a majority will have to be recognized and accepted as a matter of principle. Otherwise, the situation could go out of hand. In the same way, the people of Gondar and Wollo, whose territories have been illegally and forcefully annexed and incorporated to Tigrai, have

refused to recognize the present boundaries of Tigray. Tigreans as well as all other Ethiopians can still go and work on the farms as they used to. Hence, those districts will have to revert back to Wollo and Gondar. Secondly, the act of sharing regional boundaries based on the main ethnic groups has created minority ethnic groups in each region, which are being condemned to the status of permanent minorities without any hope of being able to obtain political power. There are 23 ethnic groups in six of the regional states that do not have a sufficient population to qualify for constituency seats. Third, though legally sanctioned, ethnic parties have not been willing to work together. They tend to be arrogant and neglect the welfare of the minorities whose political support they do not need and advocate only the concerns of their constituencies, regardless of the consequences upon the national interest. A good example would be the refusal of the Oromia regional government to accept the application of the All Amhara Peoples' Organization to open branch offices in the region. Fourth, such a system will always be unstable because political parties will have to be organized along ethnic lines. Moreover, for a federal system to work effectively, the constituent state provinces should be of equal size. What sort of equality is there between Oromia and the Afar, or between Ben Shangul and the Amhara state? Fifth, reliance on ethnicity as the boundary of political parties has proved to be a disaster as an electoral struggle elsewhere. In fact, without an opposition which both aggregates societal interests and represents them in elections, the country cannot move from a political opening to a viable form of multi-party democracy.<sup>114</sup>

There is also the question of resources. Time and space does not permit a detailed examination of this subject. But to illustrate the point, let us look at some of the regions. For reasons given earlier, the Oromos inhabit that part of the country, which is rich and fertile. It produces much of Ethiopia's industrial raw materials, livestock products, timber, cash crops such as tea and coffee, and minerals that include gold and platinum. Similarly, the Afars inhabit an area that is rich in geo-thermal energy, which is a cheap source of electricity. It also has an estimated 200 million tons of potash. Because of the construction of a series of multi-purpose dams on the Awash River in the 1960s, the area now produces cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, and various fruits and vegetables. In the same way, the Ogaden has proven natural gas and oil deposits. And if a series of multi-purpose dams were to be built on the Wabi Shibebe and Juba Rivers, the area would produce a variety of cash crops and industrial raw materials. Southern Ethiopia too, is richly endowed. But the present boundary set-up puts the Amharas, the second largest population in the country, at a disadvantage. Thousands of them have been killed in the last ten years in other regions where they lived for centuries because of the hostile policy initiated against them by the existing regime. Thousands of them have also been uprooted from their lands for precisely the same reason. The area they inhabit, which the regime calls the "Amhara Region", has been farmed for centuries without interruption. Since it is overpopulated, the land: man ratio is not favourable. In so far as current information goes, it does not also seem to be blessed with known mineral deposits that are commercially exploitable. Even the few commercial farms, which existed in the Amhara Provinces like Gondar and Wollo have been forcefully annexed and incorporated to Tigray. If the peace and stability of the country is not to be disturbed, these facts should be seriously taken into consideration.

To go back to the early point of discussion, in a country like the USA, national unity has been attained among people of the most disparate origins, and that differences of religion, of culture, and of tradition have not been insurmountable obstacles to the coming together of people. While the authorities in the USA talk of “The American People”, and of “One Nation, Indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all”, the authorities in Addis Ababa and leaders of ethnic parties who have their own sinister political agendas insist on “The Peoples of Ethiopia”. Yet, the people of Ethiopia are more similar and historically more connected than the different people that inhabit the USA. Since Ethiopians have been interacting with one another for centuries, their national identification has been largely formed, and they enjoy widely shared values and internalize restraints on highly parochial and norm-challenging actions.

### **Towards a Working Federation**

A federation can be defined as a political unit on which a number of smaller political units develop certain power over themselves and their citizens to which they entrust the conduct of such affairs as national defense, foreign affairs, foreign trade, economic development, transport and communications, public health, and education. Individual provinces retain some control over their internal affairs, and in order that their rights should be clearly defined, there is usually a federal constitution, which allocates powers between them and the federal government. The gradual transfer of administrative duties to the centre provides for centralization, whereas the sharing of these duties between the centre and the periphery maintains the guarantee of survival.<sup>115</sup> As disputes often arise as to the constitutional legality of executive decisions or laws made by the federal government, a supreme court is generally created to interpret the constitution.

Among the elements that contribute to the smooth functioning of such a system are that the constituent parts in a federal system must be fairly equal in population and wealth, or else balanced geographically or numerically in their inequabilities. The lack of balance among the constituent parts has often resulted in the failure of the federal system. Successful federal systems have also been characterized by the permanence of their internal boundaries. Boundary changes may occur, but such changes are made only with the consent of the polities involved and are avoided except in extreme situations.<sup>116</sup> In the case of Ethiopia, one is recommending the federal system for the following reasons:

First, the system can be used as a means of uniting further the people who are already linked by bonds of history, culture, and nationality through the redistribution of political power among the constituent provinces. In this case, the provinces that constitute the federal system are unalterably parts of the national whole. Federalism invariably leads to the development of a

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<sup>115</sup>. William H. Riker (1964) Federalism, Origin, Operation, Significance (Little Brown and Company: Boston & Toronto) P.50.

<sup>116</sup>. “Federalism”, in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, p. 354

<sup>117</sup>. IBID.

strong national government operating in direct contact with the people it serves.<sup>117</sup>

Second, it allows for local initiative.

Third, federalism is being recommended as a form of decentralized government in an established state as a repository of all powers not especially granted in order to speed-up the development of the provinces. This includes the possession of substantial powers, which can be enforced even against the principal local units, which will not be free to nullify the laws of the central government or to withdraw from the federal unit.

Fourth, within the framework of centralization of the state, there has always been a more loosely federated Ethiopian state. In fact, as noted by a keen observer, Ethiopia's geography predisposed it towards regionalism. Yet, thanks to the manner in which the rulers expanded their authority, including the spread of their language and religion, Ethiopia has evolved into a large unified polity.<sup>118</sup> Hence, the need for partial indulgence into decentralization and using it to build consent for centralization, as has been the essence of nation building in many states.

Fifth, given its geographic location, its historical, cultural, and economic links with the countries of the Horn of Africa, and its potential resource endowments, Ethiopia can play an important role in the peace and development of the sub-region. Phase I should focus on the establishment of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. An open-ended and a working federal structure should make it possible for Eritrea to join the federation. Phase II involves Djibouti, Somaliland and Somalia. One would suggest cooperation with these countries on a number of socio-economic projects that could lay down the foundations that would lead to a confederation and eventually to the establishment of the Federation of Northeast African States. Such projects would include the construction of multi-purpose dams on the Awash, the Juba, and the Wabi Shibelle rivers, and cooperation in the exploitation of the oil and natural gas deposits in Eastern Ethiopia. To that end, the necessary roads and infrastructure could be built to encourage trade between these countries. Ethiopia can, for instance, export hydro-electricity to all of its neighbours. It could also conduct 10% of its export - import trade through Port Sudan; 5% through Massawa; 35% through Assab; 30% through Djibouti; 10% through Berbera; and 10% through Mogadisho.

Most of the Ethiopian opposition movements seem to favour political pluralism. But the proof of the pudding as they say is in the eating. Federalism can exist only when there is considerable tolerance of diversity and willingness to take political action through

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<sup>118</sup>. See John Harbeson (1988), *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post Imperial State* (Boulder: Westview Press), p.226. See also Paul B.Henze (2,000) *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*, (St. Martin's Press: New York), p. 110.

conciliation. Tolerance, fair play, and respecting the equality of rights of other people, including their views, are the abiding principles of true federalists.

Given the above factors, the dismantling of the anachronistic ethnic federal structure and its replacement by a workable federal structure appears to be important. The local potentates and entrenched ethnic oligarchs will resist, but to no avail. The federal idea can be implemented by restructuring the state along internal regional administrative boundaries that have evolved historically and have received legitimacy by the passage of time. The old provinces of Arussie, Bale, Gojjam, Gomu Goffa, Gondar, Harar, Illubabor, Keffa, Shoa, Sidamo, Tigray, Wollega and Wollo have strong historical legitimacy. Furthermore, given some modification, the existing Afar and Somali regions, could be retained as provinces. In this case, the members of the federation will be fifteen provinces.

In point of fact, the provincial boundaries were not created in an arbitrary manner. They were conceived in such a way in order to create what the Germans call “lebensraum” -- living space. In most cases, rivers like the Mereb, the Tekezie, the Abai, Awash, and so on, served as natural boundaries. Moreover, the highlands and the lowlands, which complement each other, were brought together in a common provincial market. One could look at the boundaries of such provinces as Wollo, Gondar, Shoa, Bale, Gojjam, Wollega, or even Harar. Such an integrated common provincial market in turn created conditions where highland and lowland products are exchanged. They also served to integrate cultures. So why dismantle the boundaries which provide economic links, and which have strong historical legitimacy, and with which millions of Ethiopians identify?

A federal system by definition is costly. But for a vast country like Ethiopia, it is the best system. Some of the provinces will need subsidy from the federal government for a while. Given political stability, which will provide the opportunity to exploit Ethiopia's immense resources, it will pay in the long run. A federal constitution which corresponds to Ethiopia's historical experiences, but modified to suit its present conditions, and based on such principles as the rule of law, state secularism, a bill of rights, a system of checks and balances, political and economic pluralism, including the legalization of political parties that are organized on the basis of shared political principles and philosophies and not merely on ethnic identities, should therefore be presented to the Ethiopian people. A two-chamber federal parliament consisting of a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies could be envisioned. Elections for the Chamber of Deputies could take place every four years, and for the Senate every six years. Political parties that have concrete political programmes to help promote the peace, security and prosperity of the people should be given free access into the state-owned mass media to reach the masses. Such parties could be conservatives, liberals, socialists, social democrats, Marxists, and so on. The point is the playing field would have to be leveled. They should be encouraged to compete in the market place of ideas, and to struggle for the hearts and minds of the Ethiopian people. The leading party, which commands the highest vote, could select the head of state as well as head of government.

As we have seen, the present political system in Ethiopia is creating political instability and ethnic strife, which, unless timely measures are taken, could lead to the eventual

dismemberment of the country. Without peace and stability, economic development will be an impossible task. The people of Ethiopia will be mired in poverty for generations to come. The alternative approach to national development that is provided in this study will ensure political stability. It will reduce ethnic strife and enhance national unity, as well as inflows of foreign capital investment. The result will be a peaceful, unified, free, and democratic Ethiopia that will be in a much better position to conquer poverty and technical backwardness, and which could also shoulder some regional responsibility for peace and development.

### **Endnotes:**