British Military
Administration - Eritrea

Races and Tribes of Eritrea

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Preface

We present this book to the English language readers as part of our attempts to introduce fighting Eritrea to the world. Because of imperialist conspiracies Eritrea fell victim of a new occupation under the phony mask of federal union with Ethiopia. This came in the wake of the termination of British imperialism which replaced Italian imperialism that was routed in the Second World War.

The book tackles issues pertaining to the population setup of Eritrea and therefore contains useful information regarding this subject. However, it is not free from errors. Some errors are intentionally made and have been necessitated by Britain's political outlook towards the Eritrean problem at that time. Britain in those days had the intention of dividing Eritrea between Ethiopia and the Sudan.

We agree with the author in that Eritrea, because of its geographical location, had always been a scene of successive waves of Semitic, Hamitic and negro emigrations. Accordingly, it can be said that the people of Eritrea is the result of the inter-marriages that took place among these races. Hence the people of Eritrea is of unigue composition.

Plurality is not a unique characteristic exclusive to Eritrea. It is rare to find in the world people who belong entirely to one racial origin with one culture and one language.

Another important remark that should be made is that the figures contained in the book regarding the number of the population and natural resources are based on out-of-date Italian estimates going back to more than half of a century.

Eritrea during the Italian rule had a population estimated at 800,000 but today it has a population of approximately 3000,000.

The author uses the word "serf" as synonym to "Tigrai" which is an incorrect translation. In the past the word "Tigrai" meant subject or ruled people to the nobility in the Sahel and Barka areas.

By and large, the contents of the book represent the standpoint of its author and not necessarily congruent with the objective reality as the Eritreans know it. Yet by presenting this book in English we have helped in introducing Eritrea to the peoples of the world.

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The official spokesman
ELF/PLF

Contents

I. Introduction

1. Physical and Political

The Italian colony of Eritrea covers an area of 40.000 sq. miles; and has a population of about 800.000. On the map, Eritrea resembles an irregular triangle, with the base from east to west and the apex in the north. This triangle which is Eritrea falls physically in three, or more precisely four, parts. Resting on its base and stretching north towards its tip, we have the spur of the Abys sinian table land. It forms, in the south of Eritrea, a mountainous plateau, 7000 – 8000 ft high, which slopes gradually, over a plateau and hills of lesser height (4500 – 5000), to the north and the sea. To the west of the spur lies a wide, aride plain, intersected by the dry beds of large rivers – the Barka, Gash and Setit. In the east, the mountain spur drops into the narrow plain which is wedged between the escarpment and the sea. We shall in the following pages speak of these geographical zones as the Eastern and Western Plain, as the Central Plateau, and the Northern Hills.

Climatically, too, the four zones are sharply distinct. The Plateau is cold, windswept and dry; the Northern Hills have a milder climate, with higher temperatures and greater humidity; the two plains share the typical climate of the aride and semi-desert zones of the Sudan or East Africa. The plains are distinguished, however, by their rain full. For in the Western Plain, is in the north

and south of Eritrea, the main rainy season is in summer, in the months April to September. The total annual rainfull is comparatively small – 20 in, on the Plateau and the Northern Hills, and 12 in. in the Western plain. On the coast the rain fall in winter months, from November to February. They are light in the plain (6 – 7 in.), but heavy in the foothills and on the escarpment (32 in.). We shall see how greatly these climatic conditions influences the economic habits of the people, above all, their seasonal migrations, which follow the grazing and the rains.

The political division of Eritrea corresponds fairly closely to the physical configuration. The large geographical zones reapear, only slightly modified, as administrative Divisions – Comissariati, in Italian nomenclature. The Western Plain forms the administrative Division of Agordat. The Northern Hills form approximately Keren Division, though this Division also includes, in its north-east corner, a strip of the coast. The Eastern Plain is divided between four Divisions: in the north, there is the strip of coast belonging to Keren: south of it, the coastal plain coincides with Massawa Division: at the Bay of Zula a narrow corridor to the sea, which forms part of the Plateau Division of Akkele Guzai, splits the territory of Massawa in half: further south still, the plain extends over the Division of Assab. The Central Plateau finally, is the territory of three Divisions: Hamasien. Serae, and Akkele Guzai.

Each Commissariato is sub-divided into a varying number of Residenze and Vice-Risidenze. This sub-division is rarely based on geographical or ethnic features. More often it reflect merely principles of administrative convenience, and may thus for the moment be disregarded.

The physical configuration of the country has shaped, above all, its humain contents. The physically uniform and relatively fertile Central Plateau is inhabited by the solid block of a sedentary agriculturist population, possessed of a common language (Tigrinya), a largely common religion (Coptic Christianity), and a common civilisation. The arid plains in the east and west are the habitat of numerous scattered tribes of greatly varying size and origin, yet united by the common livelihood of nomadic herdsmen and the common religion of Islam.Often the same tribes are spread over both plains as well as the Northern Hills, which, as it were, bridge the mountain spur. Indeed the Northern Hills may be called an ethnic bridge. They were crossed and crossed again by the tribes and races of Eritrea on their many migrations in historical times, which led from plain to plain, east to west and west to east. Today the Northern Hills are no longer a "bridge"; rather have they become an ethnic divide. For the hill tribes only descend seasonally to the plain in the east (hardly ever to the more distant Western Plain), to return again to their mountain home: and the plains tribes in the west move up to the escarpment, but not beyond it.

The physical separation of sedentary groups and nomadic tribes, too, has its counterpart in the political structure of the colony. This differentiation in livelihood is responsible for a certain administrative dualism. On the Central Plateau administration is based on territorial division, with "districts" as the units: in the east, west and north, we meet with a system of tribal administration, which adopts, not territories, but tribal or kinship groups as the units of organisation (See Map No. 1).

These boundaries of livelihood and political organisation are not sharply defined. They are blurred periodically by the seasonal migrations of the nomadic tribes between the plains and the highlands. The escarpment of the Central Plateau, moreover, has become the semipermanent habitat of some of the nomadic groups. Others have even become sedentary and agriculturistic, and settled in the highlands, so that tribal areas and "districts" overlap at the edges of the central block. In a few cases the tribal groups have reconstituted themselves as territorial units: but often, too, these

offshoots of once nomadic tribes live now as tenants of the land-owning highland groups, as newcomers and, as it were, guests in their territory.

2. Racial.

The fairly simple picture of ethnic grouping which emerged from the foregoing description is somewhat misleading. The areas which appear uniform on a map showing the distribution of religion or economic habits (see maps No. 2 and 3) in reality enclose a complex variety of ethnic. Elements Eritrea was for centuries the scene of migrations, into its territory and across it. The result is, in this comparatively small population, a mosaic of tribes, races, linguistic groups. Before examining this "mosaic" in detail, it may be useful to outline the main ethnic units with which we shall be dealing. The first viewpoint which suggests itself is that of race.

The concept of race, vague and all-too-often abused, is an unreliable guide to ethnic grouping. This much, however, can be said without going too deeply into the involved, (and in this case largely unobtainable) details of physical anthropology. In the west and east we find representatives of the race usually described as hamitic – it would be more correct to speak of a race habitually using languages of the hamitic type. This race embraces, in the west, the Beja-speaking Bent Amer, and in the east, the tribe of the Danakil and possibly the tribes speaking a language known as Saho. A second racial unit is that of groups speaking semitic languages: it embraces the Tigrinya block, the tribes speaking Tigré, and many scattered immigrant groups, ancient or recent, from Arabia. A third racial group is represented in a number of tribes of negro origin, the Baria, Kunama, and one or two fragments of tribes in the Western Plain. Neither the hamitic nor the semitic groups are racially pure; indeed they have absorbed so much alien blood, from each other, from negroid groups, and from sources difficult to identify, that the term race has little meaning left.

3. Linguistic.

In this outline of racial grouping we had already to invoke the criterion of linguistic affinity. We will adopt it once more, in more detail, as a guide to ethnic distribution. These are the most important linguistic groups in Eritrea: Beja, Tigré (or Khasa), Tigrinya, Saho, and Danakil. Languages spoken by smaller groups are: Belein, Baria, Kunama, Ilit, and Arabic, Beja and Tigré are widespread also in the north-eastern Sudan, Tigrinya, Saho, and Danakil spread into Ethiopia. The remaining languages, with the exception of Arabic, are limited to Eritrea.

Map No. 4 shows the distribution of these languages in Eritrea and the adjacent parts of Ethiopia and the Sudan. As regards the structure and origin of these languages, available information is meagre and occasionally conflicting. Yet these general statements can be made.

Beja, also known as *To Bedawi*, is a language of northern-hamitic type. It bears no relation to any of the other languages spoken in Eritrea. It is represented in the large tribe of the Western Plain, the Beni Amer. But as we shall see later, the tribe also embraces sections which speak, not Beja, but Tigré, or which are bilingual, speaking both languages.

Tigré and *Tigrinya* are both semitic languages. Tigré is spoken by the majority of the tribes in the Northern Hills and the Eastern Plain. Tigrinya, as was said before, is the language of the solid ethnic block inhabiting the Central Plateau. It spreads into northern Ethiopia, over the whole of the area known as the Tigrai, down to the rivers Angareb. Takatse and Ala. Tigré and Tigrinya have sprung from a common root, Geez, the ancient language of Ethiopia, which has survived only in the Coptic liturgy. Tigrinya, possibly closer to the root, and since centuries a written language. uses Geez characters. Tigré reached the stage of a written language comparatively recently: it is written both in Geez and Arabic

script. In spite of the similar name of these two languages their kinship is remote. It is based on common origin and structure rather than on recognisable similarity. As spoken to-day. Tigré and Tigrinya are mutually unintelligible. When Tigré herdsmen and local peasants once met in the Akkele-Guzai, the writer had to act as a double interpreter, speaking Arabic with the Tigré and Italian with the Tigrinya. A third branch from the same common root is *Amharic*, which is spoken in central Ethiopia and which is the official language of the Ethiopian Empire. It is said to be the language farthest removed from the mother language, Geez, and is as distantly akin to Tigrinya or Tigré as these languages are to each other.

Saho is spoken by the tribes in eastern and south-eastern Eritrea and by the groups inhabiting the highlands and the escarpment in the eastern Tigrai, in the districts of Irob, Agame, Kilte Awlalo, and Enderta. Little is known about this language, except that it is closely akin to Dankali, the language of the Danakil tribe in the south of the Eastern Plain. Both languages belong to the language family known as southern hamitic.

Belein is the language of three tribes in the south of Keren Division. It is classed by some authorities with the central-hamitic languages, which are described as the most ancient in the Ethiopian highlands. This would make the Belein-speaking peoples akin to the Ago of Agau, once a powerful ethnic unit, which is represented to-day in small, scattered and broken-up groups, many on the verge of extinction, which live in central Ethiopia, in the provinces of Lasta, Avergalla, Dembien and Woggera. The writer prefers to describe Belein as an unidentified language.

The languages, *Baria*, *Kunama*, and *Ilit*, spoken by the tribes of these names, must equally be called unidentified. In Eritrea, they represent linguistic islands, which bear no relation to the surrounding language groups. As spoken, the languages are distinct from one another, and mutually unintelligibile. Structurally,

they seem akin, and related to the family of Sudanic languages – whether to its Nilotic branch or to that of the central Sudan must be left undecided.

Arabic is spoken by immigrant groups, like the Rashaida in the east or the Shukria in the west, whose arrival in Eritrea is of comparatively recent date. But Arabic has also been adopted, as a second language, by sections and individuals of the Mohammedan tribes to which Arab culture has spread, either from Arabia or the Sudan. Arabic is, finally, almost a lingua franca in the Mohammedan quarters of the Eritrean towns and, above all, on the Red Sea coast.

1. Traditions ard History.

The ethnic zones which we have outlined on the basis of livelihood, religion, race and language, do not coincide. Nor are these zones static and permanent. We have spoken of racial mixture, and of groups changing nomadic for sedentary life. We shall equally meet with groups which have changed their religion or language in the past – recent or remote. How these various strands which make up the texture of individual societies, race, religion, language and livelihood, are woven into one another, and what weight they have in the social fabric, will be shown in the description which is to follow. How they came to be so interwoven, is a question almost too dangerous to approach.

It is true that the past existence of the ethnic groups, their racial origin, and the language or religion which they once possessed, have survived in their memory, in the form of numerous traditions. The Eritrean, of all groups, is strongly historically minded. But the content of historical truth in these traditions is difficult to assess. The traditions are mostly vague and not infrequently conflicting. Few help us to elucidate the past, and fewer still to understand the living society. Those that do are concerned, above all, with the support of present claims to political status

and social prestige. A typical example are the claims of Arab descent, which are the fashion among Mohammedan tribes (though their Islamic faith may be only a few generations old). Another example are the traditions which refer to the widespread social division into ruling caste and serf class. And here the historical exactness hardly matters. Even as myths they can back, with persuasive arguments, the obtaining political and social system.

II. THE WESTERN PLAIN.

1. The Country.

The Division of Agordat, which embraces this geographical zone, is divided into three administrative sub-divisions or *Residenze:* Agordat, in the east and north. Barentu, to the south-west of Agordat, and Tessenei, in the extreme west of the Division. In the south-west corner of Agordat Division, on the Ethiopian frontier, the village of Om Hager is the centre of a small *Vice-Residenza.* This territorial sub-division has in the main only administrative significance, though it coincides to some extent with ethnic grouping in the country. Thus the *Residenza* of Barentu comprises the larger part of the territory of two tribes, the Baria and Kunama; and the *Residenza* of Agordat is clearly intended to unite the majority of the Beni Amer tribe. But these tribes also spread across the administrative boundaries, which we may therefore disregard in the following description.

The headquarters of the administrative sub-Divisions are also the only towns in the Western Plains. They are comparatively new creations, founded under the Italian regime as military posts and centres of administration and trade. Agordat has a population of 4000, Barentu a population of 1000, Om Hager one of 2000, and Tessenei, the most populous of the four, one of 5000. In all four towns the population is cosmopolitan, including many foreigners from the Sudan, the Yemen, West Africa, and other parts of Eritrea.

But the population is largely uniform in its religion, Islam, and its standards of living, which closely resemble those of the towns and villages in the Sudan. Of the members of the local tribes only the more important chiefs, well-to-do merchants, and certain religious notables have taken to living, part of the year at least, in the towns.

Agordat Division is agriculturally one of the richest in Eritrea. Its agricultural resources are not fully utilised, however, partly because of the lack of perennial water, and partly because of the nomadic habits of a large proportion of the population, which takes only unwillingly to work on the land. The most important agricultural enterprises in the area are, in fact, in the hands of immigrants from the Sudan or West Africa.

Its wealth in crops makes Agordat Division an export country which sends its surplus to the poorer east, to Keren and the Plateau. Transport by modern means, on lorries and roads, and caravans along the old camel routes alike, serve this regular export trade. The Division is, besides, a country of transit for grain from the Sudan, especially in bad years, when the always precarious supplies of the Eritrean highlands fall far short of needs. Agordat Division is thus fairly self-supporting. Its dependence on outside territories (disregarding commercial and industrial products) is limited to the grazing lands of which the roving Beni Amer tribe is always in search.

2. The Beni Amer.

With a population of about 60,000, this is the largest tribe in the west and south-west and indeed in the whole of Eritrea. The Beni Amer occupy the north, west and south-west of Agordat Division, spreading, in the west, deep into the Sudan (where they number about 30.000) and overflowing in the east into the Divisions of Keren and Serae. As has been said, the tribe belongs to the large racial group usually known as Hamitic. Yet the term "tribe" is in a sense a misnomer, for the Beni Amer are a conglomerate of tribes,

often of diverse origin, rather than a solid, single ethnic unit. Their union is largely political, and in the nature of a loose federation which pays allegiance to a common paramount chief, the *Diglal*, and acknowledges a common ruling caste known as *Nabtab*.

The heterogeneous origin of the Beni Amer is clearly visible in the linguistic situation. For sections of the tribe speak Beja, others Tigré, and others again are bi-lingual. In the case of several sections, moreover, their different origin has not been obscured by the growth of the Beni Amer "nation". As we shall see, there are among the Beni Amer sections which descend from the Hadendowa in the Sudan, from the Ad Sheikh tribe in the Northern Hills, from groups of negro origin, or from immigrants from Arabia.

The Nabtab ruling caste of the Beni Amer cuts across the existing tribal divisions, as well as probably the divisions of ethnic descent. But the Nabtab, of all the tribal sections, would allege that this diversity of descent applies only to the serf class of the tribe; for themselves, they claim a single common descent and that racial purity which figures so prominently in the ideologies of ruling groups. They trace their origin, in a vague tradition, to a man of the Jaalin tribe of the Middle Nile who married a woman of the Bellu, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Beni Amer country; his descendants are said to have migrated to that country, conquering and subjugating the various groups with which they came into contact. There are also certain other, equally vague, traditions, the most mythical of which states that the Nabtab have "sprung from the earth", as the predestined rulers over many tribes. Reduced to more concrete facts, the history of the Beni Amer shows them as the eastern spearhead of an expanding, nomadic, hamitic race, which came to dominate and partly to absorb many weaker and scattered groups, thus creating the Beni Amer nation. In the course of time other alien groups probably joined this confederacy, which offered them protection from the raids by the powerful neighbouring tribes in the Sudan and Ethiopia. The caste system must have grown out

of the original distinction between invaders and invaded, protectors and protected.

There is no equivalent clear-cut term for the serfs as there is for the ruling caste. The serfs are generally called "the Arabs" of the rulers; or they are referred to as the *ndessna* (those "who belong") of this or that Beni Amer section; or finally, they are called the *Nabtabu haieffin* – those "under the Nabtab". The serfs bear the name of the tribal sections to which they "belong", and are an integral part of the section. They live side by side with their rulers and, to-day, share in the same activities. The old division of labour which made the rulers the warriors and protectors, and their subjects the serfs and clients, has come to an end. To-day there exist wealthy and influential serfs who own livestock and work their own land. In some cases groups of serfs have become so large and powerful that they have even gained independent political status and are recognised as separate tribes (like the Labat, Elman, Ad Sala, and Beit Awat); their old serf origin is little more than a memory. The social integrity of the Nabtab is preserved only in the (at least theoretical) rejection of all intermarriage between masters and serfs. Another element of discrimination is to-day merely of historical interest. It is embodied in the tribal code governing homicide, which lays down that if a Nabtab kills a Nabtab, (of another section; within the tribal section, no secular punishment of this crime amounting to fratricide is admissible), blood feuds must ensue. But if a Nabtab kills a serf, the deed is expiated by the payment of blood money. The case of a serf killing a Nabtab is considered so unheard of a phenomenon that informants would decline to discuss its legal implications.

The Beni Amer are divided into 21 tribes, which are known as *badana* or, in Arabic, *qabail*. This, at least, is the tribal structure to-day. For this loose federation has undergone many changes, in the distant as well as recent past, new groups joining the federation, and old groups seceding from it. The latter process was mostly

due to internal feuds or personal rivalry between the tribal leaders. The former, as has been said, may reflect the need of protection which, in the past, caused weaker tribes to join the powerful union; or a forceful Beni Amer chief would compel some small and weak group to exchange its autonomy for a tributary status; in recent times, too, this inclusion of new sections was sponsored for administrative reasons, by the Italian Government.

Like the tribal federation, the component tribe is largely a fluid unit, whose sections sometime leave the mother-tribe and establish themselves as independent groups. The tribes, or *badana*, are of greatly varying size and are accordingly divided into varying numbers of sub-sections; these are known as *hissa* (in Beja and Arabic) or *hissat* (in Tigrè). The tribes are thought of as genealogical branches of that vast kindred with which the Beni Amer ruling caste indentifies itself; the *hissa*, as kinship groups within the genealogical branch. Certain sub-sections (of the tribe Ad Omar) are so large that they have come to be regarded almost as separate tribes. Groups of tribes, on the other hand, are credited with close kinship, such as the four tribes Dagga, Ad Al Bakhit, Ad Taule, and Sinkat Keinab, and may well have grown out of what were originally branches of the same tribe.

These are the Beni Amer *badana* (the population figures are very approximate).

Dagga. This is the most important and wealthiest tribe, from which the paramount chiefs of the Beni Amer descend. Its people number 12,000 and speak both Beja and Tigré. The word *dagga* means literally "camp", it refers, more specifically, to the large semipermanent camp situated near what is to-day Agordat town, where the paramount chief used to reside and from which he governed his scattered tribes. Thus emerged the separate branch of the "people of the camp", which was composed of the chief's kindred, his many henchmen serfs and slaves, and became the "royal" tribe of the Beni Amer.

Ad Omar. This tribe is divided into five large sections which claim to-day the status of separate tribes. They are Ad Al Allam (with a population of 2000. Tigré-speaking). Al Hamid Awad (1.000, Tigré-speaking), Ad Humbirra (1,500, Tigré-speaking), Hassal (1600 Beja-speaking), and Sheneiab (1500, Beja-speaking). During the Mahdist wars internal feuds caused the Ad Omar to leave the Beni Amer federation; this secession, however, lasted only 10-15 years; it ended with the Italian occupation of the country, though the estrangement between the Ad Omar and their brother-tribes survived to the present day.

Ad Okud – Ad Towas. These two tribes claim close kinship. The former numbers 10,000, and its people speak partly Beja, partly Tigré; the latter numbers 1700, and is Beja-speaking. Like the Ad Omar, the Ad Okud tribe made itself independent about 40 years ago, denouncing its allegiance to the paramount chief of the Beni Amer. It was brought back into the federation only recently, in 1940.

Ad Al Bakhit – Ad Taule or Tauliab – Sinkat Keinab. They claim close kinship with each other and the tribe Dagga. The Ad Al Bakhit number 3400 and speak Tigré; the Ad Taule and Sinkat Keinab, much smaller tribes, have a population of 400 and 700, respectively, and are Beja-speaking. In the last generation the Ad Al Bakhit and Ad Taule tended to become sedentary; they live in the extreme south-east of Beni Amer country, south of Agordat, and are settled farmers rather than nomadic herdsmen.

Ad Ibrahim. The people number 2000: the majority speak Tigre, a few speak Beja. In Italian times a chief of this tribe was placed over the Ad Omar and Labat tribes as well, with the object of bringing these dissident sections back into the Beni Amer fold. With his death this tentative, small-scale paramount chieftainship lapsed.

Faidab. The tribe numbers 1500 souls, and is Tigré-speaking. It

descends from the Ad Sheikh in Keren Division, but claims kinship with the Beni Amer Nabtab in the maternal line. It has since long identified itself with the Beni Amer.

Ad Sheikh Garabit. Another group descended from the Ad Sheikh, and still conscious of this kinship. It joined the Beni Amer about 30 years ago. The group numbers 1200, and speaks Tigré.

Labat. They number 2000-3000, and speak Beja. The tribe occupies two disconnected territories, one north of the Gash, and the other in the south, between Tessenei and Om Hager. The Labat were originally serfs of the Dagga and Ad Okud; they seemed to have gained independence later, acquiring their own serf class: under the Italian regime they exchanged their political independence for the qualified autonomy of a separate section within the Beni Amer federation.

Ad Sheraf. They number about 1000; their languages are Beja and Tigré. They claim Arab origin and trace their pedigree to a descendant of the Prophet (Sherif). This "holy" tribe joined the Beni Amer federation many generations ago.

Beit Awat. They number 1300; the majority speak Tigré, a few speak Beja. Like the Labat, the Beit Awat were once the serfs of the Dagga tribe, but are now an autonomous section.

Ad Galtana. They are 4000 strong, and Tigre-speaking.

Algeden. They number about 500, and speak Tigré. They were incorporated in the Beni Amer federation in Italian times. By descent they are akin to the small tribes of Negro origin which live amidst the Beni Amer, the Ilit and Bitama, of which we shall speak presently.

Ad Sala or Absadab. They number 500 and speak Beja. They are commonly regarded as descendants of serf groups but claim Nabtab descent themselves. Like the Ad Al Bakhit and Tauliab, with whom they share the territory south-east of Agordat, the Ad Sala have

adopted the life of sedentary peasants.

Ad Nazi – Ad Hassari. Two small groups, claiming common descent. The former number 300 and speak Beja; the latter, slightly less numerous, are Tigré speaking.

Ad Ali. They number 300, and speak Beja.

Elman. 300 strong, and originally of serf status. To-day they are autonomous and have their own serfs. Their languages are Beja and Tigré.

Hashish. A large proportion of this group is descended from the Hadendowa – the large hamitic tribe in the eastern Sudan. The Hashish number 400, and speak Beja. They were brought into the Beni Amer federation under the Italians.

Each *badana* is a political unit, ruled over by an *Omdah* or, in the vernacular, *ta badana ta hadda.* Each branch of a *badana,* or *hissa,* is under a Sheikh or *t'hissa ta hadda.* Chiefs and sub-chiefs are invariably members of the ruling caste. The Beni Amer confederacy as a whole is under a paramount chief, who styles himself *Diglal* and comes, as we have heard, from the tribe Dagga. The reigning *Diglal* is Geilani Hussein. At the beginning of the British occupation he was deposed and exiled to the Sudan for his alleged pro-Italian sympathies. The accusation, however, proved unfounded, and the *Diglal* was allowed to return to Eritrea and resume the rule of his tribe. At his side is his deputy, the Sheikh al Mushaikh, again descended from the "royal tribe", Dagga. The office of the *Diglal* is hereditary in a dynasty which several generations ago split into two branches. It has long been the traditional rule that both branches should be represented in the paramount offices of the tribe, so that if the *Diglal* comes from one branch, the Sheikh al Mushaikh must come from another.

Recently, the Administration has created the posts of two more Shiyukh al Mushaikh, dividing among the three chiefs the various tribes and tribal sections, giving five each to two of the

chiefs, and fifteen to the third. There is no historical precedent for this administrative grouping, nor are the sections which have been so united akin to or linked with one another. Their unification has provoked a mild protest from an unexpected quarter: the paramount chief of the Ad Sheikh in Keren Division complained that the off-shoot of his tribe in the Beni Amer federation, the Ad Sheikh Garabit, had been placed under an "alien" Sheikh al Mushaikh, the chief of Ad Okut. Regarding himself still as the protector of these ex-members of his tribe, the chief of the Ad Sheikh demanded that they should be given back their old autonomous status in the Beni Amer confederacy.

The political unity of the Beni Amer is sustained by a common religion – Islam. The large majority acknowledges the spiritual leadership of the Morghani family, which holds the same ecclesiastical position in the Eastern Sudan. From time to time, however, holy men appear in the Beni Amer country who command, for a period at least, the religious allegiance of the people. The most recent as well as the most conspicuous figure is Sayidna Mustafa, of the Faidab tribe, whose fame seriously rivalled that of the Morghani. He died in 1941, and his grave near Agordat has become a place of pilgrimage for the people of many tribes.

The Beni Amer also have in common their livelihood, which is largely that of nomadic herdsmen whose wealth lies in camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and only to a small extent in agriculture. During the dry season the Beni Amer wander far afield, less towards the west and into the Sudan than to the east and south. The camel-owning groups tend to move eastwards, towards the western flank of the Northern Hills; the cattle-owners migrate to the Gash river and beyond it, some sections visiting annually the pastures in the valleys of Keren, in the Akkele – Guzai and Serae. During the rains a large proportion of the people move to the river Barka, where hamlets and villages form the semi-permanent centres of the tribe. At this time of the year, too, the various sections restrict their

migrations and inhabit fairly well defined areas (see Map No. 2). We have already spoken of the area in the south-east, where a few sections have almost abandoned nomadic life, exchanging it for the livelihood of settled farmers.

3. Kunama and Baria.

These two large tribes differ in race and culture fundamentally from the surrounding groups. They live in the Barentu area, the Baria roughly to the north of the motor road, the Kunama (or Baza) south of this line, down to the Setit and the Ethiopian frontier, and as far west as Om Hager. Small groups of Kunama also live in the north-west corner of the Serae. The tribe spreads into Ethiopia, across the Setit, which marks the political boundary. Ethnic affinity does not prevent this off-shoot of the tribe from joining its Ethiopian neighbours in raids upon the Kunama in Eritrea, and the latter have been forced to move north and inland from the Setit to evade this constant danger. The Baria number about 15.000 and the Kunama 10,000. The two tribes are of negro stock, and probably, represent the remnants of the once much larger negro population which must have occupied the central Sudan and the middle Nile, and was gradually reduced and pushed south by the expansion of Arabs and Beja. Nor has this process come to a halt in recent times. We have historical evidence that in the years between 1850 and 1860 the population of the Baria and Kunama was literally decimated by the incessant raids of the Beni Amer and Abyssinians.

Kunama and Baria speak different languages, both apparently of the Sudanese type, and rarely intermarry. Sedentary and agriculturist, the tribes live in large, permanent villages. The Baria are to-day largely Mohammedans: the Kunama are only now exchanging their religion for the new faith of Islam. Catholic and Protestant missions, too, have made converts in this tribe, which now includes about 250 Catholics and the same number of Protestant. The pagan rites and the priestly experts which the tribes possess

(or possessed) are again reminiscent of the negro groups in the central Sudan, and especially of that untouched enclave, the Nuba mountains.

The social structure of the Kunama is based on a division into six clans *(molata)* – Kara, Dula, Sogona, Nataka, Serme and Argatakra. The clans are strictly exogamous, and descent is counted in the maternal line. The matrilineal element also determines to some extent the residence of the individual. A man moves on marriage to his wife's home and the children must be born in the mother's village. Afterwards the family may, if it chooses, move to the husband's place, but it is possible that here the impact of Islam has weakened the traditional rule. In the case of divorce, the children must invariably return to their mother's family. Their guardian is, not the father, but the mother's brother. The clans appear to have a totemic background, for they are linked with certain animals or natural phenomena (elephant, moon), which are regarded as the symbols of the groups. The clans are vested with special magic and spiritual powers, which they wield for the benefit of the tribe at large. Certain of these powers have considerable political significance. Thus the clan Kara possesses grain-magic, which it exercises through its old men or priests; the clan Dula gives to the tribe its hereditary rain-maker; another clan supplies a priest who controls locusts; finally the clans Dula and Sogona are called upon whenever there is a tribal dispute over land or a blood feud, to act, through their elders, as the tribal peacemakers. The political importance of these clans is expressed in the name by which they, or their elders, are known in the tribe: *lagamanna*, "chief of the earth".

Yet the clan system plays no part in the political life of the tribe. For the social structure is combined with another, politically more effective, sub-division, based on territory and local units. As the clans are irregularly scattered over the territory of the tribe, territorial and clan divisions are unrelated. The local groups are

said to be distinguished by minor differences of dialect and custom. How these differences originated, whether they are the result of immigrations from without or of spontaneous separation from within, it is impossible to say. To-day the territorial division alone forms the basis of the political system.

There are six local groups, or sub-tribes, which take their names largely from geographical features – the names of rivers or localities: Marda, Barka, Mogreb, Sogodas, Lakatakura and Tika, The first three live in the north-east of Kunama country, between the rivers Mogreb and Gash (called Barka by the Kunama); the Sogodas live in the north-west, the Lakatakura and Tika in the south, on the Setit (Tika in Kunama). The Lakatakura and Sogodas belong to the *Residenza* of Tessenei, the remaining sections to the *Residenza* of Barentu. Each sub-tribe is divided into 3-4 sections, which represent again local units, living in well-defined, different areas.

Each sub-tribe is under a chief called *manna* or (in Arabic) *Omdah*, and each local section under a chief's deputy – *awdada* or *Wakil*. In Mahdist times the tribe possessed a paramount chief, whose name was Sayyid Kakashi. He seems to have come from one of the two "peace-maker" clans, but it is not clear whether he was the last man of a hereditary line, or only a tribal leader chosen by the people in their fight against the foreign invasion. Sayyid Kakashi was killed in battle in 1884, and his office died with him.

The political organisation of the Baria tribe closely resembles that of the Kunama. Again we find a division into local groups or sub-tribes, each with its smaller sections. There are two sub-tribes. the Mogreb in the west (north of the river of that name), and the Higgir in the east, both in Barentu district. Each sub-tribe has its chief *(mashinge* or *Omdah)*, and each section its deputy *(nada* or *Wakil)*. Unlike the Kunama, however the Baria have since long been under a paramount chief, who is called, in Arabic fashion, the *Nazir* of the tribe. The social organisation of the Baria, too,

seems closely akin to that of the Kunama – it is again based on a division into clans *(nara)* which are invested with magic powers: descent is counted in the paternal line. But among the Baria Islamic conceptions have overlaid the original features of the culture, and obscured the social structure of the tribe.

4. Small Tribes and Immigrants.

In the middle of Beni Amer country we find certain small enclaves of sedentary tribes of diverse origin, which have maintained their ethnic integrity, mainly owing to their reluctance to intermarry with their neighbours. The Sabdarat, on the Sudan frontier, number about 3000. They are bilingual, speaking both Arabic and Tigré. Mohammedan, and claim descent from a Sherif in Mecca. The Ilit, in the hills of Alkota, number about 600. They speak a language of their own, but are Mohammedans like the Sabdarat. The Bitama, only about 150 strong, and again Mohammedan, speak Tigré. The Ilit and Bitama are of negro stock and possibly akin to the Kunama. They were at one time under the Sabdarat, but have been autonomous for several generations. A group of Shukria Arabs, 400 strong, lives near the Kassala frontier. These Shukria are the off-shoot of the Sudanese tribe of that name, and migrated to their present home before the Mahdist regime.

On the river Gash, in the villages of Dukumoia and Wogero, in the midst of Kunama country, we meet with a group of Tigrinya-speaking Copts. They number about 1000, and have settled in their present home some 30 years ago. The majority are descended from the Serae, but among them are also people from Ethiopia – from Gondar and the Tigrai. In the villages in the south and south-west of Agordat Divison groups of West Africans, Sudanese. Somali and Rashaida Arabs live side by side, without having evolved political units of their own. Mostly they are recent arrivals, who were attracted by the prospects of trade and by the large agricultural schemes which the Italians started in the Tessenei area. A final

wave of immigration is happening under our eyes. It is specially interesting, as it repeats, in modern context, what must have been an essential feature of the growth of the Beni Amer nation and its serf class. The immigrants belong to the Maria tribe whose tribal lands are in Keren Division. Groups of this tribe (4000-5000 strong) move annually during the dry season to the rivers Barka and Gash for grazing. But Maria men and women have also settled in Agordat Division, and partly at Kassala in the Sudan, in ever increasing numbers during the last decade. The reason for their emigration is the poverty of the soil and the scarcity of grazing lands in their old country. The men found work as labourers in the towns or as herdsmen of the Beni Amer; the women make mats of palm leaves or work as servants in the Beni Amer houses. It is said that few Agordat households are without a Maria servant. Most of the immigrants belong to the serf class of their tribe, a few are impoverished "nobles" now reduced to the state of serfs. In Agordat they still preserve one symbol of their tribal autonomy – they pay tribute through their tribal chiefs; in Kassala, they have lost even this. In a generation or so their name will probably be added to the list of the Beni Amer serfs.

III. THE NORTHERN HILLS

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III. THE NORTHERN HILLS

1. The Country.

Keren Division, which embraces the territory of the Northern Hills, is divided into two *Residenze* – Keren in the South, and Nacfa in the North. This administrative arrangement, unlike that in other Divisions, corresponds closely both to the geography of the country and to the ethnic distribution. Keren District lies on the low plateau from which the chains of hills slope down towards the north; Nacfa district comprises the hills themselves and the stretch of coast at their eastern base. Moreover, as we shall see, Keren District is inhabited by a largely sedentary population, while Nacfa is the habitat of nomadic tribes.

Economically, too, this two-fold division is clearly marked. Keren District is comparatively rich in agricultural wealth, and in large measure self-supporting. The tribes of Nacfa have little arable land, and are disinclined to agriculture. They are, in consequence almost completely dependent on supplies from outside. These come from two different sources. Imports on a large scale, effected by merchants, reach the markets of Keren and Nacfa from Agordat; for the small-scale purchases of individuals and families, Massawa and the coast, the transit markets for grain from the Yemen, are the sources of supply. The trading of livestock for grain forms part of the seasonal routine of these herdsmen tribes, which regularly visit the coast on their winter migrations.

Another economic dependence on outside territories, the need of grazing lands, affects only few of the tribes of Keren and Nacfa. The Maria Talaam move in the winter months to the Barka valley in Agordat Division. The Mensa tribe takes its herds to the plain of Sheb, on the border of Massawa Division. And in bad years the Habab would look for pastures in the Tokar region of the Sudan. The remaining tribes migrate within the territory of the Division, between the hills, their summer habitat, and the coast or the low lying valleys of the Shotel and Anseba, where they move in the dry season.

The Division has only one town. Keren. It has a native population of 9000, which is composed, in roughly equal proportion, of members of the local tribes, mostly Mohammedans, and strangers from the Yemen, the Sudan, Somaliland and, above all, from the Eritrean plateau and Ethiopia. About one third of the native population of Keren town belongs to the Belein tribe. Keren is an old settlement: it existed in the time of Munziger Pasha, the Swiss adventurer in Egyptian service, who made it the seat of his short-lived government (1871-1876). In Italian times Keren developed into an important administrative, military and commercial centre, and became the third largest town of Eritrea.

Nacfa, the headquarters of Nacfa District, is an insignificant village in the winter months, with a population of only 150-200 But in the summer months, when the nomadic tribes, return to the hills, it become a populous centre and a busy market.

2. The People.

The complex variety of tribes and races in the Northern Hills does not lend itself to a simple classification. Linguistically, the population falls in two large groups the Belein-speaking and the Tigré-speaking tribes. The former group comprises three tribes; the latter, a large number of independent ethnic units – the Habab, Mensa, Maria, and others. There are, in addition, certain smaller linguistic groups – one speaking Tigrinya, a second Arabic, and

third speaking Beja as well as Tigré.

More significant is a division based on economic habits and forms of livelihood. Here a fairly sharp line can be drawn between the south and north, between the predominantly sedentary southern groups, and the nomadic herdsmen tribes in the northern part of the country. As has been said, this geographical and ethnic division coincides with the administrative organisation of the territory. The southern groups belong to the political District of Keren, the northern tribes to Nacfa District. There are, however, exceptions. For certain of the northern tribes have exchanged, or are even now exchanging, their "northern" livelihood for "southern" habits.

To the tribes just enumerated we must add sections of the Beni Amer, which graze their herds in the Shotel valley, in the south-west; and a block of Tigrinya-speaking people in the "Abyssinian Districts" south of Keren, which represents not a tribe, but an offshoot of the race inhabiting the Central Plateau.

3. Social System

Cutting across ethnic divisions, and differences of livelihood and habitat, we find yet another most important division: the social distinction between ruling caste and serf caste. The names by which the two castes are known differ somewhat in different tribes, though the Tigré words *shumagalle* for the ruling caste and *tigré* for the serfs have come to be used throughout the territory. It will be understood then, that the Belein tribes comprise a *tigré* class which does not speak Tigré – the language of the serfs; while among the Tigré-speaking tribes, the class of nobles share the languages of their serfs. A plausible explanation of this anomaly seems to be that an alien ruling class has, in the course of time, adopted the language of the aboriginal population, which it reduced to the state of serfs. However, the available historical data are insufficient to prove this theory with any degree of certainty.

Indeed the facts of immigration and ethnic origin only compli-

cate the picture. The ruling caste in these various tribes is said to be descended either from the Beja in the Sudan or the Ethiopian (Tigrinya-speaking) race of the Central Plateau. The serf-race, of heterogeneous stock, represents both remnants of an oboriginal population and the descendants of slaves or of weak and small groups which came under the domination of the new lords of the land. In some tribes (Habab and Ad Temariam) the latter distinction is expressed in the nomenclature, the descendants of slaves being known as *maket*, and the other serf-groups as *tigré*. In other tribes again, both ruling class and serfs claim Arab origin. Thus the only tangible reality that remains is that of groups united by submission to a system of political domination, by the acceptance of a common code, and by the consciousness of "belonging together".

In this sense the serfs "belong" to the tribe or sub-tribe, even to the kinship group, of their masters. The serfs identify themselves with the tribes or tribal sections of their overlords, though one or the other serf group may also preserve its old tribal or family name. The serfs live in the same settlements as their masters, and attend with them (though always in the back row) tribal feasts and ceremonies. Serfs and masters even intermarry, though the intermarriage remains unilateral, men of the ruling caste taking serf women for their wives. The caste distinction is expressed, above all, in chieftainship, and in certain social and economic disabilities which attach to serf status.

Only the ruling group can give the tribes or tribal sections their chiefs and hereditary heads. It claims property rights over all the tribal lands. Serfs may work land in their own right, but only as tenants of their masters, paying a share of the crops as rent. Again, serfs may own livestock, but must pay dues on it to their masters. The serfs are permanently bound to their masters and cannot change their allegiance without their masters' permission. The serfs must undertake all the menial duties which are considered

unfitting for men of noble birth, like the herding of animals, the milking of cows or, in groups which practise agriculture, the work on the land. Finally, the serf is bound to make certain gifts, often of a ceremonial and symbolic nature, to his masters, either on the occasion of tribal feasts, or at harvest time, or whenever he slaughters a beast from his herd.

The economic and social relations between masters and serfs have undergone considerable changes in the past, and are even now moving towards a re-definition. Among the Belein, for example, the serfs have bought land from their masters, a transaction which is forbidden by custom, and have thus become landlords in their own right; dues paid on the land are the last remnants of the old landlord-tenant relationship. Sometimes serfs have refused to continue the customary gifts. and have obtained exemption from these obligations – de facto, not de jure, in the eyes of the rulers. Serfs have even declined to perform their duty par *excellence*, the milking of cows, much to the annoyance of their helpless masters. These changes have reached different stages in different tribes. The serf obligations have almost disappeared among the Belein; they are fast disappearing among the Mensa; the firstsigns of the coming change are visible among the Ad Tekles and Beit Juk: only among the Maria and Habab are the old customs still in force.

To understand these changes we must realise the reciprocal nature of the relations between masters and serfs. They consist, or consisted, in a definite give-and-take. For their services the serfs received the protection of their more powerful rulers and the use of land and grazing grounds held by the masters by the right of conquest. The need of the former has lapsed; and two generations of peaceful existence have obscured the old claims of conquest. Finally, economic changes have undermined the privileges of the rulers: now there are poor "masters" and wealthy "serfs" – a state of affairs which ill accords with the old relationship.

Probably other, less tangible, factors equally count in the master-serf relationship. If the serfs are expected to obey and honour their masters, the latter must treat their subjects with patriarchal benevolence. Indeed it seems that in the tribes which have preserved the old relationship intact, the ruling caste never failed in these duties. In other groups it did fail, and forfeited the submission of the serfs. To-day, having lost both their material power and their psychological sway, the weakened rulers are appealing to the Government, to help them to preserve, or revive, their waning authority.

4. The Southern Tribes.

Belein. This large group, also known as Bogos, lives in the south of Keren Division. It comprises two tribes (of a third, affiliated group we shall speak presently): the Beit Tarke, with a population of 10,000 and the Beit Tawke, with a population of 11,000. Though speaking the same language and sharing a common culture, the Tarke and Tawke regard themselves as separate units and claim independent origin, one from the highlands of Ethiopia, the other from the Eritrean Hamasien. They live in distinct, well-defined areas, the Beit Tarke in the south, the Beit Tawke in the north-west. Each tribe is divided into sub-tribes or *hissat* – the Tarke into five, the Tawke into six, – and each sub-tribe is further sub-divided into numerous kinship groups (again known as *hissat*).

To the two Belein tribes we must add a third, small and unimportant group (only about 1100 strong), the Bab Jangeren. It is of alien origin, and originally spoke a different language. Offshoots of the tribe live today among the Hababb and other Tigré-speaking groups. The Jangeren now living with the Belein have adopted the language of that tribe, and became affiliated to it. Even this small and dependent group has its class of masters and serfs. Politically, the Jangeren remained autonomous till 1932, when, for administrative reasons, they were joined to Tarke and placed under the chief of that tribe, retaining, however,

their own group head, known as *Sim*.

Until 70 or 80 years ago the Belein were Coptic Christians. During the Egyptian invasion of the Keren highlands (1860-1876) the tribes began to adopt the faith of their new overlords. Today they are largely Islamized, though among the Tarke we find 5000 Mission-converted Catholics, a few Mission-Protestants, as well as a small Coptic minority.

The Belein are mainly agriculturist, and live in permanent settlements – small hamlets of 4-5 families. Masters (called *simager*) and serfs *(mikeru)* live side by side and share in the common livelihood – agriculture.

The political organisation of the Belein tribes reflects their sedentary habits – it is essentially territorial, and based on the districts in which the people live. Until recently each sub-tribe of the Tarke and Tawke was politically autonomous, under it own ditary head *(Sim)*. In 1932 the Italian Government decided to place the group heads in each tribe under a District Chief or *Meslenie* – a measure which, logical though it appears, has never become popular. In the political organisation of these groups tribal administration thus shades over into district administration. The former is visible in the internal division of the tribes, into sub-tribes and kinship groups; the latter in the territorial jurisdiction of the chiefs. This territorial jurisdiction allows of one exception: the internal disputes of alien herdsmen tribes which visit Belein country on their migrations remain under the jurisdiction of the tribal chiefs of these seasonal guests. In disputes between the "guests" and their "hosts" the chiefs of the latter alone are, according to custom, the judges.

Maria. This tribe, about 25.000 strong, lives to the north-west of the Belein. It derives its descent from a common ancestor with certain other tribes, the Tigré-speaking Mensa, the Saho-speaking Hazu and Asaorta, who is said to have come from Arabia. Eight generations ago, when the tribe already occupied its present

habitat, it split into two branches, the Black and the Red Maria (Maria Tsalam and Maria Ayyah), which are said to have taken their names from the two wives of their paternal ancestor – one "black", and the other "red" of skin. The Black Maria, more numerous and wealthy than their brothers, are regarded as the first-born, and used to claim the prerogative of investing their hereditary chief with the ancient paramount title of *Shum*. This prerogative has lapsed however, and to-day each section of the tribe has its chief called *Shum*. The two sections intermarry freely, but live in well-defined areas, the Black Maria in the west, the Red Maria in the east. Each section is sub-divided into four kinship groups *(hissat)*, each under its hereditary head (again known as *Shum)*. The kinship groups do not occupy separate territories, but live interspersed among each other. The true descendants of the tribal ancestor constitute the aristocracy – *shumagalle* – and give the tribe its chiefs and headmen. The serfs – *tigré* – are, as in all these tribes, descendants of slaves and of aboriginal inhabitants, or of weak tribal fractions which came under the tutelage of the Maria.

Like the Belein, the Maria were originally Coptic Christians. According to local tradition they were Mohammedans first, but later lost their religion and adopted the Coptic creed of the country. Early in the 19th century, the tribe was converted (or reconverted) to Islam.

The Maria are cultivators on a small scale. Their main wealth is representend in the large herds of cattle, sheep and goats, and (especially among the Black Maria) camels. The seasonal migrations of the tribe in search of grazing are largely limited to the tribal territory, though the Black Maria, who live close to the border of Agordat, also move seasonally to the Barka valley in that Division. Some groups, of the Red Maria more particularly, live in small permanent hamlets. Their nomadic leanings are still discernible in the many temporary encampments, rarely of more

than three or four tents, which are moved from place to place, as the tribe takes new stretches of land under cultivation. The serfs live with their masters; they observe, fairly rigidly, the old division of labour which makes the former the tillers of the soil, and the latter the idle landlords.

As among the Belein, tribal and territorial units coincide, and the political organisation is on a territorial basis. Again, alien visitors on their seasonal migrations remain, in disputes between themselves, under the jurisdiction of their own chiefs.

Mensa. This tribe lives to the east of the Belein, touching the administrative boundaries between Keren and the Divisions of Massawa and the Hamasien. The tribe is small, only about 5000 strong, and is divided into two sections (each with five kinship groups), the Beit Abrehe and the Beit Shakan. Of the traditional origin of the tribe we have already spoken. The two sections of the Mensa represent two genealogical branches, descended from the common ancestor of the tribe, Mensaai. Again, the offspring of the tribal ancestor forms the nobility which rules over the *tigré* serf population. The two branches of the tribe occupy different parts of the country, the Beit Abrehe the northern, and the Beit Shakan the southern part. The Beit Abrehe are the senior branch, richer in land, and one of its ancestors is said to have received, in 1600, the rank of *Kantibai* from the Emperor of Ethiopia. The rank became the title of the hereditary chiefs of the Beit Abrehe. The chief of the Beit Shakan bore till recently the less ambitious title of *Meslenie;* to-day the chief of the junior branch is equally known as *Kantibai.*

The Mensa, too, have exchanged their original faith – Coptic Christianity – for Islam. On the border of the Hamasien there are still a few Copts among the tribe – as there are also a few who speak, not Tigré, but the language of the Coptic Eritrean. Tigrinya. About a thousand Mensa were converted to Protestantism by the Swedish Mission.

The Mensa are cultivators, and live in small, permanent settlements. Their system of chieftainship is, accordingly, based on territorial jursidiction.

Beit Juk. They are a small tribe of under 4000 souls, said to be descended from the Tigrinya-speaking peoples on the Plateau. Even this small group has its caste division of nobles *(shumagalle)* and serfs *(Sebmider)*. The tribe is Mohammedan and agriculturist, and lives in permanent settlements, mostly small hamlets, though there is one large village, called Wasentet. As in the other sedentary tribes, the political organisation is territorial; at its head is the chief of the tribe, who bears the rank of *Kantibai*.

5. The Northern Tribes.

Beit Asgede. The largest of the northern tribes is the Habab tribe, numbering 25,000. It claims common descent with the Ad Tekles (10,000) and Ad Temariam (7.000) from an identical ancestor, Asgede. Though the three groups thus appear as sub-tribes or genealogical branches, it seems more appropriate to regard them as separate tribes, for today they lead an independent life in well-defined territories, and are politically autonomous, each under its own tribal chief.

Asgede, the semi-mythical founder of the three tribes, is said to have lived in the 17th century, and to be descended from the Tsenadegle, a kinship group (now a territorial unit) in the Akkele-Guzai on the Plateau. It is interesting to note that the people living in Tsenadegle today are as well aware of this tradition as is the offspring of Asgede in the Keren and Nacfa hills. These latter groups have lost their original language. Tigrinya, and now speak the language of their serfs. Tigré. Again we are dealing with immigrant groups which became a tribal aristocracy, ruling over a population of serfs and ex-slaves. The three tribes are known collectively as Beit Asgede (the House of Asgede). The ruling cast is referred to as *tono* or *shumagalle*. The former name is applied to those members of the aristocracy who combine social standing

with wealth, and thus real power. The word *shumagalle*, on the other hand, has come to mean the impoverished aristocracy of the country – men of noble descent without wealth or authority.

The Habab claim descent from the first-born son of a certain Mafles; the Ad Tekles from the second-born; the Ad Temariam from a younger brother of the same Mafles. Each tribe is subdivided into numerous kinship groups *(hissat)*. The hereditary chiefs of the tribes, as well as the heads of the kinship groups, are known as *Shum*, except in the case of the chief of the Habab tribe, who bears the ancient Ethiopian title of *Kantibai*.

The Asgede tribes were originally Coptic Christians, their *tigré* subjects Mohammedans. But in the course of time the rulers adopted, with the language of their subjects, also their faith.

The Habab and Ad Temariam are nomadic herdsmen, rich in herds. They live in temporary encapments of tents and grass huts. Their winter migrations take them down to the coast and, occasionally, north, into the Sudan. Both in the plain and in the hills, at Algena, Maba and Nacfa, they have traditional camping sites, which are the semi-permanent centres of the moving tribe, especially of its less mobile members, the old men and the nobles. The two tribes also practise a little agriculture near these tribal centres. The political organisation of the Habab and Ad Temariam is tribal, the jurisdiction of their chiefs extending over the members of the tribe wherever their migrations may take them.

The Ad Tekles, the southernmost of the Beit Asgede, have adopted agriculture on a much larger scale, and are today almost sedentary. We were referring, above all, to this tribe, when we spoke above of groups which have exchanged the "southern" way of living. Administratively, too, the Ad Tekles are separated from their brother tribes. For while the latter belong to Nacfa District, the Ad Tekles have been placed under the less distant Keren. In the political system of the Ad Tekles the transition from nomadic to sedentary existence is reflected in the gradual reorientation of

chieftainship from tribal to territorial jurisdiction.

Ad Sheikh. Their country is wedged between the Habab in the north and the Ad Tekles in the south. The Ad Sheikh number some 9000 souls. They claim Arab origin, and trace their descent to a *sherif* (relation of the Prophet) in Mecca. The arrival of the tribe in its present habitat is placed five generations back (about 1800). The fame of its sanctity and the strength of the tribe attracted many weak groups, which voluntarily became the clients of the immigrants, among them even groups which had already been the serfs of the House of Asgede. Among the serf groups of the Ad Sheikh (called *tigré)* are a few of Beni Amer origin, which are today bilingual, speaking both Beja and Tigré. The aristocracy is known, as among the Habab, as *shumagalle* and *tono,* the two names having the same meaning as in that tribe. The close contacts with the local tribes have caused the Ad Sheikh to lose their old language and, through intermarriage, their racial characteristics (though the Ad Sheikh themselves would hotly deny this intermarriage). In the course of time the tribe split into several sections. The branch descending from the eldest son of the tribal ancestor alone lives in the hills of Nacfa; the other branches have emigrated east, to the coastal plain, north, to Tokar in the Sudan, or west, to the Barka valley. Two sections – the Faidab and Ad Sheikh Garabit – now live in the Western Plain under the patronage of the Beni Amer. This separation, though apparently fully acceptable to the split-off groups themselves, is viewed with resentment by the chief of the senior Ad Sheikh; he has several times appealed to the Government to bring these offshoots of his tribe back under his jurisdiction.

The Ad Sheikh are strongly conscious of their role of a "holy" tribe, they are, naturally, fervent Mohammedans. One Ad Sheikh man, Sheikh Mohammed ben Ali, who died in 1877, is widely worshipped as a saint, and his grave near Massawa has become a sacred shrine and famous place of pilgrimage. The position of religious leaders, however, which the Ad Sheikh could once claim,

has passed from them to the Morghani family, whose spiritual overlordship is now acknowledged by most of the Mohammedans of Eritrea.

The Ad Sheikh are nomadic herdsmen, though they have one or two fixed camps at Kamchewa and Afabet, to which they are accustomed to return after their winter migrations. The tombs of the tribe, situated close to these camp sites, are visible evidence of this sedentary strain in the otherwise nomadic character of the tribe.

The political system of the Ad Sheikh is tribal. Its rule is vested in a hereditary chief who is called in Arabic, *Nazir* or *Sheikh.*

Ad Tsaura, Ad Muallim and *Beit Mala.* These are three small tribes, totalling 4000-5000 souls, also claiming, with more or less justification, Arab origin. The first two live in the east, down to the Red Sea coast (partly in Massawa territory); the third lives in the foothills northwest of the Habab. Offshoots of the Ad Tsaura have become the dependents of the Habab and Ad Temariam; the rest of the tribe is autonomous, under its own chief, as are also the other two tribes, Ad Muallim and Beit Mala. During the Mahdist invasion, the Beit Mala became, for a time, the serfs of the Beni Amer; small groups of Beit Mala still belong to the Beni Amer federation of tribes. At one time, too, the Beit Mala spoke only Beja, the language of the Beni Amer; today they are billingual, speaking both Beja and Tigré. Alone among the Tigré-speaking tribes, the Ad Tsaura, Ad Muallim and Beit Mala, have no caste division. To the caste-proud ruling groups of other tribes, these three groups are very nearly serfs, their political autonomy notwithstanding.

The three tribes are Mohammedan, and largely nomadic. The Ad Muallim – "Tribe of the Teachers" – claim descent from Mohammedan scholars, and used to supply the teachers of the Qoran to their neighbours, the Ad Tamariam. To-day they practise a little agriculture, and engage in trade in salt, which they transport on their camels from the Red Sea to the hills.

Rashaida. They represent the most recent wave of immigration from Arabia, dating back only to 1870, and possibly the only one that can be established with any certainty. They are also the only group which preserved its language and culture, disdaining both intermarriage with other tribes and cultural assimilation. The tribe is small, probably only a thousand strong, and exclusively nomadic. The Rashaida own camels and goats – no cattle – and live in the typical cloth tents of Arabia. Their principal livelihood of bygone times – slave trade – is today one hopes, only a memory.

6. The "Abyssinian Districts".

These four districts – Debresina, Lamachelli, Adirba and Dakandu – are situated close to the Hamasien border. They share with the Hamasien, and the people of the Central Plateau, language, religion, and civilisation at large. They speak Tigrinya, they are Copts (excepting a few recently converted Catholics), and are organised in the large kinship groups or *enda* which are typical of the social organisation of the Plateau population. It is this close affinity with the "Abyssinian" culture in the highlands which has given these districts their names. The population of the Abyssinian Districts numbers 6000, and lives in large, permament villages, governed by village chiefs or *Chikka*, as are the villages on the Central Plateau. In the Districts Debresina, Adirba and Dakandu, the name of the district is also the name of the main village. The fourth district, Lamachelli, has no village of that name; the main settlement is Haddish Adi.

In pre-Italian times each district was autonomous, under a chief who styled himself *Shumonya*. In Debresina the famous monastery of that name, which still exists, owned all the land and claimed the temporal as well as spiritual overlordship. Under Italian rule, the monastery lost its land and temporal powers, but the four districts retained their autonomy till 1932. In that year the Italians united them under a paramount chief, entitled *Meslenië*, who now rules over the four communities and their *Shumonya*. It is interesting

to note that *Shumonya* is the old title of the District Chief on the Plateau, which was superseded in Italian times by the modern rank of *Meslenie*. Thus the Abyssinian Districts, offshoots of the Plateau groups, have preserved a feature of their mother-culture which has disappeard in the country which was its home.

IV. THE EASTERN PLAIN

1. Country and People.

The spur of the Central Plateau which, at Massawa and the Bay of Zula, almost reaches the sea, divides the coastal plain in half. To the north the plain is known as Samhar, and further north still, as Sahel (meaning "plain"). It stretches from Massawa, through the north-eastern part of Keren Division, to the Sudan border. In the south, the plain of Dankalia sweeps south and south-west into Abyssinia and to the border of French Somaliland.

This geographical division also determines the ethnic configuration. The north is sparsely populated, though rich in racial variety. Mostly we find small, broken-up sections. Often offshoots of larger tribes and races, which are scattered in an irregular pattern over plain and foothills. The population is to a large extent only seasonal, and in the summer months, when the nomadic groups move to the hills, large tracts of the country are empty of people. The southern part of the plain is inhabited by the large tribe of the Danakil, whose far-flung dominion stretches as far as the plain which bears its name.

A third geographical and ethnic region is the mountain spur itself, with the foothills at its base. It is the home of many groups, some sedentary, others nomadic, which move into the hills during the winter months, for grazing or cultivation. On the northern flank of the mountains, at Ghinda, we find cultivators from the

Plateau districts of Tsenadegle and Engana. On the southern and eastern flank we meet with three large tribes from the Akkele-Guzai, the Asaorta, Miniferi and Hazu.

The hills of Ghinda belong, politically, to Massawa Division. The eastern flank of the mountain spur and the stretch of coast beyond, to the Akkele-Guzai. This stretch of coast thus forms a "corridor" through Massawa Division, from the mountains to the Bay of Zula, an odd frontier arrangment, which was created to allow the tribes from the Akkele-Guzai to reach the coast without crossing the administrative boundary.

The regular movement between the plain and the mountains, which characterises the livelihood of all these tribes, makes it difficult to decide whether to regard them as hill groups or plains tribes, and whether to treat them in the present chapter or in that on the Central Plateau or on the Northern Hills. The period of the year which these groups spend in the plain often equals that spent in the hills. Some groups, too, cultivate both in the plain and in the mountains. Nor does the distinction of descent and origin offer any guidance; for many of the groups with which we meet in the plain have their mother tribe and kindred on the plateau and in the hills. Politically, however, the distinction is easy: the tribes "belong" where they pay tribute. This distinction is neither arbitrary nor artificial. For the payment of tribute reflects, in all tribes of Eritrea, the consciousness of tribal membership. It thus expresses the attitude of the people themselves – whether they regard themselves as mountain dwellers or plainsmen, and the hills or the plain as their real home. It is this criterion which we have adopted in the present description. And it decrees, in the case of the "corridor" tribes, that they "belong" with the other groups of the Akkele-Guzai and the Central Plateau.

The nomadic tribes in the Eastern Pain are rich in livestock, but the sandy, barren country is far from self-supporting in agricultural wealth. It does not produce enough either for its permanent

population, small though it is, or for the migrant groups which move between the coast and the hills. Only the area of Ghinda and the cultivations at Sheb, on the Nacfa-Massawa border, are centres of production of some importance, the former for the seasonal cultivators from the Plateau, the latter for the Mensa and Ad Temariam tribes of Keren Division. But the coastal plain with its ports, large and small, is an important transit market for grain and other commodities from the Yemen. The stream of supplies from overseas reaches central and southern Eritrea by various routes – by the main road to Asmara, and by the many caravan routes to the Northern Hills and the plateau region of the Akkele-Guzai.

2. Dankalia.

The Danakil of Eritrea are about 20,000 strong, and are typical plainsmen. They are essentially of hamitic stock, but the loose organisation of the tribe, which represents a political rather than an ethnic unit, admitted of considerable admixture of other racial elements. Common language (Dankali), common religion (Islam), and above all, the century old threat of Abyssinian aggression, have created and sustained the consciousness of unity in this heterogenic group. The tribe is divided into numerous sub-tribes and kinship groups. It is, besides, split into two castes: the ruling caste of Assaimara ("red men"), and the serf caste of Adoimara ("white men.") According to tradition, the former are the conquerors of the latter – once more aliens ruling over an indigenous population Ethnic, social and tribal divisions cut across one another. Thus one sub-tribe, the Damoheita, embraces both ruling caste and groups of serfs; another sub-tribe. Dahimela, consists of members of the serf caste who, unattached to any ruling group, are in reality their own masters; the serf caste, finally, embraces many groups of alien origin which, through political affiliation and submission, merged with the Danakil tribe.

The powers of the ruling caste are political and economic.

The chiefs of the tribe and the headmen of kinship groups must belong to the Assaimara; and in the ruling caste is also vested that paramount economic privilege, the title to the land. Only the ruling class, or the serf groups which have attained autonomy, can claim rights to well-defined grazing grounds. The serf may own herds, but not the pastures on which to graze them. Landless and unfree, the serfs move with their masters, and derive their claims to grazing lands from the submission to the ruling groups. Thus, if serf groups intend to move to other, new, areas, they must seek the permission of the lords of that country and submit, for the time of residence, to their political authority.

Let us note that while the ruling caste numbers about 5000 individuals, the various serf groups total more than three times that number. This discrepancy in numbers is not rare in societies split into ruling and serf groups; and one of its results has been, in this, as in other, similarly organised societies, to weaken the hold of the ruling caste over the serfs, and to enable the latter to gain political autonomy, if not recognition as members of the master race.

This is the list of the sub-tribes of the Eritrean Danakil. The Danakil groups living in Ethiopia had to be omitted from the present description.

Damoheita. About 4000 strong, this group is scattered along the coast between Assab and the Buri peninsula. As said before, it is composed of ruling caste and serf groups. The tribal name refers more specifically to the ruling caste, which claims (probably with little justification) pure Danakil descent. The serfs are groups of varied, and partly forgotten, origin, which live with the Damoheita and have become identified with the master-tribe.

Assabarka – Nassal – Afara. Three small groups, just over 1000 strong, and members of the ruling caste. They live with their serf groups at Beilul, north of Assab.

Dahimela. A powerful group of serf origin, numbering over 5000 souls, which became politically autonomous. It even extended

its protection over other, weaker, groups so that today this tribe of serf descent has itself its dependents of serf status. The Dahimela live in the western part of the Dankalia plain, near the salt lakes of Assab, and in the Bedda area.

Hedarem. A group of Hadramaut origin, 3000 strong, and widely scattered over the plain. In spite of its size it did not achieve political unity, but is distributed as serf caste among the various local sections of the Damoheita and partly Dahimela.

Bellesuwa. Just under 1000 strong and of Arab origin, claiming descent from the Yemen. The Bellesuwa live between the Endeli river and the Buri peninsula. Though not of Dankali origin, and therefore regarded as having serf-status only, this group is (or became) politically autonomous.

Dunna. Another group of Arab descent, tracing its origin to Hodeida. This small group, with a population of only 400, was originally subject to the Bellesuwa, as a serf group serving serfs. The Dunna shared with their masters the tribal lands round the Dimo hills, at the base of the Buri peninsula. Having grown comparatively numerous, the Dunna gained social independence and, in 1907, political autonomy.

Ankala. A group 760 strong, of mixed descent and serf status, though since long politically autonomous. Small sections of the tribe live near Assab; the larger part lives in the west of the peninsula of Buri.

Hawakil. This is the name of an island and bay south-east of Buri. Island and bay are inhabited by small groups of fishermen, totalling only 100-200 souls, which have taken the name of the locality, having lost their own tribal name. They were once the serfs of the Damoheita of Buri, but were declared autonomous under the Italian régime.

Gedimto. They are said to have originated in Baada, in Ethiopian territory, in the extreme south-west of the Dankalia plain. A tiny section (numbering 50 individuals in all) lives near Lake Giulietta as serfs of the Damoheita.

Sheka. A widely scattered group, with a population of 500. It calls itself the "tribe of sheikhs", for it claims descent from the family of the Prophet, and is therefore regarded as of noble origin. The Sheka are not, however, politically united, but live dispersed among the other Danakil sub-tribes. One small section of the Sheka affiliated itself, as a serf group, to the Damoheita of Buri.

Somali. Scattered groups of Somali descent live on the island of Baka and in Hawakil bay. After their arrival in their present home, three generations ago, the Somalis remained for a period dependent on the chiefs in the old country. The connection with the mother tribe soon lapsed, and the group merged with the Danakil nation, in which it now occupies the place of a sub-tribe, politically autonomous, though of serf status.

Adoimara. To the sub-tribes enumerated above must be added small, broken-up sections of the Adoimara (serf class), totalling about 1500 souls, which, through lack of cohesion and long submission to the Danakil ruling groups, lost their tribal identity. They have survived as nameless families and kinship groups of serfs.

The Danakil are nomadic herdsmen, owning cattle, camels and goats. Their livestock forces them to some extent to restrict their migrations to the areas which offer pasture. Thus the cattle-owning groups among the Damoheita never move far afield from the rich grazing lands of the Buri peninsula, while the camel – and goat-owners, more independent of the seasonal pasture, migrate over long distances, often deep into Ethiopia. This restricted mobility of the cattle owning Damoheita finds expression in the name by which the tribal sections are known; for these names link, with the tribal name, that of the locality which became the habitat of the group: Damoheita-Buri, or Damoheita-Edd. One small section of the Danakil (probably an immigrant group) adopted agriculture and became sedentary at Badda. A few groups on the shores of the Red Sea are fishermen; and the Dahimela also mine salt in the salt pans of Badoli.

Small hamlets of poorly built huts, rarely larger than 10-20 families, are scattered over the plain. Situated near wells, they are the seat of headment, the home of the old, and the semi-permanent centres in the tribal migrations. A few larger villages, Thio, Badda, Meder and Edd, owe their growth to the importance which they attained more recently, as markets, ports, police posts, or administrative centres.

Today, a large number of headmen controls the various sections of the tribe and collects the Government tribute. We know little about the traditional political system of the Danakil. It seems to have been based on a division in kinship groups rather than tribal sections, and the chiefs of the tribe were probably kinship heads rather than political leaders. There is no trace (or no longer any trace) of a stronger and more embracing political leadership, save the vague allegiance which the tribe at large owes to the Sultan of Aussa in Ethiopia.

3. Northern groups — the Plain.

The Samhar plain has, in the past, attracted numerous tribes and tribal sections from the north and west of Eritrea, as it still attracts the seasonal migrations from that area. The somewhat turbulent history of Massawa caused further migrations from place to place in the plain. Immigration from Arabia and liberal intermarriage have done the rest, so that today the population appears as a mosaic of many groups, of greatly varied ethnic strain.

The ethnic diversity, however, is combined with a striking uniformity of custom, social organisation and ways of livelihood. All groups share the same religion – Islam. Over half of the population speaks the same language – Tigré; next come groups speaking Arabic and Saho, and a few small sections speaking Dankali or Somali. A caste division, as it exists among the Danakil or in the Northern Hills, is unknown among the Samhar tribes, even among the sections which hail from these parts: these immigrants were clearly serfs who only too readily adapted themselves to the "demo-

cratic" regime of the country. Only few of the tribes in the Samhar are sedentary. They are concentrated in the towns of Massawa and Archico, and in the few villages which are scattered over the plain. The remaining groups are nomadic and pastoral, though most of them also engage, on a varying scale, in agriculture during the winter months. The people live in small encampments of grass huts or tents, covered with hides or matting. They cultivate mainly along the few rivers which run to the Red Sea. Applying a primitive system of dams and channels, the cultivators utilise the seasonal floods for the irrigation of their fields. In the summer months, when the rivers are dry, the people turn to the pastoral life.

The political organisation of the tribes again follows a common pattern. Each tribe has its chief or Sheikh, who is elected from the old and influential men of the group. Only two of the tribes have a hereditary chieftainship (as will be pointed out later). Hereditary or elected, the chief is mostly a man of little consequence, and his leadership, like the group over which it extends, is on a most modest scale. The petty salaries which these men receive are a clear expression of their political insignificance.

Bellu. Of the groups in the Samhar this tribe alone grew to political importance. The Bellu are the descendants of the original inhabitants and rulers of Beni Amer country who, dispossessed in their own country, emigrated to the coastal plain. Here they are sedentary and speak Tigré. They live in Archico and Massawa, and in the villages of Otumlo. Monkullo, Zaga and Emberemi. The tribe gained political importance at the time of the Turkish occupation of Massawa, when the member of a wealthy and powerful Bellu family became the *Naib* – the Deputy Governor of the Turkish commanders. Another family, equally powerful and equally enjoying the protection of the alien Government, came to rival the leadership of the Naib family. In the course of time the position of Naib became hereditary in the two famlies, which succeeded to the office in turn. The tribe itself split into two

sections, led by these two families and bearing their names – Beit Hassan and Beit Osman. Through the centuries, the Bellu maintained and increased their power placing their men as chiefs, tax-collectors, religious emissaries or simple merchants among the Mohammedan groups in the plain, and extending their political and economic influence even to the Coptic Plateau. In the Egyptain era a member of the tribe became the commander *(Sirdar)* of the Egyptian troops in Massawa, and his family is still known as the "House of the *Sirdar*", Beit Sardal. The rest of the trible, its slaves, clients and poor relations, was efficiently organised; the able-bodied men were recruited into bands of irregulars; and their command became hereditary in another branch of this enterprising tribe. This branch is known as the Beit Kekkia, after the (Turkish?) title of the commander of these slave troops. The influence of the Naib family and its brother clans is still great, and their members are prominent in the political and economic life of Massawa Division.

Aflenda. This group is of Beja and Hadendowa origin, and once formed part of the Beni Amer, apparently as a serf group of the tribe. Escaping from the overlordship of the Beni Amer, the Aflenda established themselves in the coastal plain, where they now number 2500. The Aflenda speak Tigré. They conbine seasonal agriculture in the north of the plain with pastoral life. Their migrations lead them only to the foothills in the west. Though small, this tribe is divided into sub-tribes, of which there are three: Nasreddin, Ad Igel, and Ad Hababai. The last lives, not in the coastal plain, but in the foothills of Ghinda.

Mes'halit. A tribe 1600 strong, and composed of sections of diverse origin (Asaorta, Ad Tsaura, Arab and Dankali). Today the whole tribe speaks Tigré. Its nomadic migrations are on a small scale, and its cultivations in the plain, on the Wakiro river, larger than those of the other tribes.

Tribes from the Northern Hills. Throughout the coastal plain,

and specially in the north, where the plain changes its name from Samhar to Sahel, we also meet with tribes we know. They are migrant groups, or offshoots of tribes from the Northern Hills: Ad Sheikh, Ad Tsaura, Ad Muallim, Habab and Rashaida. Groups of Ad Sheikh and Habab, about a thousand strong, cultivate in the winter months on the Wakiro river in the Samhar. The Ad Sheikh and Ad Muallim, more rarely the Rashaida, also appear in the foothills of Ghinda.

The Islands. A word remains to be said about the population of the islands off the Massawa coast. Of these islands, which number over a hundred, only few have permanent settlements. The main islands are Dahlak, Nocra, Norah, Dohol, Harat, Kubari, Daraka and Dinifarikh. The total population is about 3000, and is composed of people of mixed stock, mainly Arab. Dankali and Somali by descent. The people are mostly fishermen; a few own goats and camels: none cultivate. Nocra was for a time the seat of a *Vice-Residente* and thus gained importance as an administrative headquarters. Its main claim to fame under the Italian regime was that of being the penal settlement for political malcontents and rebellious chiefs.

4. Northern Groups — the oothills.

This geographical zone is separated from the coastal plain also administratively, by the political boundary which assigns the foothills and the spur of the plateau to the sub-District *(Vice-Residenza)* of Ghinda, and the Samhar plain to the District of Massawa. In the west, towards the Plateau, the administrative boundary of Ghinda District is artificial; towards the plain, it coincides with a well marked ethnic division. As we have seen, a few of the tribes in the plain also spread into the zone of the foothills; and by descent, language and religion the groups in the plain and in the hills are closely akin. But most of the tribes have chosen either one or the other area as their habitat. For the different geographical configuration has provoked different economic habits

in the plains and in the foothills, and thus fostered the physical separation of the tribes. Indeed a strip of poor and rocky soil, uncultivable and uninhabited, forms a natural barrier between the two zones. The foothills, too, enclose a wide, open plain it lies higher than the coastal plain and enjoys, owing to the closeness of the escarpment, greater rainfall. Thus agriculture in the foothills is based on rain cultivation and not, as in the coastal plain, on irrigation. The richer pastures allow of a greater concentration of livestock: and the closeness of the plateau slopes has opened to the people new paths for their seasonal migrations.

Apart from these differences in economic habits, what we have said about the languages, religion, political organisation and ethnic affinities of the Samhar tribes applies equally to the groups in the foothills. But here the admixture of migrant groups from other parts is greater: it also includes the Tigrinya-speaking sections from the plateau districts which annually visit the pastures and cultivations at Ghinda. Here again, the political boundaries reflect the ethnic grouping. The boundary between Ghinda and Massawa is also the line which bounds the eastward migrations of these seasonal cultivators. Their cultivations are even more restricted, lying in the region of Damas and Agambussa, in the southern half of the Ghinda area. In 1938 this region was constituted as a territorial district, modelled on the native districts on the plateau and administered by a district chief. The chief belongs, himself, to the groups of seasonal immigrants, and combines with his political office that of a *Moaferi* or "Cultivation Chief". His jurisdiction is limited to the Christian cultivators from the plateau, and does not extend to the Mohammedan tribesmen who live in the area or visit it on their migrations. The attributes of this district-chieftainship are no more peculiar than is the nature of the district itself, which remains, for half the year, without a chief and almost without population.

These are the Mohammedan tribes in the Ghinda area.

Ad Aha. This small group claims descent from the Saho-speaking tribes, but its language to-day is Tigré. The tribe has absorbed small fragments of other ethnic units – the Ad Sheikh, Mensa and Beit Asgede from the Northern Hills. The whole group only numbers about 400 souls. It is nomadic, moving between the plain of Ailet and the southern hills of Keren Division.

Ad Shuma. Of obscure descent, about 2500 strong, the Ad Shuma speak Tigré, and combine agriculture with pastoral life. Their summer migrations lead the tribe far afield, from its home in the Ailet plain, to the plateau region of the Hamasien and Serae.

Ad Ashker. A small and poor tribe, 750 strong, claiming Saho descent but Tigré-speaking. As their name reveals, these people descend from groups of soldiers (askari) – from those bands of irregulars which served the Naib family. The tribe cultivates in the plain of Ailet and, to a lesser extent, in the Samhar. On its migrations in search of grazing, it moves up to the plateau in the Serae. Hereditary soldiers by descent, the Ad Ashker also evolved a system of hereditary chieftainship.

Gedem Sikta. The origin of this group is the same as that of the Ad Ashker. The tribe is 600 strong, and embraces fragments of varied descent – serfs of the Bellu and the Naib family, Assaorta, Miniferi, and Danakil of the sub-tribe Ankala. Its language is Tigré. As among the Ad Ashker, chieftainship is hereditary, and vested in one family, of Bellu descent. The tribe is largely pastoral and moves between the foothills of Ghinda and the edge of the plateau, up to the highlands of Serae.

Nabara. Ethnically a conglomerate, the tribe is today united by its common language, Tigré. The Nabara number 800, and are partly nomadic and partly sedentary. Sections of the tribe have settled as agriculturists in the highlands of the Hamasien; the rest of the tribe migrates between Ghinda and the edge of the Plateau.

Waria. These people, probably of Hadendowa origin and

Tigré speaking, number 1700. They are prosperous, cultivate on a small scale, and move seasonally with their herds to the edge of the plateau in the Hamasien and to Mensa country, in the hills of Keren.

Terowa Beit Mushe. They claim kinship with the Mensa and Maria in the Northern Hills, and with the Saho-speaking Hazu of the Akkele-Guzai. The tribe is bilingual, speaking Tigré as well as Saho. The people, 1100 strong, are nomads, rich in cattle, and move far afield, from the Agambussa hills to the Hamasien, the Engana, the Serae, and even to the pastures of the Tigrai.

Iddifer. Another bilingual tribe, speaking Saho and Tigré. The Iddifer are descended from the Idda sub-tribe of the Asaorta, as is borne out by their tribal name. Their number is 900. A few cultivate at Agamedda in the hills of Ghinda; the majority of the tribe is nomadic and pastoral, and moves with its herds to the Hamasien and Serae.

5. Villages and Towns.

No permament settlements exist in the Sahel, and only few have sprung up in the Samhar and the foothills. They are: Otumlo, Monkullo, Emberemi, Zaga, Zula, Afta, Ailet, Gumhod, Asus, Damas and Ghinda Fewer still form part of the tribal life of the country, and are the home of groups still conscious of their tribal membership. These village are: Ailet (with a population of 700). Gumhod (400) and Asus (700), all in Ghinda District. But even here we find the admixture of many alien ethnic fragments – Asaorta, Ad Sheikh, Ad Muallim, Yemeni Arabs, as well as groups which can no longer be ethnically identified, and which are known only by the name of the locality in which they live.

Afta and Zula, with a population of 3000, belong ethnically to the Asaorta "corridor". They are inhabited by settled Asaorta, detribalised and since long split off from the mother tribe, and a few Yemeni Arabs and tribesmen from the Samhar.

Otumlo, Monkullo, Zaga and Emberemi (with a total population of about 8000) are almost suburbs of Massawa, and as cosmopolitan as that metropolis.

Damas has a settled population of only 150; but as was said before, it is visited by large numbers of cultivators from the plateau, which seasonally treble the population of the village. Ghinda, which shares in this floating population, is a modern creation. Headquarters of a *Vice-Residenza*, a railway station, and a commercial centre, it acquired its large permanent population of 3000.

The villages in the plain are composed largely of primitive grass huts with thatched roofs, though petrol tins and corrugated iron are, when available, equally acceptable building material. Near Massawa well constructed houses, built of wooden planks, predominate. Here and there the urban style of housing has penetrated, and chiefs or wealthy merchants built themselves modern houses of stone and mortar.

The picture of racial variety which characterises the coastal plain reappears, greatly enlarged, in the two towns, Massawa and Archico. The population of Massawa is 10,000, that of Archico 7000. Tigré-speaking groups from the Samhar, tribesmen from the Northern Hills, Asaorta, Arabs, Danakil, Sudanese, West Africans, Indians, and groups of Turkish descent, all live side by side in the crowded quarters of the towns. The livelihood of the people is of the great variety typical of coastal settlements and large and wealthy cities. There are, however, unifying factors: the predominant religion is Islam, and the predominant language Tigré and Arabic.

Till the 17th century Archico was the more important of the two towns. Even afterwards, when Massawa had already become the richer and more important port. Archico retained its significance; for it remained the seat of the Naib- the Governor appointed by Turkey and Egypt. The early history of Massawa is obscure.

It is first mentioned in an account of the wars between the Ethiopian Empire and the Iman Grany, Sultan of Harrar, early in the 16th century. In 1520 a Portuguese embassy landed at Massawa, and from a report left by the commander of the fleet we learn that at the time Massawa belonged to the maritime province of the Ethiopian Empire. In 1557 Massawa and Archico were occupied by the Turks. In 1865 the towns and their hinterland passed into the possession of Egypt, and were held by her until the Italian occupation in 1885. The political changes had their repercussions in the life of the tribes as these were drawn into the military adventures of their overlords and had to accept, now one, now the other, protector (or oppressor). But the political changes have altered but little the face of the country and the habits of the people.

Assab, finally, in the extreme south of the Dankalia plain, is a town without hinterland. All around it is almost uninhabited country. Assab town has a population of 2000, the people in the rest of the Division numbering only 6000. The small fishing village of Assab was bought in 1869 by an Italian shipping company on behalf of the Italian Government, and here Italy gained her first foothold on the Red Sea and in Eritrea. Assab grew into an administrative, commercial and military centre, but reached the height of its importance only after 1935, when it became one of the most modern ports of the new Italian African Empire. Today it has relapsed into comparative insignificance.

V. THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

1. Cultural Division.

It may have been noticed that in the foregoing description we referred to the Administrative Divisions in the plains and in the Northern Hills by the names of their main towns, while for the Divisions on the Central Plateau we used names denoting the territories as such. This is no accident, for the former represent largely artificial political creations, the latter, traditional units which are the result of a long historical evolution. To the people of Eritrea at large, the three Plateau Divisions, Hamasien, Akkele-Guzzai, and Serae, are different "countries" in the true sense of the word, with different history, different character, even different customs, and the people of the different Divisions are conscious of these differences almost as one is conscious of different nationality.

But these differences and affinities are balanced by a unity which is both wider and narrower than that embodied in the single "country". Thus the three Divisions form part of the large cultural and ethnic block which is characterised by Coptic religion, Tigrinya language, and the livelihood of sedentary peasants living in large villages of towns. It embraces, with southern Eritrea, the northern part of the Ethiopian Empire, known as the Tigrai or the *Alauha Mellash* (the country "beyond the river Ala", – a river south of Lake Ashangi). At the same time, the Plateau Divisions are sub-divided into Districts *(awraja* in Tigrinya), which are again known by traditional names, and which again represent (with certain

exceptions) historical units, separated from each other by minor divergences in tradition and custom. Group migrations, finally, both in historical times and in the dim past, have woven ties of kinship and common descent between districts and "countries", even between Eritrea and the Tigrai, so that a third, irregular pattern of affinities has overlaid the other forms of unity.

The diversity of custom which separates Divisions and districts is epitomized in the different codes of customary law which exist in the country. Thus the majority of the people in the Akkele-Guzai follow the code known as Meem Mehaza. The customary law of the Serae is embodied in the code of Adkeme and Melega, so called after the brother-ancestors of the Serae people. Half of the districts in the Hamasien have adopted the law of Gebrekristos, also known, after a district in the Division, as the law of Dekki Teshim. The remaining districts in the Hamasien have codes of law of their own. Various districts in the Akkele-Guzai and Serae, too, have separate codes of law. The main codes of the three Divisions show considerable differences both in the legal conceptions and in the rules of procedure. The divergent laws of districts, on the other hand, differ only in minor features: matrimonial customs, customs of hospitality, or the rules of blood money. Often these divergences can be derived from differences in descent and ethnic affinity. Typical examples are the law of the people called Loggo Cwa in the Hamasien, which is also the law of the groups of Loggo Cwa descent in the Serae, and the law of Eggela in the Akkele-Guzai, which is shared by a number of groups claiming common origin. Yet this possession of a common or different code is not an unequivocal criterion of ethnic affinity; for in many cases, as we shall see, it can be proved to be the result of recent developments – of political re-grouping or self-chosen assimilation.

2. Ethnic Grouping.

The population of the Central Plateau embraces more than half of the total population of Eritrea. In this large racial group

the questions of origin are no less obscure, and the traditions of descent no less mythical, than in the other parts of Eritrea. There is a vague tradition that the greater part of the population of the Hamasien and Akkele-Guzai (as well as the whole Amhara race) descends from a common ancestor, sometimes described as a "King from beyond the Seas", and his three sons, Maluk, Chaluk, and Faluk. Another tradition traces the origin of the people of the Serae to immigrants from Lasta in Ethiopia. These mythical first inhabitants or immigrants are said to have been joined, in the course of time, by other racial groups and fragments of tribes, many of which are admitted to be of unknown origin.

The memory of ethnic descent and affinity still survives in a few names of districts or Divisions. The Akkele-Guzai is said to be named after two brothers, Akkele and Guzai, who were the ancestors of the first inhabitants of the country. There are districts called Loggo in the Akkele-Guzai, the Hamasien and Serae, whose peoples are believed to be descended from the same ethnic branch. There is a district called Dekki Digna, "sons of Digna", in the Akkele-Guzai, and one of the same name in the Serae, again names suggestive of common descent.

However this may be, in the population of today the old ethnic divisions are hardly more than a memory. Migrations and crossmigrations have rendered the Tigrinya-speaking peoples both in Eritrea and Ethiopia a confusing mixture of racial strains, and the ethnic or tribal distinctions which may once have existed have become submerged in the century-old territorial regime of the country.

3. Economics.

The economic position on the Plateau, the wealth in livestock and agricultural production, differs from Division to Division. But nowhere does the produce of the land amount to self-sufficiency. The insufficiency of grazing lands, though undeniable, is not, on the whole, serious: it can be met comparatively easily by migrations

to richer pastures. We shall hear of the regular migrations to the coast of the herdsmen tribes in the Akkele-Guzai, and of other migrations, on a smaller scale, to the Western Plain of the people in the Hamasien and Serae. The shortage in staple crops, on the other hand, constitutes one of the paramount economic problems of the country.

Various reasons are responsible for it. In the Hamasien, the presence of the large city of Asmara, agriculturally unproductive, cannot but preclude a balance of production and consumption, even if the land were more ample and fertile than it is. The Serae, agriculturally the richest of the three Divisions, is very nearly self-sufficient; that it is not fully so is due to the density of the population. In the Akkele-Guzai, finally, the presence of a large nomadic population and the poverty of the soil render this Division far from self-supporting. To these physical factors we must add another, psychological, motive, which is no less effective, and possibly most powerful in the Akkele-Guzai. It is the warlike tradition of the people, to whom work on the land is only the second best occupation. This tradition was utilized to the full by the Italians. They withdrew thousands of able-bodied men for service in the army, unfitting them for the more strenuous and more hundrum work on the soil.

The shortage in agricultural production is made up, and has been made up since ancient times, by imports from outside. There are two main sources of supply: the rich granary of the Tigrai in Ethiopia; and the coast, the transit market for the Yemen. The modern means of transport, lorries and railways, have never quite superseded the old trade routes travelled by mules and camels. These are least important in the Hamasien, whose capital is the commercial centre of modern Eritrea. Here imports from Agordat, from the coast, and from the markets in Ethiopia, near or distant, converge, partly to be redistributed over the country. Certain parts of the Hamasien, however, still depend on the old trade routes

across the frontier. The Market of Decamere is the terminus of one such route, which comes from Enticcio in the Tigrai, and crosses the frontier at Tzorona, in the Akkele-Guzai. The district of Decamere also relies on the crops grown at Damas and Ghinda, in Massawa Division, where many of the people of the district have their cultivations.

In the Serae one of the main trade routes from Ethiopia leads through the frontier district of Zaid Akollom to the village market of Tukul; another, following the motor road, reaches the market of Adi Quala. The merchants of Adi Ugri, besides, import grain from Ethiopian markets as far distant as Adowa and Enda Selasse.

In the Akkele-Guzai the sedentary Coptic population and the Mohammedan nomads rely on different sources of supply. The former depends on the trade routes from the Tigrai: these cross the frontier at Tzorona, on the border of Enticcio; at Monoxeito, on the border of Agame; and at Aromo, on the border of Irob. The districts in the Saganeiti area are an exception; like the adjacent district of Decamere, they rely on the crops from the cultivations at Ghinda and Damas. The largest of the nomadic tribes, the Asaorta, obtains its supplies from the coast, from Massawa or Zula, or buys its grain at Mahio, in the Haddas river valley, the meeting place of caravan routes from east and west. The Miniferi tribe, which lives between the coast and Senafe, depends on the coastal market of Arafali and on the inland market of Senafe. The Hazu, in the south-east of the Division, again depend on supplies, both from the coast and Senafe, but also visit the markets of Agame in the Tigrai.

This considerable, as well as ancient, dependence on the granaries across the frontier fits well into the picture which we have outlined of the ethnic and cultural affinities linking Eritrea with the Ethiopian Tigrai.

4. Religion.

As already stated, the large majority of the Plateau groups are Coptic Christians. The smallest village has its Coptic church, and no Division is without a number of famous monasteries, often wealthy and of great age, which are the spiritual centres of the country. These monasteries once had considerable secular powers, owning large stretches of land, and holding territorial fiefs. The latter were secularised partly already in Ethiopian times, and the former were reduced, and are still being reduced, by the will of the people, whose respect for the church is more than offset by their land-hunger. Indeed the respect for the church must not be exaggerated: the Coptic priests and monks are greedy, ignorant and lazy, and lead far from holy lives, and the peasant is not blind to this. Disputes between chiefs and abbots, villages and priests, are common. It happens more and more often nowadays that the peasants refuse to work on the land of the monasteries, thus breaking away from the old feudal obligation.

The church still wields those formidable weapons, excommunication and the refusal to celebrate Mass for a recaleitrant community; but even these are losing their force. Finally, internal discord is weakening the resistance of the Coptic Church to these assaults from without.

The head of the Coptic church is the Bishop at Asmara, who styles himself "Abuna", and whose traditional diocese comprises both Eritrea and the Ethiopian Tigrai. Up to 1935 the Bishop of Eritrea received his office at the hands of the Coptic Metropolitan of Alexandria. After the interlude of the Italian rule over Ethiopia, during which, for political reasons, the Coptic bishoprics in the Italian dominions were made dependent on the newly created see of Addis Ababa, the situation reverted to what it had been before – in theory; for the position is still undefined and full of anomalies. The present Bishop of Eritrea is one of those church dignitaries who were appointed by the short-lived see of Addis

Ababa. He lost, by official decree, his unorthodox rank, but still continues to exercise his office.

In the Akkele-Guzai and the Hamasien, Catholics of Ethiopian Rite form a fairly considerable minority. The Ethiopian Catholics in the Plateau Divisions number just under 10.000 (as against 350,000 Copts). This creed, which represents a compromise between Roman Catholicism and Coptic Christianity, was founded early in the 18th century by the Italian Franciscan De Iacobis, who is known among the people as Abuna Iakob. De Iacobis spread the new faith among the people of Agame, in the north-eastern Tigrai, and the Eritrean provinces, braving the bitter hostility of the Coptic rulers of Ethiopia of that day. He succeeded in reviving (with certain modifications) the Catholic faith which had very nearly succumbed to the religious persecutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. The palatial church, erected in modern times over his grave at Hebo near Saganeiti, is a belated symbol of his final triumph. The Ethiopian Catholics have their own bishop, whose seat is in Asmara. He and his clergy keep the proselytizing spirit alive, and have enthusiastically adopted the doctrine of a church militant.

Islam numbers 72,000 adherents on the Eritrean Plateau. It is represented by two ethnic bodies: first, the Mohammedan, Saho-speaking tribes which live as immigrants in the Plateau Divisions; secondly, the sect of the *Jiberti* (the "elect"), which is settled in small groups throughout the country. The *Jiberti* are ethnically identical with the Coptic inhabitants of the Plateau, and speak their language, Tigrinya. They trace their conversion to one Mohammed El Negash, a self-appointed disciple of the Prophet, of Abyssinian origin, said to have lived at the time of the Hejra. Mohammed El Negash is buried in the Tigrai near Adigrat, and his tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for all Mohammedans of *Jiberti* persuasion. A third, alien, group of Mohammedans are the Arabs from the Yemen and Hadramaut. Labourers or mer-

chants by profession, they congregate in considerable numbers in all the towns and larger villages.

Copts and Catholics rarely intermarry; Christians and Mohammedans hardly ever; but apart from occasional jealousies between Copts and Catholics, the different communities live peacefully side by side, enjoying the benefits of the old Italian policy of religious tolerance. The Catholic church, supported by Rome, has been expanding slowly but steadily. The Coptic and Mohammedan communities seem static. It is said that, in the past, certain tribes were converted from Coptic Christianity to Islam (e.g. the Miniferi in the Akkele-Guzai), while others exchanged Islam for Coptic Christianity: today, large-scale conversions of either kind no longer happen.

5. Land Rights and Social Structure.

The pivot of social organisation on the Plateau is the *enda*, the large kinship group. It is composed of a greatly varying number of individual families, all claiming descent from a common ancestor, whose name the *enda* bears. An *enda* which grows very large splits into two or more sections, which in the course of time acquire a name and social identity of their own. The *enda* is, in a sense, a territorial unit, for the most important form of land tenure in the country, the hereditary, absolute land right of *resti*, is bound up with the *enda*-group. Land of the *resti* type can also be owned by the individual family within the *enda;* but these individual landrights are conceived of as being derived from the landrights vested in the *enda* itself, in virtue of an ancient first occupation of the land. This corporate conception of land-ownership is revived in every dispute over land, and indeed constitutes the strongest bond of cohesion in the *enda*.

As a result of this corporate land-tenure, the single *enda* tends to be concentrated in one district, or even one village community. Progressive sub-divisions of *enda*-groups, combined with migrations

in search of new land, have partly broken down these territorial limits and today we meet with *endas* which have spread over different villages and districts. Nor are there, today, villages or districts composed of one *enda* only, though certain local names seem to indicate that political districts and village communities did once coincide with *enda* groups (e.g. the district called Enda-Dashim in the Akkele-Guzai; the district Enda Azmac Ogbit in the Serae; or the district which existed in the Hamasien up to the time of the Italian occupation, called Enda Gebrekristos)

The land-rights of *resti,* round which the *enda* revolves, are also the foundation of a social division vaguely reminiscent of class or caste distinctions. This division groups, on one side, the people who are regarded as the old original inhabitants of the country, and on the other, the newcomers to the area. The former are known as the *restenyatat,* the "*resti*-owners", or as *ballabat,* "hereditary families"; the latter as *makhelai-alet,* the "people amidst", i.e. the people who live "amidst" the original population. As the name implies, only the *restenyatat* can claim the absolute hereditary rights of *resti,* while the "foreigners" hold land as tenants only *(sedbi)*, or by the right of ancient or recent purchase *(worki)*. The *restenyatat* claim the status almost of a landed aristocracy, which looks down upon the once landless "foreigners". This class distinction has lost some of its old rigidity. The ownership of purchased land has come to be regarded as a full equivalent of hereditary *resti.* Moreover, in a system of communal land land-ownership known as *shehena* or *diesa,* which exists in many parts of Eritrea, and which allots equal usufructuary rights to all members of the village community, the distinction between "hereditary families" and strangers is largely emptied of meaning. A political measure with which Ras Alula, the last Ethiopian governor of Eritrea, is credited, finally bridged the gulf between landed aristocracy and landless foreigners. This measure was embodied in a famous edict which Ras Alula issued before leaving for the wars

against the Mahdi; it was prompted, above all, by the necessity of finding the large tribute which was to furnish the where-withals for the forthcoming campaign. The edict laid down that whoever, there and then, paid the tribute due on land in his possession, would become, ipso facto, one of the *restenyatat*, whatever his origin, or the nature of his and rights. Yet though weakened, the class barrier has not disappeared. It is visible in the important political prerogatives still vested in the *ballabat* families (like the right to be invested with chieftainship and other village offices), and in the social obligations (symbolic gifts to the *restenyatat*, duties of hospitality) which still attach to the status of foreigners in this land-proud country.

6. Political Organisation.

The modern political system of the Plateau groups is based on a territorial organisation which recognises two units: the narrow unit of the village community, under a *chikka* or village chief; and the wider unit of the district, under a *meslenie* or district chief. The social organisation, with the *enda* as its centre, represents largely an independent, parallel organisation, which does not overlap with the political structure. It did however, overlap in the past. The leaders of powerful *enda* groups could obtain recognition as feudal chiefs of villages and districts. And the village chief in pre-Italian times (then known as *halakha)* owed his office to his membership of an *enda;* for he was nominated by his kinsmen, and chieftainship changed hands annually, devolving upon each of the village *endas* in turn. In some parts village chieftainship has not wholly severed its old link with the *enda*, and here *chikkas* administer, not villages, but *endas* within the village.

Village chieftainship has changed its meaning as well as its name. Today it is by appointment, and permanent. But as of old, the village chief must still come of the "hereditary families"; apart from this, his office has no hereditary background. The village unit itself has remained intact throughout the political changes

which Eritrea underwent. The political unit of the district, on the other hand, has been considerably affected by the political evolution of the country. A large number of the districts existing today, are of the traditional type described before. Some, however, are of more recent origin. Up to the time of the Italian occupation of Eritrea, many villages were enjoying an autonomous status, never having been incorporated in political districts; the majority of these autonomous villages are now united in districts, though a few still survive in all the Plateau Divisions. With the secularization of the church lands, and the abolition of royal fiefs under the Italian regimé, new districts came into being. The Italian Government also split up or united certain of the traditional districts, either for administrative reasons, or to create new offices for favoured chiefs, or to limit the powers of too influential traditional rulers.

Like the districts, the office of the District Chiefs underwent considerable changes. The District Chief in pre-Italian times, was known as *shumonya;* he was invariably descended from the *ballabat* - "the landed aristocracy" – of the country. Often, too, the office of the *shumonya* was hereditary, though it is difficult in this war-torn country to define with certainty the age of these hereditary ruling houses, few of which were probably older than 3-4 generations. The Italians changed the old title of the chiefs to *meslenie*, an Amharic word meaning "I am the emblem", that is "I represent". Many of the hereditary chiefs still held office under the Italian Government; but many are new men - mostly ex-soldiers who were rewarded with the chieftainship for services rendered. Some are natives of the districts which they now govern; a few have not even this claim to their office. Again some chiefs are descendants of ruling houses, but have been transferred to districts other than their own, often by way of promotion to more important posts. Or again, the jurisdiction of hereditary chiefs was extended over new, alien districts.

The territorial government of the country in pre-Italian times was equally varied and subject to change. The old Eritrea, we must remember, was part of the Ethiopian Empire; it was known by its traditional name as the *Mareb Mellash* – the country "beyond the Mareb" – and was administered by an Imperial Governor who bore the rank of *Ras*. The offices of village head and district chief were only two grades in a complex, and far from uniform, hierarchy of territorial offices. Only the lowest and highest grades – village chieftainship, and the governorship of the *Mareb Mellash* – were invariable: between these two extremes there were, in greatly changing combination, the offices of traditional district chiefs, feudal chiefs. Imperial tax-collectors, district heads appointed by the Central Government, and Imperial governors of provinces. It is more appropriate to speak of the principles of government behind this varying pattern of administration than to describe the latter in all its details.

We find three main principles: first, the traditional autonomy of villages and districts, which was embodied in the offices of village head and *shumonya*. Secondly, the leadership of powerful local families which succeeded in obtaining the support of the Central Government for their territorial claims; men of these families became feudal "barons" of the Emperors of Ethiopia, and were known as *shumgulti*, "chiefs of fiefs".

Thirdly, we have the principle of direct military or civil administration by representatives of the Central Government: these men were all aliens in the country they administered: they acted as tax-collectors or regent-delegates (both offices were known by a common term, *ferresenya)*; the governors *(geza'i)* of provinces came frequently from their ranks, and invariably the *Ras* of the *Mareb Mellash*.

In the Akkele-Guzai the first principle was paramount. The districts were under district chiefs of *ballabat* families, who were confirmed by the Imperial governor. The office of the *ferresenya*

was concerned with little more than tax-collecting and periodical inspections. The whole province was under a *geza'i* appointed by the Emperor. In the time of Empor John, the Governor of the Akkele-Guzai was Ras Araia, a man from Enderta (Tigrai); he was succeeded by Dejach Bariagaber of Adowa: Dejach Asbaha, also from the Tigrai: and finally Dejach Debeb, a son of Araia. Debeb had been ruling for only one year when the country fell to the Italians.

In the Hamasien the feudal principle held the balance of direct administration. Men of powerful families not only maintained their rule over districts over which they had, in times past, established their domination, but could also become Imperial governors of the whole province. Thus Ras Hailu of the Hazega family, ruled over the Hamasien in the time of the Emperor Theodor, and Ras Woldenkiel of the rival house of Zazzega, in the time of Emperor John. Ras Woldenkiel also extended his rule for a period (in the time of Napier's expedition to Magdala) over the Serae as well.

In the Serae, territorial autonomy and feudal claims reduced the "direct" administration to the level of a decentralized, local supervision. The chief of a village community would be directly under a *ferresenya* as the representative of the Central Government, but was also ruled by the local feudal "baron". The rival claims of feudal houses would frequently break up existing, and achieve new, bonds of political dependence.

The explanation for this irregular and varying system lies in the structure of the Ethiopia Empire, the historical changes which it underwent, and in the position of Eritrea as a dependency of a remote and far from stable Central Government. The historical background and the political relations between Eritrea and the Ethiopian Empire will be discussed more fully in a different context *(see* the separate monograph on "Eritrea and her Neighbours").

Here we need only add that the territorial office of provincial overlords survived in one case into Italian times. One Dejach Bahta Hagos of Tsenadegle in the Akkele-Guzai, a powerful chief who, at the time of the Italian occupation of Eritrea threw in his lot with the invaders, was rewarded with the paramount chieftainship of the Akkele-Guzai. His appointment was not an unqualified success: for shortly afterwards Bahta rebelled against the Italians, and was sent to the penal settlement of Nokra. With his disappearance from the scene the office lapsed, not to be revived. We shall also meet with two other chiefs who aided the Italian occupation, with more lasting success,– Ras Baraki of the Hamasien and Dejach Tesfamariam of the Serae. They, too, received their reward at the hands of the new rulers. It was, though not the paramount chieftainship of provinces, yet a chieftainship which extended over a large part of the country, and over districts to which these men could lay no traditional claim.

VI. THE HAMASIEN.

1. Country and People.

Of the three plateau divisions, the Hamasien is the smallest in territory, the largest in population (over 200,000) and politically the most important. Already in Ethiopian times the capital of the Hamasien was also the capital of Eritrea and the seat of the Imperial Governors. Geographical and ethnic conditions alike have contributed to making Asmara and the Hamasien the strategic and political centre of Eritrea. The main roads (caravan routes in the past, motor roads and railway in the present) from the coast to the west, and from the Northern Hills to the south, cross the Hamasien at Asmara. The Hamasien is, besides, the northernmost outpost of the Tigrinya block. Ethnically more homogeneous and united than the Akkele-Guzai or the Serae, it lent itself more easily to becoming the point d'appui for the government of that distant Ethiopian province, the *Mareb Mellash*. This ancient political prominence of the Hamasien is reflected in the equivocal use which was made of its name; for many of the old travellers and historians of Ethiopia took the name Hamasien to mean the whole of the *Mareb Mellash*, and spoke of the Imperial Governors of the Hamasien as of the Governors of Eritrea.

As has been said before, a large part of the people of the Hamasien derive their descent from three brothers the mythical ancestors of the Eritrean people, Faluk, Maluk and Chaluk. The legend

describes how their father emigrated from his old home (which some place in Ethiopia, others in a country "beyond the sea") and wandered through the Ethiopian Wolkeit, through the country of the Kunama and Baria, up the valley of the Anseba, until he reached the Hamasien, where he decided to make his home. His numerous offspring reaches the light of history in the man Tesfazien, who is said to have lived in the 17th century and to have been invested with the rule of the Hamasien by the Emperor of Ethiopia. Tesfazien's younger brother and sons bear names which are the names of present districts in the Hamasien, Gebrekristos. Agaba, Zerai, Takkele and Menab, and the people of the districts regard themselves as the direct descendants of these men. Whatever the facts of this Hamasien Book of Genesis, it has sustained till to-day the pretensions of supremacy of the Hamasien people and, more especially, the political claims of the descendants of Tesfazien. It is admitted that many groups from other races and countries, from Amhara, the Tigrai and the Western Plain, also immigrated into the Hamasien, where they either merged with the first settlers or founded new communities and districts. Yet in the uniformity of culture, which has characterised the Hamasien for the last century, there is little trace of these ancient divisions.

The modern administrative Division, or *Commissariato*, of the Hamasien, is composed of three zones; the township of Asmara; the Hamasien proper, and the District *(Residenza)* of Decamere. The last is a comparatively recent creation, dating back only to 1935.

2. Asmara Town.

Of Asmara little need be said except that its population numbers over 140,000, of which over 100,000 are non-Europeans of diverse descent and race. The majority of the native inhabitants of Asmara are Eritreans and Copts (about 70.000), but there are also, many Eritrean Mohammedans, of Saho and Jiberti origin (over 25,000), and a few Catholics of Ethiopian Rite (1900); there

are, finally, considerable sections of non-Eritrean descent, above all. Ethiopians, Sudanese and Yemeni Arabs. Their professions are of the great diversity typical of large towns.

The non-European population of Asmara lives almost entirely in a special part of the town, separated from the European population. This non-European part is divided into two quarters, each composed of four wards. The quarters are administered by town chiefs *(Capi Rione)*, and the wards by wardheads *(Capi Ouartieri)*. One of the quarters, whose population is predominantly Mohammedan, is under a Mohammedan town chief; the other, predominantly Coptic, has a town chief and ward-heads of that faith.

3. The Districts.

Dekki Teshim. Though its territory is small, this district has a large population (13.000). The name of the district is new; before the Italian occupation of Eritrea it was called Enda Gebrekristos, after the ancestor of the kinship group which first settled in the area. The rule of the district was in the hands of this family of original settlers till the advent of the Italians, when Kantiba Tesemma the last of the line, rebelled against the new masters and fled to Ethiopia. The district headship went to Blatta Baraki, a nominee of the Italian Government. He came from an influential family in the Hamasien, but had no specific claim to the chieftainship. The Italians found him useful and energetic, and in due course invested him with the chieftainship of almost the whole of the Hamasien. Nor was his prestige neglected. From a simple Blatta (one of the lowest ranks in the Ethiopian hierachy), he became a Ras, thus acquiring the title of the ancient Governors of Eritrea. In his old age, Ras Baraki divided his dominions among his five sons, whom be appointed as his deputies and successors. After Ras Baraki's death (in 1939), the Italian Government confirmed their appointment, so that today nine out of the fifteen districts of the Hamasien are governed by members of the Baraki family.

The district of Dekki Teshim includes two suburbs of Asmara Godaif and Gajjiret. The two most important villages in the rural part of the district are Addi Sogdo, the capital of the district, and Tsada Kristian. Dekki Teshim is a rich agricultural district, though it had to cede much of its fertile land to the township of Asmara. Many of the people in the districts, too, seek their livelihood in the town. With the exception of a few Jiberti Mohammedans and a small group of Protestant converts of the Swedish Mission, the population is Coptic.

Dekki Teshim gave its name to one of the codes of customary law existing in the Hamasien. This code has been adopted also by five other districts which bear no kinship to the people of Dekki Teshim.

Tekkele Agaba. About the same size as Dekki Teshim, with a population of 9000. Its most important village is Zazzega. It is the home of the Zazzega family, a branch of the dynasty of Tesfazien, of local fame, which claims to have ruled over the whole of the Hamasien and even (a most dubious claim) over the whole of the *Mareb Mellash* under the Emperors of Ethiopia. Today, the family has completely lost its former power. Its last representative is an insignificant "Notable", and the chieftainship of the district has passed to an ex-soldier in the Italian Army. The district is rich in agricultural land. The religion distribution is the same as in Dekki Teshim.

Minabe Zerai. Lies to the north of Tekkele Agaba. Its area is small, and its population only 5000. It is the home of another branch of the once powerful dynasty of Tesfazien. But unlike the Zazzega family, this branch has preserved its political importance, at least in the narrow orbit of district administration. The present chief is a direct descendant of Tesfazien, and a son of Ras Woldenkiel, who ruled over the Hamasien in the time of Emperor John. The district is poor in agricultural land, and of little importance, save for its connection with the ancient ruling house. Indeed

Minabe Zerai is one of the two districts in the Hamasien which are governed by chiefs holding their office by the right of heredity. The majority of the people are Coptic Christians; there are also small groups of Mohammedans and Catholics.

Dembezan. One of the largest districts in the Hamasien, with a population of over 13,000. Dembezan is credited to be the country where the mythical ancestors of the Hamasien, Faluk and his brothers, first settled. Till 1933 the district comprised also what is now the independent district of Ad Teklezan and the capital of the Dembezan was in the village of Ad Teklezan When Ad Teklezan was made a separate district, the village Gashinashim became the political centre of Dembezan, and the seat of its chief. He is a son of Ras Baraki, of whom we have spoken above. The district comprises some very fertile land, but much of its area is rocky and barren. In Dembezan the Swedish Mission has found a promising field, and flourishing congregations of Protestants (totalling 540 souls) exist in many villages. The large majority of the people are Copts, though there is the usual admixture of Mohammedans and Catholics.

Ad Teklezan. Lies in the north-west corner of the Hamasien, on the edge of the escarpment. It is a small district comprising only two larger villages, and a population of 4200. As was said before, it is a newly-created district, split off from Dembezan in 1933. The old political link has survived in the chieftainship of the district; for the present chief, of ancient lineage, is the son of a former chief of Dembezan. The lands of the district are poor, and the people depend largely on cultivation in the Bahri. The populous village of Ad Teklezan was to have become a township on modern lines, but the project was cut short by the present war. A quarter of the population is Mohammedan, of Jiberti persuasion; the rest are Copts, though there are a few Catholics.

Autonomous Villages. There are four — Hadamu, Adi Nefas, Adi Abeito, and Beit Meka. Their population is 6700. The people of

Hadamu, Adi Nefas and Adi Abeito, are akin to the main ethnic branch in the Hamasien, the people of Beit Meka trace their descent to the Bellu of Massawa Division. The villages are situated close to Asmara and one of them, Hadamu, used to occupy part of what is today the town area. When Asmara was built, the village was moved to a site outside. The people of Hadamu owned most of the land on which Asmara now stands, and in spite of extensive expropriation, they still keep large tracts of cultivable land. Today, the villages are "autonomous" only in name. They are united under a district chief, who is another member of the ubiquitous tribe of Baraki. The population is almost entirely Copt.

Karneshim. A twin district, consisting of Karneshim North and South. Its total population is 13,300. Karneshim North has its headquarters at Ad Zien; other important villages are Wokki and Zagir. The capital of Karneshim South is Amba Darho. The chiefs of both districts are new men, without hereditary claims to their office. The districts are rich in livestock and arable land, though most of the cultivations of Karneshim lie outside the districts, on Bahri land. In Karneshim we find another flourishing community of Swedish Mission Protestants; the rest of the people are Copts; Karneshim North has a small Mohammedan minority.

Karneshim follows a code of customary law of its own. This code shows small and on the whole insignificant differences from the code of Dekki Teshim to which all the districts enumerated above subscribe.

Anseba. Another twin district divided in North and South. The two Anseba districts lie in the west of the Hamasien, where the plateau slopes down to the hills of Keren. The population is 14,400. The main villages of Anseba North are Ad Naameh and Deresenen of Anseba South, Dekki Skiai. The chiefs of both districts are ex-soldiers, with no hereditary or traditional title to their chieftainship. With the exception of a small Moslem minority the people are Copts. The districts are poor in agricultural lands, and the majo-

rity of the people are semi-nomadic herdsmen rather than sedentary cultivators. Their migrations take them to the western plain and to the pastures of the Tigrai in the south. To the west of the Anseba districts lies a large tract of mountainous, uninhabited land, which is administered as part of the Crownlands of the colony, on the lines of the Bahri domain (to be discussed presently). This area, too, serves as pasture for the Anseba people. In the Anseba districts we meet with a new code of customary law. Again it closely resembles the code of Dekki Teshim, perhaps as a result of the ties of kinship which the two groups claim.

Loggo Chwa. A large district in the extreme south-west of the Division, bordering on the Serae. The name Loggo is said to mean the military colonies which the Emperors of Ethiopia established in their distant dominions, and the present Loggo people are believed to be descended from the men of many races who made up these colonies. Thus the Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien, numbering 15,000 claim common origin with the group of the same name in the Serae and with the Loggo Sarda people in the Akkele Guzai. The two Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien and the Serae also share a common code of customary law. The two largest settlements in the Hamasien district of Loggo Chwa are Himberti and Skiketti. As an area inhabited by a well-defined group the Loggo Chwa is old; as a political district it is a new creation. For in pre-Italian times it was divided into a number of autonomous village communities. Under the Italian regime the villages were united and placed under a district chief, who comes again from the Baraki family. The religious distribution shows the familiar combination of a Coptic majority and small Mohammedan and Catholic minorities. The eastern part of the district is fertile, the western part rocky and barren. This area is used largely as pasture land for the considerable herds of the people. Many, however, also drive their animals down to the western plain for grazing in the winter months.

To the east of Loggo Chwa, extending to the boundary of

Asmara town, lies the sub-district of "Upper Chwa" — *Kebessa Chwa*. Its population is 5.000, and its villages are small. The largest of them. Adi Gwadad, is almost a suburb of Asmara. The people of the two Chwa districts are ethnically identical, and under the same chief.

Lamza. The population of Lamza numbers 4800 and is by religion almost exclusively Copt. The villages are small, and arable land is little and of poor quality. The chief of the district is the senior member of the house of Baraki, who also governs the neighbouring districts of Saharti and Wokerti. The people of these three districts used to follow the customary law of Dekki Teshim. For reasons difficult to understand, they recently evolved a code of their own, which differs in some important points from the old law of the country.

Saharti. In size a small district, though rich in agricultural land and densely populated (population 6000 – all Copts). The main village is Emberto.

Wokerti. Smaller still, this district has a population of 3000 (all Copts). The wealth of the district lies more in livestock than in agricultural land, of which there is little in this barren region. Though claiming different origin, the people of Wokerti have always been closely associated with Lamza and Saherti, and also share with the two districts, as has been said, their customary law.

Bahri Domain. This area comprises the eastern escarpment, the slopes and the low-lying lands in the Hamasien. Bizen, one of the most ancient and famous Coptic monasteries of Eritrea, lies within its boundaries. The Bahri has only a small settled population of 5200; and a large proportion of this (1200) lives in the modern settlements of Nefasit and Embatkalla. But the district is visited seasonally by cultivators from many districts of the Hamasien. In pre-Italian times, the larger part of the Bahri was a territorial fief held by the monastery of Bizen. Under the Italian regime

these church lands were secularised and declared Crownland; the monastery was allowed to keep only a small tract of land, of which, incidentally, the monks of Bizen make poor use. The Crownlands are allotted, in leasehold, to cultivators from the Hamasien who seek land outside their districts. The lease is, in theory, annually renewable; in practice, families and village communities hold the lease for indefinite periods, until it lapses through death or emigration. Each lease is registered in the *Commissariato* of the Hamasien. Until recently, the Bahri had the position of a State Domain placed directly under the Government; it was administered by the *Commissariato* of the Hamasien, through cultivation chiefs *(moaferi)* elected by the village communities which held land in the Bahri area. The great confusion and the constant disputes which resulted from this system led to a change in 1933. The Bahri was reconstituted as a district proper, under a district chief, who was assisted in his work by cultivation chiefs appointed for each of the Hamasien districts whose people cultivate in the Bahri. More recently still, the district was subdivided into two zones, each under its own district chief. The groups which cultivate in the Bahri, however, claim more than this usufructuary right, by the grace of the Government, to the lands which they are allowed to work: they claim of *resti*, vested since ancient times in the *enda* groups of the Hamasien – with what justification it is difficult to say in this land empty of permanent settlers.

Engana. This district does not form part of the country of the Hamasien in the traditional sense. The Engana was incorporated in the Hamasien only in 1935, as a Sub-District, or *Residenza*, with the headquarters in Decamere. Until then, the Engana had formed part of the Akkele-Guzai. The reasons for this change were administrative; for when during the Italo-Ethiopian war, a small village in the Engana called Decamere (Dekamhare in the vernacular) grew into an important town, with workshops, factories, an aerodrome, and a large Italian population, it was felt that the

district enclosing the new township would fit better into an area administered from Asmara, than into the rural Division of Akkele-Guzai.

The people of Engana claim common origin with those of Gundet and Aila, in the Southern Serae. But they regard themselves as a part of the Akkele-Guzai, to which province they belonged since old, and with which they share their code of customary law. This sentiment of 'nationality' has remained unaffected by the recent administrative changes. The population of Engana is 10,500, the large majority of which (over 7000) lives in Decamere town. Outside the town, the villages of Afalba and Sessah are the only important settlements. The rural area of the district is sparsely populated, though rich in arable land. Many of the people, however, like their neighbours in the Akkele-Guzai, also cultivate during the winter months in the foothills of Ghinda. Unlike the other district of the Hamasien. Engana has a large minority of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite (1200) and in this, too, resembles the adjacent districts of the Akkele-Guzai Division.

As a political district, the Engana is only two generations old Originally its territory was divided between three districts of the Akkele-Guzai, Dekki Gebri, Dekki Admokhom and Eggela Hames. At the time of Emperor John of Ethiopia, the district of Engana was created, mainly to provide a chieftainship for a certain Dejach Bokru, a powerful and wealthy Engana man, who had rendered valuable services to the Emperor. He was confirmed in his post by the Italian Government and received, in 1931, also the district of Dekki Gebri. After his death in 1937, Engana became again an independent district, under its present chief. He, too, is of Engana extraction and a new man, who owes his appointment, not to a traditional title, but to his undoubted ability.

VII. THE SERAE.

1. Country and People.

The Serae is, as has been said, agriculturally the richest of the three Plateau Divisions. The wide open plateau and the rolling hills over which it extends lie at a lower altitude than the plateau in the Hamasien and Akkele-Guzai, and are richer in perennial water, in arable land, and pastures. In the south and east, the plateau drops steeply into the valley of the river Mareb, which forms the boundary with Ethiopia. In the west and north-west the plateau slopes down gradually into the Western Plain. It is here that we meet with the nomadic herdsmen of the Beni Amer tribe who seasonally visit the pastures in the Serae. Here, too, a small group of Kunama, members of the tribe in the Barentu district, is living. The fertile plateau, known as the "black earth" country, is densely populated; at its edges, where the fat "black earth" gives way to rocks and barren sand, the population is scattered and sparse.

The total population of the Serae is 123,000. Ethnically, it is very nearly homogeneous, and shows only an insignificant admixture of alien elements. The large majority of the people claims descent from two genealogical branches, which are regarded as closely akin. One is associated with two brother-ancestors, Adkeme and Melega; the other with a third ancestor called Tesfa, and is known as Dekki Tesfa the "sons of Tesfa". Both branches are said

to have orginated in the country of Bora and Selowa, in the Ethiopia kingdom of Lasta. The different genealogical branches tended to spread over different parts of the Serae, so that today they inhabit, with few exceptions, well defined areas. The Dekki Tesfa live in the western districts, usually known by the collective name of Arreza. The descendants of Melega inhabit the large southern district of Kohain, and partly the adjacent Maraguz and Takala. In these two districts we also meet with the genealogical branch of Adkeme, which, besides, extends over nearly all the remaining districts of the Serae. A few districts on the northern and southern border are inhabited by alien groups of Hamasien or Tigrai descent. The ethnic uniformity is reflected in the largely uniform customary law of the country, which is called, after the brother-ancestors, the code of Adkeme-Melega. The few exceptions which exist, and which concern the groups of alien origin, will be mentioned in the description of the districts.

Administratively, the Serae is divided into one *Residenza* and one *Vice-Residenza*, Adi Ugri in the north, and Adi Quala in the south. This sub-division has no ethnic or traditional significance. Nor is the boundary of the Division itself founded everywhere on tradition or ethnic grouping. It has undergone not inconsiderable changes during Italian rule: thus districts which used to belong to the Hamasien and the Akkele-Guzai have been incorporated in the Serae, and an area in the north-west which once formed part of the Serae is now in Agordat Division. Administrative convenience, not always fully justified, was the motive for these boundary revisions.

2. Districts of Adi Ugri Residenza.

Takala. This is the district which includes the political capital of the Division, Adi Ugri. The population of the district, numbering 9400, descends, as has already been said, from Adkeme and Melega; a few villages are inhabited by immigrants from Saharti in the Hamasien. The majority of the people are Copts; but there are also

Jiberti Mohammedans and a few Catholics of Ethiopian Rite. Takala has an old and famous Coptic monastery, Enda Abu Ioannes. The main settlements are Adi Ugri, Kena Haiela, Egri Makhet and Adi Bari. The land is very fertile and the district rich. Like most of the districts in the Serae, Takala has been an independent district since ancient times. Under Ethiopian rule, it was administered by the chiefs of villages, under an Imperial *ferresenya*. The administration of Takala as a group of "autonomous" villages continued into Italian times till 1931, when the district was given its first, and present, district chief. He comes from one of the noble families of the country which, in the past, had held fiefs *(gulti)* under the Ethiopian Emperors.

In pre-Italian times Adi Ugri was a small village, situated on the hill now occupied by an Italian fort. In 1894 the modern town was founded, as a military and administrative centre, and the old village was moved to its present site. Adi Ugri is to-day an important market town, with a population of 2200, half Copt and half Mohammedan. Among the Mohammedans there are men of Jiberti extraction, Belein from Keren. Beni Amer from Agordat, a few Asaorta, and the ubiquitous Arabs from the Yemen.

Maraguz. Its population of 11,200 is largely Copt, with a small Mohammedan minority. The district is large and rich in agricultural land, though poor in livestock. The main villages are Duko (the seat of the chief), Mai Laha, Aagezana, Adi Haiis, and Zeban Sebau (a Mohammedan settlement.) In Ethiopian times the district was divided into autonomous villages which had evolved a government by a council of elected elders, called *endaba*. Under Emperor John, a *ferresenya* from Tembien in the Tigrai was appointed as regent of the district. The Italian Government revived the old system of *endaba*, which was discontinued only in 1931, when the present district chief was appointed. He is an ex-soldier, but an able administrator.

Medri Wod Sebera. Less fertile than Maraguz or Takala, but

richer in livestock. Its population numbers 7000, mostly Copts. The main villages are Arreza (the chief's village). Addebai, Tsada Adi, Adi Ahsa, Melad Mante (with a Mohammedan population). The district is governed by Ras Kidenemariam, one of the two chiefs in Eritrea who bear this highest rank, Ras. An old man, who held office already in Ethiopian times, he is the descendant of the old dynasty of Aite Hailab, which attained the position of powerful feudal barons *(shumgulti)* under the Emperors of Ethiopia. Their dominion extended over seven districts, which became known as the country of Arreza, after the home of the *shumgulti* chiefs. The seven districts are still governed by this old ruling house, which has even extended its possessions over new territories.

Medri Falassi. A small district, with a population of 1700 (all Copts) and only one large village – Tukul. It is rich in livestock, and moderately rich in agricultural land. The name Medri Falassi means "country of monks"; for the district used to belong to a powerful monastery in the territory, Debre Merkurios. With the abolition of church lands, under Emperor John, shortly before the Italian occupation of Eritrea, the district was joined to the possessions of Ras Kidenemariam of Arreza.

Kunno Redda. The population, all Copts, is very small (370) and the district has only three villages. It is the third of the territories dependent on Arreza. Shortly before the Italian occupation a local man, related by marriage to the powerful Hazzega family of the Hamasien and enjoying its support, usurped the rule of the district. He was at first confirmed by the Italian Government, but later rebelled, and was deposed and imprisoned. After which interlude the district was handed back to the chiefs of Arreza.

Dekki Aitaes. The fourth of the Arreza dominions. A large and fertile district, with a population of 1200, and only one large village, Mahakuk. The people claim descent from the *Naib-Bellu* of Massawa, and are akin to the people of Tedrer in the Akkele-Guzai and Beit Maka in Asmara. They arrived in the country ten generations

ago, as Mohammedan herdsmen, but have become sedentary, and Coptic Christians.

Zaid Akolom. A large and moderately fertile district, with a scattered population (5000). It has one large village, Tukul. A few Mohammedans live in the small village of Adi Kentib; the rest of the people are Copts. This district, too, belonged to the house of Arreza. Under the Italian règime it was made independent under an ex-soldier, who became the chief of the district. He proved unmanageable, establishing himself as a robber-baron on the frontier. He was deposed in 1928, and the district returned to Arreza.

Kwollo Serae. A small but very rich district with only four villages and a populationof 760 (mostly Copts, with a group of mission-converted Protestants). It formed one of the dominions of the ruling house of Arreza, but was made independant under Italian rule. It was administered first by village chiefs and, since 1925, by *endaba*, modelled on the council of elders as it existed in the district of Maraguz. The *endaba* system did not prove a success, and in 1930 the district was again entrusted to the ruling house of Arreza, though to a different branch of the family, headed by Dejach Mengesha, a kinsman of Ras Kidanemariam. The chief of Kwollo Serae governs his many districts from Arreza.

Afelba. Another small district, rich and fertile, and a possession of the Arreza dynasty. The population numbers 2200 (all Copts) and includes, in the village of Hatsina, a group of Bellu descent. The two main villages are Hatsina Lalai and Adi Gulti. The political history of the district is the same as that of Kwollo Serae.

Anagir. The people number 2000 and are in roughly equal proportion Copts and Mohammedans. The Copts are of diverse descent, the Mohammedans are of Jiberti and Asaorta extraction. The district has only one large village, Abi Adi, which is all Mohammedan. This small but rich district formed in Ethiopian times the

fief *(gulti)* of the "barons" of Adi Mongosti. When the *gulti*-lands were abolished the district split into a group of autonomous villages. Under Italian rule they were united with the neighbouring Harfi Grotto. In 1925 the Italian Government tried here, too, the system of *endaba*. Again it failed, and in 1931 the territory of Anagir, once more a district, was added to the possession of Dejach Mengesha of Arreza.

Harfi Grotto. The people, numbering 2700 (all Copts) are akin to those of Maraguz. The land is more suitable for pasture than for agriculture. The main villages are Adi Grotto and Adi Harfi. In pre-Italian times, the district formed part of Maraguz. Later it was detached from Maraguz and united with Anagir, with which district it shares its more recent history.

Guhcha. A very fertile district. Its population of 5000 is of heterogeneous descent, but Coptic by religion. The main villages are Addekki, Tokla, Semazem and Laghen. In pre-Italian times Guhcha did not exist as a political district, but was divided into various territorial fiefs held by families of gultinyatat (feudal barons) in other districts. With the abolition of the *gulti* system, the fiefs became autonomous villages. In 1925 the *endaba* system was tried in this as in other districts, to be replaced in 1930 by a district chieftainship, which was again vested in Dejach Mengesha of Arreza.

Tsellima. Borders on the Loggo Chwa district in the Hamasien, and formed up to the time of the Italian occupation part of that Division and district. The people (numbering 12,000) claim common descent with those of Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien and Loggo Sarda in the Akkele-Guzai, and also follow the law of Loggo Chwa. By religion they are Copts, but there is a considerable group of recently converted Protestants, and numerous Jiberti Mohammedans of Tigrai extraction live in several villages. Many of these Mohammedans recently emigrated to Asmara and the west for lack of land. For, though very fertile, the land is insufficient for the

large population. The main settlements are Adi Gedder (the chief's residence), Amader, Emmi Tsellim, Debaroa, Adi Bezehannes, Adi Baro, and Dekki Tsuna. In Ethiopian times the district was administered by village chiefs under an Imperial *ferresenya*. The autonomous village administration continued, under the Italian regime, till 1925. In that year the Italians introduced the *endaba* council of elders, and replaced it again in 1931 by the appointment of a district chief. He is an ex-soldier, and a stranger in the district, hailing from the Hamasien.

Seffaha. Like Tsellima, inhabited by people of Loggo Chwa descent, and formerly part of the Hamasien. The people number 4800, and are almost exclusively Copts. The district is rich in agricultural land and livestock. The main villages are Adi Felesti and Tallaa. The district was long under a hereditary dynasty of chiefs. In 1931 the last chief was, for obscure reasons, reduced to the status of a Wakil, dependant on the chiefs of Tsellima. Recently this hereditary chief with Wakil rank was deposed and replaced by a new man. The monastery of Enda Abuna Endrias, situated in the district, is worthy of mention. Though poor, it is important and of ancient fame, for the hot springs on its land are believed to cure leprosy, and are visited by the sick from many parts of the country.

Liban. This small district, too, belonged originally to the Hamasien. Its population of 2600 is of mixed descent; it embraces people from the Ethiopian Lasta and Tigrai, groups of Belein descent, and sections of the Adkeme-Melega. The country is poor, adapted to animal husbandry rather than agriculture. The people of Liban cultivate across the frontier, in Agordat territory, where they claim ancient rights of *resti*. There are two large settlements, Grat Gebru (the seat of the chief) and Wogerikho Lalai. In pre-Italian times the district was governed by a number of chiefs who represented the large kinship groups *(enda)* in the district; the nomadic leanings of the people, who have few permanent settle-

ments, led to this chieftainship, based, not on the village unit, but on the *enda*. This system remained in force till 1932, when the first (and present) chief was appointed. About that time many of the people emigrated to the district of Adi Abo, in the Ethiopian Wolkeit, in search of pasture. The chief still claims jurisdiction over these emigrants – a claim which, under present conditions, can have hardly more than platonic value.

Wedged between Liban and the Hamasien border, lies the large autonomous village of Habela (population 1300). The land is poor, but the people are rich in livestock. They descend from the Loggo and other groups in the Hamasien. Habela was separated from the district of Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien and incorporated in the Serae, only in 1939. The reason was a grazing dispute of long standing and, frequently, violent repercussions between the people of Habela and their neighbours in Liban. It was hoped to facilitate its settlement by including both groups in the same territory. The first chief of the newly constituted autonomous village was elected by the villagers themselves. He was, however, deposed shortly afterwards, and replaced by a stranger, a man from Godefelasse.

Temezza. The people, numbering 3000, are Copts, and are descended from Agame in Ethiopia. There is also a considerable minority of Mohammedan Asaorta. The district is rich in livestock, and its lands are situated in the fertile plain of the Mareb valley. The main villages are Kenafena and Adi Segwawi. Till Italian times the district, composed of autonomous villages, belonged to the Akkele-Guzai, on whose border it lies. The Italians handed the district to Dejach Tesfamariam of Adi Quala, their much favoured chief. After his death in 1916, the district once more reverted to the status of autonomous villages. In 1932, finally, the present chief was appointed, a man from Adi Mongonti, and a descendant of one of the old *gultinyatat* families. The people of Temezza have a law of their own, called Awaa Tsumro, which differs only in matri-

monial rules from the code of Adkeme-Melega.

Dobub. The population, 5000 strong, is of the same descent as that of the district Guhcha. The majority of the people are Copts; there are also three Mohammedan villages peopled by Jiberti and Asaorta. The district is rich in arable land. Its main settlements are Damba Mich (the chief's village) Adikkiamo, and Adi Hai. Like Guhcha, the district was originally divided between the *gultinyatat* of other districts. In 1931 Dobub was given a district chief, who is a native of the district.

Dekki Digna. The people come from the district of the same name in the Akkele-Guzai, but have intermarried with the Adkeme-Melega, and have become part of that genealogical group. They number 1200, and are Copts. The district, very fertile, has only one large village. Addekki Seiemti. Its history is the same as that of Guhcha and Dobub and the chief of the latter also governs Dekki Digna.

Dembelas. The district lies in the dry and barren northwest corner of the country on the Agordat border. It is rich in livestock, but poor in agricultural land. Like the people of Liban, another district bordering on Agordat, the people of Dembelas cultivate across the frontier and claim *resti* rights in that area. The population numbers 6,600, and is largely Coptic; Jiberti and Asaorta form a small Mohammedan minority. The main villages are Adi Tsetser (the residence of the chief), Kennan Koba, and Mai Mefalis. Politically the district came intermittently under the overlordship of Arreza, and was at other times independent, under its autonomous village chiefs. The Italians appointed the local chief of the village of Mai Mefalis as district head. He rebelled against the Government, and was forced to flee the country. In 1897 the people elected a new chief, who was confirmed by the Government. He was succeeded by his son, the present chief.

A part of Dembelas, embracing the land of the village Missiam,

was made an autonomous territory in 1900. The village was inhabited by Mohammedan settlers from the Tigrai, and the autonomous community was created as a Mohammedan "colony". It subsequently attracted more immigrants from the Tigrai, and its present population numbers 600. The people are mostly herdsmen, though a few cultivate in the adjacent parts of Agordat territory.

Autonomous Villages. There are six autonomous communities in the Residenza of Adi Ugri, mostly small and of little importance, except Godefelasse and Adi Mongonti, which are important as the home of powerful feudal families in Ethiopian times. Godefelasse, with a population of 1600, is the home of the feudal barons of the Enda Asgodom. It includes besides, the descendants of the serfs and slave troops of that family; they are of varied descent, some descending from Merettah Sebene in the Akkele-Guzai, others from the Tigrai and Gondar, and embrace both Copts and Mohammedans. The land of Godefelasse, though small, is very rich. When the *gulti* was abolished, the former feudal lord remained *chikka* of the village community. He was succeeded by his son, who was deposed after a short reign. Since then the village has been ruled by various chiefs, local men and mostly ex-soldiers.

Adi Mongonti, which has a population of 800 (all Copts), is the home of the feudal house of Dejach Zerabruk, kinsman of the Enda Asgodom. Its serfs and dependents came from the Wolkeit in Ethiopia, the Hamasien and other parts. The area, though small, is rich. The former feudal rulers now hold office as village chiefs.

Teramni (population 1800) was a *gulti* of Godefelasse, peopled by the dependents of the Enda Asgodom. Among them are a few Mohammedans, descendants of the people of Senafe. Takkita (population 900) and Gwila (300) were *gultis* of Adi Mongonti. Until 1932 each of the three villages was under a separate *chikka*. Today they have been united under one chief. The village of Adi Gonned, finally, was in pre-Italian times a *gulti* of the chiefs of

Arreza. Its population of 500 is composed of alien immigrants of obscure origin.

3. Districts of Adi Quala Vice Residenza.

Mai Tsada. This names comprised originally three territories which are today independent districts the new Mai Tsada. Enda Azmach Ogbit and Dekki Bokri. The people in all three districts are akin, descended from Adkeme and Melega. Under the Italian regime the present district of Mai Tsada was created, which embraces the territory around Adi Quala. The majority of the people are Copts; there is a Mohammedan minority as well as a group of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite. The population numbers 6700, of which 2000 live in the only large village of the district. Adi Quala. The district is very rich, and its land most fertile. In Ethiopian times two rival families. Enda Geremariam and Enda Kahsu, disputed each other the gulti rights over the district. At the time of the Italian occupation the Enda Geremariam had attained supremacy. The leader of the rival faction, one Lij Tesfamariam, made submission to the Italians, and was rewarded with the chieftainship and the rank of Dejach. His less fortunate rival who had sided with Ethiopia, was sent into exile to Assab. Dejach Tesfamariam persona gratissima with the Italians, was allowed to extend his rule over many other districts as well. In 1919, he was succeeded by his eldest son. Dejach Haile, who remained chief of Mai Tsada only. Recently, under British rule, Haile was deposed and exiled to Nacfa for his troublesome conduct and irredentist activities.

Enda Azmach Ogbit. A very rich district, with a population of 3000. The main village is One Gabriet. There are a few Mohammedans among the people, the rest are Copts. This district was of old a *gulti* of the families which ruled over Mai Tsada, though their authority was frequently disputed by powerful local families. Under the Italian Government the district was given to Dejach Tesfamariam. After his death. Tesfamariam's younger son was

appointed as chief, to be deposed again after a short misrule. A new chief was appointed who is still in office. He is an ex-soldier, and a stranger from Harfi Grotto.

Medri Felassi. A small but very rich district, of only five villages. Its population (900) is Coptic. Like the other Medri Felassi in Arreza, this district belonged originally to the churchlands of the monastery of Debra Merkurios. Under the Italians it was added to the possessions of Dejach Tesfamariam, and is today under his brother.

Dekki Bokri. Another small and rich district. Its population of 1800 (almost exclusively Copt) lives in small villages which, in pre-Italian times, were autonomous. A local man, related to the Hamasien Hazzega, established himself as the feudal baron of Dekki Bokri on the eve of the Italian occupation. Though he submitted to the Italians, he was ousted by their protege, Dejach Tesfamariam. After Tesfamariam's death Dekki Bokri was allowed a chief of its own under the control of Tesfamariam's eldest son Shortly before the British occupation this control was removed and the district became autonomous.

Kohain. A large and mountainous district, inhabited by a large population (12,000). In the north, in the valley of the river Obel, we find many nomadic Mohammedan herdsmen, Asaorta from the Akkele-Guzai and Tigré-speaking groups from the coast. The southern and central part, peopled by the Coptic descendants of Melega, has many villages, the most important of which are Adi Shumbet Tombosa (the chief's settlement), Sebawu, Debre, and Adi Katina. The mountainous parts of the district are barren, but many fertile valleys offer excellent pasture and, to a lesser extent, arable land. The distance from the administrative centre and the lack of roads has kept this frontier district on a more primitive level of civilization than the rest of the country. The district has two important Coptic monasteries. Debra Mariam, once powerful but now impoverished, and Debra Dehuhan, still rich

and famous far across the border. The people Kohaim are divided into four large *enda* groups. Three of these were, in pre-Italian times, split up into autonomous village communities; the fourth the Enda Ganzai, had an elected chief, or *shumondi* (lit. "chief of the brothers" i.e. kinsmen). In 1896 the Italians handed the rule over the Kohain to Dejach Tesfamariam. This rule by a stranger was strongly resented by the people, and after Tesfamariam's death the status quo was re-established. In 1925 the experiment of *endaba* was tried and again abandoned. In 1929 a man from the Enda Ganzai, the nephew of the last *shumondi*, was appointed as chief of the district.

Aila. A small district, bordering on Kohain, with only six villages and a population of 1100. The majority are Copts, and there are a few Jiberti Mohammedans. The district lies in the plain of the Mareb, and its land is fertile, though not of the fertility of the "black earth" country farther inland. The people are rich in livestock. Originally part of the Kohain, the district was placed under Dejach Tesfamariam in Italian times. After his death, the district was joined to Gundet, under the chief of that district.

Gundet. The people, numbering 3200, hail from Sorokhso in Agame. They are Copts, and live insmall villages. The only larger settlement is Enda Keren, the residence of the chief. The agricultural and animal wealth of Gundet is the same as in the neighbouring Aila. The district was of old the *gulti* of a powerful family in Maraguz. A man from Gundet, related by marriage to Emperor John, won independence for his district, and the chieftainship for himself. His authority was confirmed by the Italian Government, but reduced to a sub-chieftainship under the ambitious Dejach Tesfamariam. After the latter's death the sub-chief of Gundet (by then united with Aila) became a full chief. Shortly afterwards, however, he was accused to being in league with rebels and Ethiopian, bandits, and was deposed. The two districts passed into the

hands of Dejach Mengesha of Arreza until 1936, when they received a new chief. He comes from Adi Quala, but is of Tigrai extraction, being descended from one of the families of serfs and soldiers who served the *gultinyatat* of the country.

VIII. THE AKKELE-GUZAI.

1. Country and People.

The population of Akkele-Guzai, numbering about 115,000, shows a greater ethnic variety than that of the other two Plateau Divisions. It embraces two distinct racial and cultural groups: in the west, the sedentary, Coptic, Tigrinya-speaking race; in the east, the nomadic Mohammedan. Saho-speaking tribes. Claims of diverse descent and ethnic affinity divide the Tigrinya-speaking groups internally. As everywhere else in this country of many races, the traditions of origin are semi-mythical and not infrequently conflicting, yet vividly conscious and effective in social relationships. The diverse claims of origin hardly detract, however, from the very nearly uniform culture of the Tigrinya-speaking population. Only in the sphere of customary law do these differences of origin become visible.

The traditions of origin of the Coptic Akkele-Guzai are again linked with the brother ancestors Chaluk and Maluk (the third brother Faluk, plays no part in the Akkele-Guzai genesis). Tradition names two descendants of Chaluk, Akkele and Guzai, as the ancestors of the greater part of the population in the country now bearing their name. The offspring of Maluk formed a group apart, much smaller in size, and restricted to two districts, called Merettah. These original inhabitant and their kin were in the course of time joined by immigrants from unknown parts (some say from Asaorta

country), the offspring of one Enai and Logai. Nor were these the only immigrants. Another large group known as Eggela, is said to have come from Agame in the Tigrai and to have settled in the west and northwest of the Division. The names of certain districts of to-day still betray the ancient distribution of these groups and genealogical branches. Thus we find a district called Woldekkele, "sons of Akkele"; another called Loggo Sarda, "Logai the Mighty" (we notice the different interpretation of the name Loggo in the Akkele-Guzai and the Hamasien); two other districts. Eggela Hames and Eggela Hatsin, bear the old family name Eggela. This local separation of the original kindreds has since long ceased to be true; but as we shall see, the various groups still appear to some extent concentrated in different areas and districts.

Administratively, the Akkele-Guzai is divided into two *Residenze* and one *Vice Residenza*, which are known by the names of their main towns — Adi Caieh, Saganeiti, and Senafe. A fourth sub-division, the *Vice-Residenza* of Arafali, had only an intermittent existence; it did not function at the time of the British occupation, and has not been revived. The various *Residenze* are artificial, purely administrative, creations: districts have been freely transferred from one to the other, and tribes or groups of common descent are divided between different *Residenze*.

More significant is the division of the country into an area organised on a territorial basis, and one administered in accordance with tribal grouping. Here we meet with that administrative dualism, of which we have spoken in the Introduction, which reflects the co-existence of sedentary territorial groups and nomadic tribes.

2. Districts of Adi Caieh Residenza.

Zebaonti. The population of this district is 3600, which figure includes the native population of Adi Caieh town (1900). The people of Zebaonti derive their descent from the ancestor Guzai.

The district is rich in arable land. It extends in the east over the plateau of Kohaito, where numerous Asaorta and small groups of Miniferi have their cultivations. With the exception of these Mohammedan "guests", the people are Copts. The main villages are Tokonda and Menah, both ancient settlements, and the former the traditional capital of the district. Zebaonti was governed by a hereditary line of chiefs, who combined with their chiefly office the dignity of an Imperial tax-collector *(ferresenya)*. The present chief is a grandson of the last Imperial *ferresenya*. Like all the groups claiming descent from Akkele or *Guzai*, the people of Zebaonti follow the code of customary law known as Meem Mehaza.

Adi Caieh (in the vernacular Add Ghayer), originally a small village, became the administrative centre and a modern township in 1892. With its foundation. Tokonda lost its former importance, though it still remains the official residence of the chief. Like all towns, Adi Caieh has a heterogeneous population, composed of Copts and Catholics, Mohammedans of Jiberti persuasion, Asaorta tribesmen, and Arabs from the Yemen and Hadramaut.

Aret. In population the largest district in the Division (5300), it extends over the plateau and mountains to the northeast of Adi Caieh. The land is largely poor and rocky, though the district includes some fertile pastures. The people of Aret belong to the genealogical branch of Guzai. On the mountains in the east we find groups of Asaorta, both as nomadic herdsmen and settled peasants. The large majority of the people are Copts; small groups of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite live in some of the villages. The most important settlements of the district are Halai, the residence of the Chief, Haddish Adi, Deraa and Auhane. Halai is of historical interest. It was visited in 1832 by Bruce, one of the first British travellers in Ethiopia; and in 1894 it was the scene of the battle between the Italians and the rebel army of Dejach Bahta Hagos, in which Bahta was defeated and killed. Aret is an ancient district, for long under the rule of a traditional dynasty. The last chief of the

line was deposed by the Italians, reduced to the rank of a "Notable" without office, and replaced by the present chief: he is an ex-soldier, a native of Aret, but without traditional claim to the office.

Dekki Zeressenei. A small and poor district, of only seven villages and a population of 1100. The people are Copts, and akin to the people of Zebaonti. The poverty of the land forces them to migrate seasonally to the Hazomo plain in the south-west of the Division. Originally an independent district. Dekki Zeressenei accepted the overlordship of the chief of Zebaonti and united itself with that district shortly before the Italian occupation of Eritrea. Dekki Zeressenei may be called the cradle of the customary law of Akkele-Guzai the Meem Mehaza. Its name is the name of a stream in the district on whose banks, under shady trees, the elders of the Akkele-Guzai are said to have held court and dispensed justice, thus evolving the law of the country.

Dekki Tihishta. A still smaller district, with three villages and a population of 450, also united with Zebaonti. The people, all Copts belong to the ethnic group associated with the mythical Enai. The villages of Dekki Tihishta belonged originally to the district of Haddadin Chalo. In 1896 they were placed under Zebaonti. The land of the district is not large but fertile, and ample for the needs of the small population.

Derichen. The population, 2700 strong, comprises the two genealogical branches of Guzai and Enai. The main villages of the district are Tegeren, the seat of the chief Dekki Lefai and Maaizgi. The people are exclusively Copts. The territory of the district lies on a barren and sandy part of the plateau, but reaches down into the fertile plain of Hazomo Derichen is an ancient district, ruled by a hereditary line of chiefs, which is still in power.

Degien. The people number 1300. They are Copts and descend from the branch of Enai. The district has only two large villages. Beit Semathi and Abaa. The lands are barren, but the people find

rich cultivations in the nearby Hazomo. Though an ancient district Degien was without political autonomy in Ethiopian times, when it formed part of the church lands of the monasteries of Bizen and Enda Abulibanos. In the time of Emperor John these church fiefs were abolished and a man of Degièn became the chief of the district. After his death, already in Italian times, the chieftainship lapsed again, and the district was administered as a group of autonomous villages. In 1932, finally, Degien was joined to the adjacent Haddadim Chalo and placed under the chief of that district.

Haddadim Chalo. The people numbering 2600, are Copts, and are akin to those of Degien. Extending over the northern part of the Hazomo, the district is rich in agricultural land. It has only one large village. Ona Andom. Though always thought of as an independent district. Haddadim Chalo was ruled by the chiefs of the neighbouring Mets'he in pre-Italian times. In 1896 Haddadim Chalo was made antonomous under its own chief. In 1920 a rebellion against the chief forced the Government to intervene; the chief was deposed and for 12 years the district was administered by a notable appointed by the Administration. In 1932 the district was again considered worthy of having a proper ruler, and the present chief was appointed. He is an ex-Government servant and an able man, but a stranger and, in this Coptic district the only Catholic.

Mets'he. The people, 4500 in number, belong to the offspring of Guzai. The territory of the district is barren and poor, but the people also own land in the more fertile Haddadim Chalo and the plain of Hazomo. The main villages are Coatit, Emba Kwakwat, Birkito and Adi Kwita (the chief's residence). Coatit has an interesting history. Here the Italian General Barattieri defeated in 1895 the army of Ras Mangasha of the Tigrai, thus saving Eritrea for Italy. During the Italo-Ethiopian war Marshal De Bono had his headquarter at Coatit. In Italian times Coatit was a garrison town, an important market, and a mission station. To-day it is an insignificant village with a population of 600. The people of Mets'he

are largely Copts, though there is a small Catholic settlement at Birkito, and a very old colony of Jiberti Mohammedans at Coatit. The district of Mets'he was long governed by a hereditary chiefly dynasty. In 1892 the line became extinct, and the district remained without a chief, being administered as a group of autonomous villages, under village chiefs. In 1932 the present chief was appointed; he is a kinsmen of the original dynasty an ex-soldier, and an able man.

Eggela-Hatsin. It is inhabited by that ethnic group which calls itself Eggela and traces its descent to the Tigrai. Unlike the districts above, which all follow the law of Meem Mehaza, the Eggela Hatsin has a law of its own, called Gorzo Tsobolo; it differs but little from the main code of the country. The population of the districts, entirely Coptic, numbers 2800. The territory, which comprises the western part of the Hazomo, is large and rich, both in agricultural and grazing land. It attracts annually large numbers of nomadic herdsmen from the Asaorta mountains, the coastal plain, and Beni Amer country, as well as cultivators from the poorer districts of the Akkele-Guzai. The main villages are Mebret(the residence of the chief), Kalai Baltit and Serae. In Ethiopian and still in Italian times the district was governed by hereditary chiefs. In 1915 the Government abolished the District Chieftainship and made the various village communities in the district autonomous. In 1918 this experiment was again abandoned, and the Eggela-Hatsin was united with the district Merettah-Sebene (now in the *Residenza* of Saganeiti). In 1939 Eggela-Hatsin became once more an independent district, under the present chief, who is an ex-soldier, with no traditional title to the office.

3. Districts of Saganeiti Residenza.

Tsenadegle. The population, 4500 strong, is an offshoot of the group inhabiting the Woldekkele – the "sons of Akkele". The district is rich in livestock but has little arable land. Thus the people migrate annually to the crownlands of Damas, in Ghinda

district, for cultivation. The main villages of Tsenadegle are Akrur, Hebo, Degra-Libe, and Saganeiti, the capital of the *Residenza.* Saganeiti is a small town, with a native population of 3600. It is an old settlement and market, which was made an administrative and military centre, strongly fortified, at the time of the Italian occupation. The large majority of the people belong to the Catholic Church of Ethiopian Rite. In Tsenadegle Abuna Yakob, the founder of the church found his most fertile field. As we have mentioned, he is buried in the church of Hebo, the village where Catholicism has struck the firmest roots. The rest of the people are Copts; in Saganeiti there are also a few Jiberti Mohammedans. Tsenadegle has no traditional chieftainship. In Ethiopian times, its villages were administered by *ferresenya* appointed by the Governor of the Tigrai. Shortly before the Italian occupation a local man, the famous Bahta Hagos, became the self-appointed ruler of the district. He joined forces with the Italians against the Emperor, but later rebelled against his allies and masters, and was defeated and killed in battle. He was succeeded by a Government nominee, a man who had served in the Italian Army, and whose family now hold office in the third generation.

Haddegti. The people are another branch of the "sons of Akkele". The district is small, and has a population of only 1400. It possesses some fertile land which is not, however, sufficent for the needs of the population. Again, the people are forced to cultivate in the plain of Damas to make up for the scarcity of land. The main settlements are Maraba (the chief's residence) and Adi Abur. The former is Coptic, the latter Catholic. The district is governed by a chief who holds one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the country, that of Dejach bel Naggarit – "Dejach of the Drums". His name is Tesemma Asberom, and he comes from one of the oldest chiefly dynasties in Eritrea. In Ethiopian times, the chiefs of the house of Asberom held also the Imperial office of *ferresenya.* Under the Italian regime, the family maintained and even extended its

powers adding to its original possessions the rule of many other districts.

Eggela Hames. The majority of the people (who total 2200) descend from the Eggela of Agame; two villages are inhabited by immigrants from Sorokhso (also in the Agame.) The district has ample, fertile land. The main villages are Gura, Zeban, Serrau and Enadoko. The population is almost exclusively Coptic. In pre-Italian times, the country called Eggela comprised the present districts of Eggela Hames, Robra and Dekki Admokhom. Politically, it was divided into numerous autonomous villages which were, however, tributary of the Woldekkele of Haddegti. In this period, too, the Eggela followed the code of Woldekkele, the Meen Mehaza. In the course of a turbulent history full of rebellions and blood feuds. Eggela gained political independence, and also abandoned the law of its overlords. It adopted a new code of law, which it called Mai Adgi, after a river of historical associations; here the chiefs of Woldekkele were formerly invested with the insignia of office at the hands of the Imperial regent-delegates. Shortly before the advent of the Italians, two powerful men usurped the position of chief, one of Eggela Hames and Robra, and the other of Dekki Admokhom. Under the Italian regime Eggela Hames was created an independent district. The local chiefs, to whom the district was first entrusted, proved unable to govern this unruly country, and in 1927 it was added to the dominions of Dejach Tesemma Asberom of Haddegti. His eldest son is the present chief of the district.

Robra. This district lies in the fertile plain of Gura and is rich in agricultural land, though it lost much of it through expropriation in 1935, when the aerodrome and the Caproni works of Gura were built. The population, numbering 2600, is almost exclusively Coptic, and hails from the Eggela and other parts of the Tigrai. The main villages are Tukul, Wutto, Mai Hoza (which were hardest hit by the expropriation of the land), Adi Nefas and Godeiti.

The history of Robra is that of Eggela Hames, and the two districts also share their code of customary law. The first chief appointed by the Italians was a local man, but, inclined to abuse his powers and hated by the population. He owed his appointment to the services which he had rendered to the Italians during the rebellion of Bahta Hagos. In 1929, after severe riots in the district, he was deposed, and this district, too, passed to the family of Dejach Tesemma. Like Eggela Hames, it is at present administered by Tesemma's eldest son.

Dekki Admokhom. A rich district, again situated on the Gura plain, with a population of 2000 (all Copts). The people are of Eggela descent, and follow the Eggela law. The main villages are Amhur. Dengel, Arato and Awle leru. An ancient and famous monastery, though endowed with little land, Enda Selasse, is situated in the district. Again, the early history of the district is that of Eggela Hames. The man who had usurped the chieftainship shortly before the Italian occupation was confirmed in his office by the new Government, but was soon afterwards murdered by one of his own people. Till 1929 the district was without chief, and remained a group of autonomous villages. In 1929 Dekki Admokhom became the fourth district of the house of Asberom.

Dekki Gebri. A district very rich in land, with a population of 2600, all Copts. The main settlements are Korbaria, the seat of the chief, Torat and Adi Rassi. The name Korbaria means "hill of slaves"; for according to tradition the people of this village are the descendants of slaves from Gondar. Other sections claim kinship with the Eggela, whose law is also the law of this country. In pre-Italian times, the district was the dominion of a chiefly dynasty, whose last representative was murdered by a relation. After an interlude under an incapable chief, appointed by the Italian Government, the district was united with Engana (now in the Hamasien) in 1931, under the chief of that district, Dejach Bokru. In 1937, after Bokru's death, the two districts were separa-

ted, and Bokru's son became chief of Dekki Gebri.

Merettah Kaieh. The people of this district claim descent from the mythical ancestor Faluk. The population numbers 2300, is Coptic by religion, and possesses a large and fertile territory. The main villages are Gogwat, Gergera, Adi Nefas, and Fekieh. Originally composed of a group of autonomous villages, Merettah Kaieh was constituted as a district in Italian times, and given first to Dejach Bokru of Engana and later to the present chief, an ex-soldier of little ability and prestige. The district has a customary law of its own, called Tsada Hamet.

Merettah Sebene. Its large population of almost 6000 is akin to that of the other Merettah, though it follows the law of Akkele and Guzai. The territory is large and fertile. The main settlements are Halibo, the seat of the chief, Mai Aha Hadidah and Embeito. The people are Copts, with a small Catholic minority. Like the brother district, Merettah Sebene consisted originally of autonomous villages. Under the Italian regime an ex-soldier was appointed as the first district chief. He handed his office on to his son, the present chief.

Tedrer. The territory of this district includes the northern part of the Hazomo plain, and is one of the richest in the Akkele-Guzai. The population numbers 3000, and is Coptic by religion. It traces its descent to a group of alien origin, the *Naib* branch of the Bellu in Massawa, of which we have heard in a previous chapter. The people of Tedrer were once Mohammedans, but were, according to tradition, converted to Coptic Christianity by the founder of the famous (though now poverty-stricken) monastery of Enda Ioannes in the district. To-day the only cultural difference between Tedrer and the rest of the Akkele-Guzai lies in the separate law of the district, which is called, after the ancestors of the group Seleste Dekki Derar, the "Three Sons of Derar". The district has many villages, the most important of which are Adi Nebri (the chief's residence) Geniseba, Adi Mokada, Hadish Adi, and Hatenat. The

hereditary line of chiefs which had ruled over the district became extinct in Italian times. Its successor is the present chief, a brother of Dejach Tesemma of Haddegti, an alien in the district, but related by marriage to the old chief's family.

Dekki Digna. A small and poor district, with a population of 1800. The people, of Woldekkele origin, are Copts and Catholics. The district has only two villages, Digsa and Adi Hadit. The last of a hereditary line of chiefs which used to rule over this small district holds today the office of a village chief of Digsa. The district itself has been joined to the neighbouring Tsenadegle.

4. Districts of Senafe Vice-Residenza.

Zeban. The people of this district (numbering 2300) claim descent from the ancestor Guzai. They are almost exclusively Copts, one village having a few Catholics. Zeban is one of the frontier districts of the Akkele-Guzai, and forms part of the region known as Shimezana. This includes, apart from Zeban, the districts Adi Gulti, Enda Dashim, and the twin district of Agruf. The territory of Zeban is fertile, though somewhat restricted. The main villages are Zigfet, where the chief resides, Ahfessi, an important market, Adi Embara, and Aromo, an old frontier post. Zeban is an ancient district, ruled by a hereditary family whose powers of old extended over a much wider area. The law of the country is the Meem Mehaza.

Degien Wogera. The people are said to be of Amhara descent, though intermarriage has made them akin to the adjacent groups. The district has only three villages, of which Matara is the only important settlement. The territory of the district is large and fertile, and more than sufficient for the small population (800). The people are Copts, and Matara is the seat of the Like Kahnat, the delegate of the Coptic Bishop of Eritrea. Degien Wogera was originally a fief of the Ethiopian monastery of Debra Damo (situated close to the border of the Eritrean district of Akran). Under

Italian rule the church lands were secularised, and the district was given to the father of the present chief, a descendant of the chiefly dynasty of Zeban.

Senafe. This name is said to mean "those who came from Sennaa", and to refer to immigrants from the Yemen, who first settled in the area. At the time of their arrival the land belonged to the nomadic Gaasu-Miniferi, and to a group of obscure origin, called Zereftai, which is today widely scattered over the Akkele-Guzai. Through intermarriage with the Gaasu, the immigrants obtained a title to the land, on which they built two villages (which still exist), Awle and Hahaile. In the time of Emperor John the Senafe people had already a hereditary chief who, incidentally, guided Napier's army to Magdala. After the extinction of this line of chiefs, a new family came to power, which now holds office in the third generation. The district is small, and its people, all Mohammedans, number 850. Of these, two-thirds live in the native quarter of Senafe town. The town is a modern creation; it was founded in 1902, as a market and a garrison to guard the nearby frontier.

Adi Gulti. A very fertile district, whose people number 2200. They are of heterogeneous origin, descending from the branch of Guzai, from the Arab settlers at Senafe, and from immigrants from the Tigrai. The majority are Copts; the Mohammedan minority, of the Jiberti sect, has given the district its hereditary chiefs. The main settlements are Barakit (the residence of the chief). Bihat, Addi Atal and Egri Manda.

Enda Dashim. The district lies in the fertile valley of the river of that name. The people (about 3000) are Copts, and claim descent from Guzai. They live in the villages of Barakna (the seat of the chief). Adderho, and Kodadu. The rule of the district is vested in a hereditary ruling house.

Colonia Cattolica. This "colony" was founded in 1896, to give shelter to groups of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite which were driven

from their old home in the Ethiopian Agame by religious persecution. The population numbers only 700, and includes a few families of Copts and Mohammedans which live as "guests" in the Catholic colony. The territory on which the "colony" was founded used to belong to the districts of Zeban and Enda Dashim. Though their new lands are rich and fertile, the people have not renounced their claims to the *resti* lands which they once possessed in Agame. The district has only one large village, Monoxeito, which is the home of the church and the residence of the chief. He is a descendant of the chiefs who ruled over the people in the old country. The district includes two small "autonomous villages". Colet and Grana, which lie to the east of the Colonia Cattolica, on the Ethiopian border. They are inhabited by people of Gasu and Ethiopian descent, who were nomads originally, and became sedentary in Italian times.

Debbar Islam. Another "autonomous village". It lies on a hill north of Akran, and its barren lands stretch to the west, to the Ethiopian border. The population, 250 in number, is Mohammedan, of Jiberti persuasion. In the time of Emperor John, the people were forced to adopt Coptic Christianity, but after the Italian occupation they reverted to the old faith. At that time, too, Debbar Islam ("Hill of the Mohammedans") was made autonomous under its own chief. It had previously belonged to the church lands of the monastery of Enda Abulibanos.

Akran. This border district is inhabited by descendants of Akkele. They number 2700 and are Copts. The land is barren and restricted. The main villages are Mes'hal. Haddit Adi, Adi Shoho, and Adi Arbeita (a frontier post and the residence of the chief). The hereditary chiefs of Akran also governed, till Italian times, the districts of Zerimossi and Woldekkele. Later the districts were separated, and the dynasty of Akran lost its paramount office as well as the district chieftainship. A new man was appoined, whose son now holds office.

Zerimossi. The people are akin to those of Akran; they are Copts and number about 1000. The territory of the district stretches over rocky cliffs and deep gullies, and is barren in the extreme. Large numbers of the people are thus forced to cultivate in the Hazomo plain to the west of Akran. There are only two large villages. Assetha and Keshahat. The present chief is the son of the first chief of the district, who was appointed by the Italians when Zerimossi gained autonomy.

Woldekkele Mes'hal. A large and important district (population 4200), and the home of the "Sons of Akkele". The people are Copts, with the exception of the chief, who is a Catholic, and a few Mohammedans of Miniferi descent. The district is rich, though some of its most fertile land was expropriated in 1935, when the aerodrome at Senafe was built. The district has many large villages: Mes'hal, Dibdib, Adi Refai, Mai Tsada, and Emba Bedahan. Originally one of the three districts ruled by the chiefs of Akran, it became autonomous under the Italians. The first chief of Woldekkele joined the rebel forces of Bahta Hagos, and was deposed. Two other chiefs followed, whose rule was only moderately successful. The fourth and present chief has ability and prestige. He comes from the Tsenadegle branch of Woldekkele, and strangely enough, from the family of the rebel chief Bahta Hagos.

Ambeset Geleba. The population of 2500 is heterogeneous, composed of groups of Tigrai descent and of a section which is akin to the people of Enda Dashim. The people are Copts, and have in their territory the famous and once powerful monastery of Enda Abulibanos. The land is poor, and the villages are few: Geleba, Ham, Ahez and Aregen. Until 1896 the district belonged to the church lands of the monastery of Enda Abulibanos. Though the church fief was abolished in that year, the district continued to be administered by the abbot of the monastery till 1929, when the present chief, an ex-soldier, was appointed.

Loggo Sarda. We have spoken of the origin of the people in this district. The population is small, numbering 1500, but the territory, which embraces the southern part of the Hazomo plain, is rich and large. Like the other districts in the Hazomo, Loggo Sarda receives annually many visitors, herdsmen and cultivators, from the poorer parts of the country. The main villages are Sarda. Mendaf Koma, Merara and Sukum. Until recently, the district was under a hereditary line of chiefs. The last representative of this old ruling house was deposed for incompetence, and replaced by the present chief, who is an able man, of Loggo descent, and an ex-soldier. Their alien descent notwithstanding, the people of Loggo Sarda follow the law of Meem Mehaza.

Agruf. There are three districts of this name; Lalai (or Upper) Agruf; Tahtai (or Lower) Agruf the First, and Tahtai Agruf the Second. The last comprises two disconnected areas, to the east and west of Lalai Agruf. All three districts are small, but moderately rich in agricultural land. The people are Copts. Lalai Agruf has long existed as an independent district. The present chief comes from a family which has held office for three generations. The people, of the branch of Guzai, number 1800. The main villages are Cefa and Mekaieh. The two Tahtai Agrufs originally formed a single district. They are inhabited by descendants of Guzai and by groups of Hazu origin. The old district of Tahtai Agruf was governed by hereditary chiefs till 1896, when the last chief having fought on the side of the Ethiopians in the battle of Adowa, was ousted from office. The district was split into the two parts which exist today. Tahtai Agruf the Second, the larger of the two, was joined to Enda Dashim. Its villages are Cegworo, Adi Hisho and Kessat Emba. The much smaller Tahtai Agruf the First (with a population of 366, and only two villages) was handed, almost in poetic justice, to a soldier who had fought at Adowa on the Italian side.

5. The Tribes.

We have already mentioned the three nomadic tribes, Asaorta. Miniferi and Hazu, which move between the Red Sea coast and the mountains of the eastern Akkele-Guzai. These three tribes speak a common language, though in slightly different dialects, which is called Saho and is akin to Dankali. They are, with the exception of one section of the Miniferi. Mohammedans. They have a tribal law (different in each tribe) which differs fundamentally from the law of the Coptic districts. Both in their mountain home and in the plain, the tribes occupy adjacent areas. The Asaorta live between the rivers Haddas and Selima. South and east of this line lies the country of the Miniferi, bounded in the east by the foothills enclosing the Wangabo plain, and in the south by the southern flank of Mt. Soira and the upper Dandero river. East and south again, down the rivers Endeli and Renda Komo, to the edge of the Dankalia plain, the Hazu are living. Groups of Asaorta and Miniferi move seasonally across the Plateau into the low-lying pastures of the Akkele-Guzai and Serae, and some have even settled in the midst of the Christian population of the highlands.

Disregarding these split-off sections, we may say that the boundary between the Mohammedan tribes and the Christian Plateau population follows the crest of the mountains to the west of the Haddas river and continues due south, across the plateau known as Kohaito, towards Senafe and the western spur of Mt. Soira. It is along this line that the "overlapping" of tribal and territorial administration occurs. For the Christian groups claim ancient land rights as far as the Haddas valley and over the whole of the Kohaito plateau, down to the plain of Senafe, and the jurisdiction of their chiefs extends to this traditional frontier. Sections of the Asaorta and Miniferi live thus as "guests" in the territory of the Christian chiefs. The result is a dual system of jurisdiction: in all disputes which bear on their status as "guests" – disputes over land or grazing rights – the tribesmen must accept the jurisdiction of the

territorial chiefs; while all internal disputes of the tribe come before their own tribal chiefs.

Asaorta. The Asaorta are about 17,000 strong. They are most probably of southern Arabian origin, and have been living in Eritrea since the early wave of immigration which must have taken place at the beginning of the Christian era. The descent of the Asaorta from southern Arabian tribes is elaborated in the tribal traditions, which are otherwise obscure and far from illuminating.

Like most tribes in this land of many races, the Asaorta are composed of an aboriginal nucleus and of alien groups which have attached themselves to the tribe, adopting its language and culture No caste or class distinction arose from this difference in origin, but the latter is clearly marked in the structure of the tribe. Of its eleven sub-tribes, six are known as Asaorta "proper", and five as "affiliated" groups. These are the Asaorta sub-tribes.

Asaorta "proper"	Fogrot Are
	Beit Lelish
	Assakeri
	Assalisan
	Beit Fakhi
	Sarmare Engage
Affiliated groups –	Hassabat Are
	Idda
	Beradotta
	Rezamare
	Tarowa Beit-Sarra

The Asaorta were originally pagans, and they still remember, and point out to the traveller, the places of their ancient worship on the sacred mountain of the tribe. Mt. Farum: today they are confirmed Mohammedans. The people own cattle, goats, and sheep. The seasonal migrations of the tribe follow a regular pattern, determined both by the need of grazing for the herds, and the

dislike of the people (who are mountain dwellers rather than plainsmen), of the heat in the plain. During the coastal rains, from November to April, the Asaorta live in the plain west of the Bay of Zula; from May to July they move up to the foothills and western edge of the plateau, which at that time of the year are covered with rich vegetation; afterwards, during the inland rainy season, the tribe moves up to the Plateau itself. During their stay in the foothills some of the people engage in a little agriculture, planting maize, millet, and other quickly naturing crops. Other groups have taken up cultivation of a more permanent nature on the plateau; these are the "tenants and guests" of whom we have spoken above. About 10-15 years ago small groups of Asaorta started cultivating on the banks of the Haddas river, which they irrigate by means of channels and primitive sluices. In the agricultural colonies which sprang up in the last 25 years. The trend from nomadic herdsmen to sedentary cultivators, already marked in the recent past of the tribe, is clearly progressing, and will in the future create the difficult problem of a land-hungry tribe pressing upon the landed people of the highlands.

The settlements of the Asaorta are small, and composed of primitive shelters made of loose wood, shaped like tents, and as temporary as these. Only in the mountains, among the more sedentary sections of the tribes, is the house of more permanent type, built of stone and thatch. Where the Asaorta have penetrated into the area of the highland population, they have also adopted the solid flat-roofed house of Abyssinian type.

The social organisation of the tribe is based on kinship and descent. The sub-tribes (omitting the affiliated groups) are thought of as a genealogical branches descended from a common ancestor. They are known as *kisho* or are ("house"). Each sub-tribe is divided into numerous kinship groups, or *dik*, which usually bear the names of individuals – the founders of the lineage. The kinship groups are not local groups as well, though the term *dik* is also used to denote

a local group (of mixed lineage). The sub-tribes, on the other hand, occupy well defined areas, where they graze their animals or put up their seasonal camps. No rigid land-rights exist – the division of the tribal lands among the different sub-tribes is by tacit agreement rather than inalienable right.

In Ethiopian times the Asaorta jealously guarded their tribal independence which, to them, included the liberty to raid the Plateau districts, and to levy dues, imposed by force of arms, on caravans from the interior. Even after the Italian occupation of Eritrea the tribe enjoyed for many years a status of quasi-autonomy, a light control, and a purely nominal tribute. In the political organisation of the tribe the sub-tribes were recognised as autonomous units, and tribal government was in the hands of the elected heads of these sections, known as *shum*. The *shum* is still the chief of the sub-tribe, and has under him the heads of kinship groups, called *nabara*. In 1933 the Italian Government united the whole tribe under a paramount chief, who was invested with the rank first of Bey, later of Pasha. Though this office is not traditional, the present chief, still the first paramount chief of the Asaorta, has some claim to the leadership of his tribe, for he comes from its senior section, and traces his descent in direct line to the tribal ancestor.

Miniferi. This tribe, about 10,000 strong, is of the same racial extraction as the Asaorta, but the Miniferi are said to have been Coptic Christians once, and to have adopted Islam only a few generations ago. A few sections which live as sedentary agriculturists on Mt. Soira, are (still?) Christians. As regards the livelihood of the tribe, and especially the gradual transformation from pastoral to peasant economy, what was said about the Asaorta applies equally to the Miniferi.

On the south end of the Bay of Zula, a fairly large village has sprung up — Arafali. Though Arafali is mainly an administrative centre, a police post and market, it is not entirely an artificial creation, for it is situated close to rich wells which, during the

winter months, attract the herds from many miles inland. A mixed population of merchants from Massawa. Zula, and the Yemen inhabits Arafali during that time of the year; in the remaining months the grass huts af Arafali are almost deserted.

The Miniferi are divided into four sub-tribes: Gaasu, Fekat-Harak, Dassamo and Danagul. The first three claim common descent from the ancestor of the tribe; the fourth is an "affiliated" group of alien origin. The Gaasu and Fekat-Harak are divided into kinship groups, the other two sub-tribes, of less numerous population, have no sub-sections. The political organisation of the tribes is closely akin to that of the Asaorta, but the Miniferi were much earlier united under a paramount chief (in 1902). Weaker, and less predatory than the Asaorta, the Miniferi were evidently considered a fitter subject for this administrative reform. Their first chief was the Qadhi of the tribe, a man of great learning and reputation. Their second, and present, chief is a man who, by descent, has no special claim to his office – he owes his promotion from sub-tribal head to paramount chief to his energy and ability.

Hazu. They are a small tribe numbering only about 4000 souls. In their mountains and river valleys,remote from towns, roads and the influence of the Christian highlands, they have remained on a more primitive level than their brother-tribes. Unlike the Asaorta and Miniferi, the Hazu never adopted agriculture. On their seasonal migrations they move within a narrow compass, between the coastal region and the inland hills. Their only outside contacts are with the Danakil and the Ethiopians from Irob, both their enemies, against whose raids they have to defend their frontiers today, as they have done for generations.

The tribe is divided into ten sections, some of which are regarded as genealogical branches of common descent, and some described as affiliated groups. Each section is under a *shum.* and the whole tribe under a paramount chief whose hereditary rank

is *Ona.* Alone among the three Saho tribes, the Hazu have a traditional tribal chieftainship.

Debrimela. A fourth, very small tribe, with a population of under a thousand lives in the south of the Akkele-Guzai on two mountains which mark the border between the Christian and Mohammedan groups. This tribe, the Debrimela, is divided into two branches – the Alades on Amba Debra and the Labalhe on Mt. Soira. Both are sedentary and largely agriculturist. They thus fit well into the framework of a territorial administration and are in fact administered as districts under district chiefs. The Alades are Mohammedans and speak Saho; the Labalhe are Copts and bilingual speaking both Tigrinya and Saho. The origin of the tribe is obscure, as is also the reason for this difference of religion in a group daiming common descent: as to whether it is due to the Islamisation of an originally Christian people or to the converse process, even the tribe itself has no theories.

STATISTICS

(The figures are approximate)

A. Sedentary and nomadic Groups

	Agordat	*Keren*	*Massawa*	*Hamasien*	*Serae*	*Akkele Guzai*	*Assab*
Sedentary	44,000	70,000	45,000	200,000	121,000	85,000	3,000
Nomadic	62,000	60,000	30,000	9,000	2,000	29,000	5,000
Total	106,000	130,000	75,000	209,000	123,000	114,000	8,000

B. Languages

	Agordat	*Keren*	*Massawa*	*Hamasien'*	*Serae*	*Akkele Guzai*	*Assab*
Tigrinya	4,000	10,000	3,000	170,000	114,000	81,000	
Tigre	43,000	90,000	28,000	5,000	2,000		
Beja	25,000	1,000					
Belein		21,000		3,000	300		
Saho			6,000	5,000	6,000	31,000	
Dankali			20,000			500	7,300
Arabic	10,000	6,000	15,000	13,000	700	1,000	500
Others	30,000	2,000	8,000	13,000			200

C. Religions

	Agordat	*Keren*	*Massawa*	*Hamasien*	*Serae*	*Akkele Guzai*	*Assab*
Copts	4,000	14,000		171,000	107,000	72,000	
Mohammedans	86,000	110,000	73,000	32,000	14,000	36,000	8,000
Ethiopian Cath.		400		2,000	500	6,400	
Mission Cath.	300	5,000					
Mission Prot.	300	1,100		3,000	1,000		
Pagans	16,000				500		

HANDBOOK

ON

ERITREA

FOR USE OF

VISITORS & TOURISTS

(April 1944 – p. 25)

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BRITISH MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
ERITREA

Land and Climate

With its crops too often insufficient for its own needs, its lack of rivers and treacherous rainfall, its largely deforested surface, its dull coastline, its humble mineral resources, its unbalancing budget, what claims to interest can be boasted by this ill-known triangle of African soil to its neighbours or to the world at large?

Geographical unity the territory does not possess. The high tableland which forms the central south of the country down to the Mareb river is flanked on the west by broad and torrid low lands stretching down to the Sudan, with which they are largely homogeneous. To the north, up to the apex of the Eritrean triangle stretch scores of miles of sparsely populated broken hills, a barren or bush-grown country of nomad graziers. The Red Sea Coastal strip forms a wide belt of arid and unhealthy waste, seen at its most forbidding in the long corridor of low coast-line stretching from the Gulf of Zula south east to the confines of French Somaliland. No contrasts could be greater than between such country and the high and cool plateau which forms the core of Eritrea, and which continues without break southwards into Ethiopia.

The difference in climate, in rainfall, in vegetation and in atmosphere between these diverse regions of the country are striking. They include all extremes from the sunken salt lakes of the Dankali hinterland — reputedly the hottest portion of all the earth's surface — to the perennial clear coolness of Asmara; from a rainfall of 46 inches a year, to no rain at all; from the well-wooded tracts and mountains of the Eastern Slopes to the desolation of Thio and Assab.

MARKET AT KEREN

Ancient History

The early history of Eritrea is lost in the dim past. Its first inhabitants were probably immigrants from other parts — nomadic tribes from the Sudan, immigrants from south-western Arabia, other Arab tribes who came later, and many groups of unknown origin who entered Eritrea from the highlands of Ethiopia.

The first known civilisation arose in the Kingdom of Axum. This, 40 miles south of the present Eritrean border, was its capital and holy city, and even after the Kingdom disappeared, it remained the sacred centre of the Ethiopian Empire, where the rulers were crowned, and where their throne and jewels are still preserved.

The Kingdom lasted from about 300 B.C. till the ninth century A.D. In the sixth century, it was reached by Christian priests from Syria; these spread the new faith, till it became the State religion of Ethiopia. This Christian creed was that of the primitive Eastern Church, and acknowledged the supremacy of the Patriarch of Alexandria. Ever since, the religion of the Eritrean highlands has been Coptic Christianity. In the plains in the west and east the people remained pagans until, long afterwards, converted to Islam.

The kingdom of Axum was a powerful State, which maintained close contact with the Arab countries, Egypt, Greece, and later the Byzantine Empire. With its collapse these [illegible]

Modern History

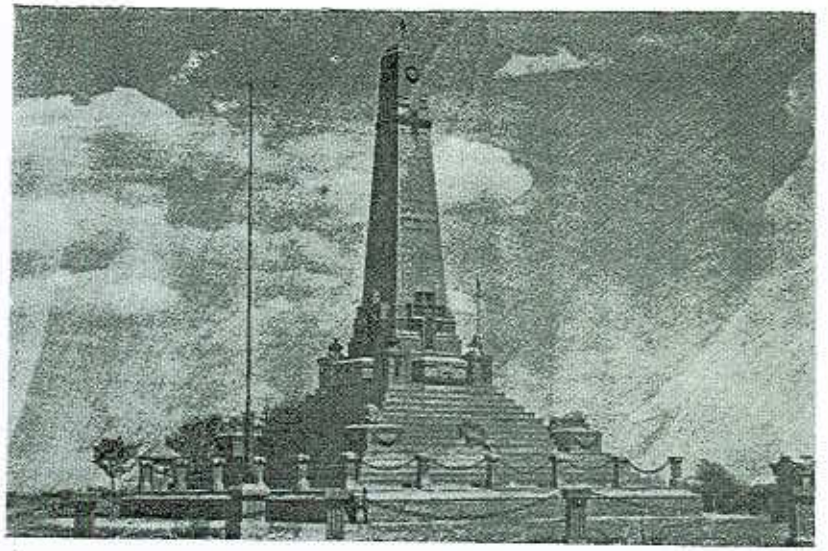
Ethiopia was rediscovered in the fifteenth century, when Vasco da Gama learned of the Empire of "Prester John" — the lengendary Christian Empire of mediaeval Ethiopia.

Its centre was no longer at Axum, but in the interior of Ethiopia; Eritrea formed part of Ethiopia's northernmost province, known as the Tigrai. The period which followed was one of anarchy and constant wars between rival warlords and vassal kings, and against aggression from without. Here the gravest danger was the threat of Islam. In 1525 the Ethiopian Empire narrowly escaped defeat by the Mohammedan armies of a Somali chieftain, the Imam Grany. It was saved only by the arrival of a Portuguese expedition at Massawa, which allied itself with Ethiopia; but shortly afterwards Massawa itself fell to a Mohammedan power, when the Turks occupied it.

Three hundred years later, Mohammedan expansion threatened Ethiopia and Eritrea from the west; in 1834, the Egyptians occupied Kassala, on the Sudan border of Eritrea, and carried their invasion as far as Keren, which they twice destroyed (in 1850 and 1852).

About that time, a man of humble origin, who had become the most powerful among the warlords of Ethiopia, usurped the throne. His name was Theodore II, and he ruled at Gondar. He was a strong man, but cruel and intolerant. He suspected the British Consul at Massawa, Captain Cameron, of intriguing with Egypt, and had him seized and imprisoned at Magdala (1863). Thus provoked the British Government sent a military expedition against the Emperor. It was commanded by Lord Napier and manned by British troops from India. The expedition landed in the Bay of Zula in 1868. A narrow gauge railway was laid from the place of landing to an advanced base, some 20 miles inland, situated at the entrance of the valley through which Napier intended to march. This valley (of the river Comaile) is still known among the people as the "English Road". Following this, Napier reached Senafè and eventually Magdala in the heart of Abyssinia. After marching over 400 miles through wild, hostile country, encumbered with artillery, huge supplies and a train of elephants, the British gave battle. The vastly superior army of the Emperor was defeated, and Theodore killed himself. The British released the prisoners and withdrew.

Theodore's successor was John IV, another warlord, who made Adowa (near Axum) his capital. As a reward for help to Lord Napier's expedition, he had been supplied with modern arms and a British

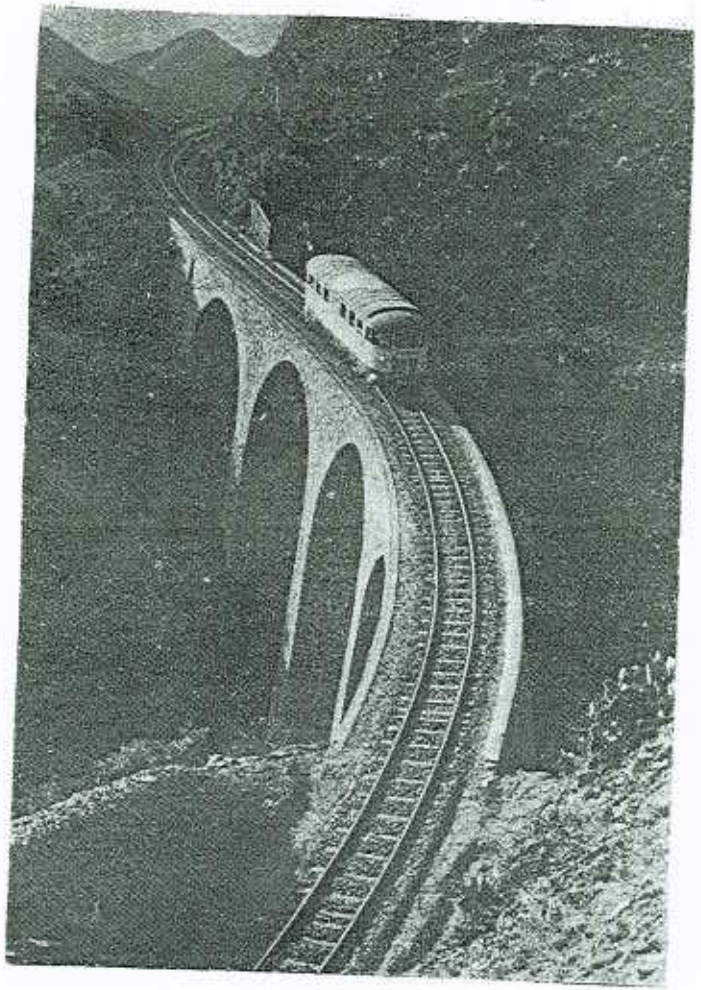


BATTLE OF ADOWA MONUMENT NEAR ADI QUALA

In 1865 Egypt occupied Massawa, and was planning to extend ov all Eritrea and Ethiopia. A Swiss adventurer and traveller, Barc Munsinger, (formerly British and French Consul at Massawa) accepte the office of Governor of the future Egyptian dominions. In 1872 h occupied Keren, and advanced farther into Ethiopia and Eritrea. Bu in 1875 and 1876 the armies of John met his forces on the Mare and at Gura. The Egyptians were defeated and had soon to withdra from Eritrea.

Meanwhile in the Sudan the Mahdi had started his religiou uprising, and his armies were raiding deep into Ethiopia and Eritrea In 1880 they occupied Kassala. In the same year John met them i the battle of Mettemma, in which he was defeated and killed. H was succeeded by the Emperor Menelik, founder of the preser Ethiopian dynasty.

Meanwhile, a new power had appeared on the scene— Italy In 1869 an Italian shipping company, financed by the Italian Govern ment, had bought a strip of coast at Assab. In 1885 Italian soldier occupied Massawa, then still Egyptian. Gradually the Italians ex tended their possessions over the hinterland of Massawa. After temporary set-back in 1887, when Ras Alula, Governor of Eritrea destroyed the Italian garrison at Dogali, near Massawa, they soo recovered from the defeat. It was a period of unrest and dissensio in Ethiopia, and they successfully utilised this situation, supportin



ASMARA-MASSAWA RAILWAY

In 1889 Italy occupied the whole north of Eritrea, and in the same year concluded the Treaty of Uccialli with Menelik, recognising Italy's territorial claims in Eritrea. Yet the interpretation of the Treaty led to a rift: Italy interpreted the Treaty as giving her the Southern boundaries of present Eritrea; the Emperor would only agree to a recognition of Italy's actual and lesser possessions. The result, once more, was war. The Italians advanced into Ethiopia, but were disastrously defeated at Adowa, in 1896. They then withdrew behind the present boundaries, to recover and to consolidate. The situation was finally recognised by the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1900, which created the Eritrea of today.

The position remained

The Campaign in Eritrea 1941

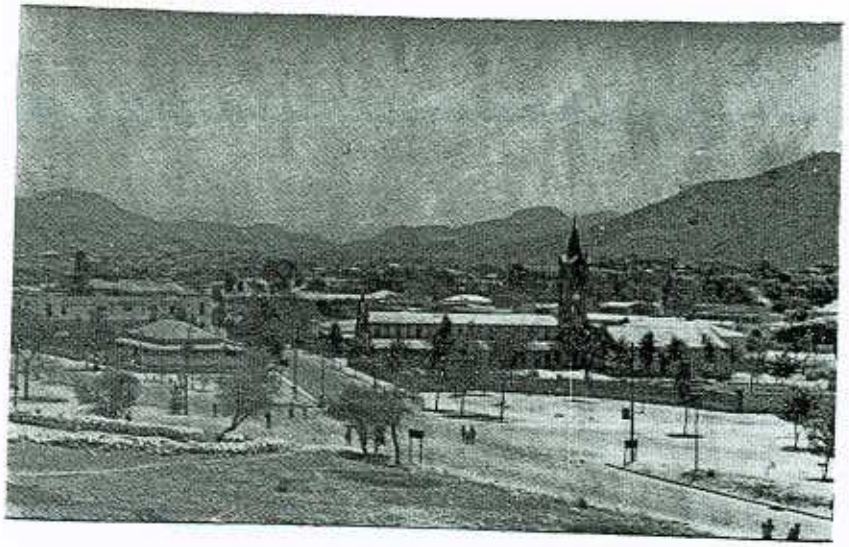
The fighting in East Africa, although a campaign on its own account, formed part of General Wavell's strategy for the destruction of Italian power elsewhere in Africa. For the British armies in Africa, gains and losses on the one front had repercussions on the other. To win in North Africa it was essential to hold the Sudan; and to hold the Sudan, the Italian armies in Eritrea had to be eliminated. The Eritrean campaign had, moreover, the aim of making the Red Sea, and thus the approaches to the Middle East, safe for Allied shipping. The goal was achieved when, after the fall of Eritrea, the President of the United States allowed American ships to enter the Red Sea, then no longer a theatre of war. The main step in the conquest of Eritrea was the victory at Keren: and that battle, no less than El-Alamein and Stalingrad, is a landmark on the road of defeat along which the Axis forces have been compelled to march.

The forces which conquered Eritrea, and Northern Ethiopia, were directed from Khartoum, while Nairobi was the starting point of those which conquered Italian and reconquered British Somaliland, and then switched north-west into Addis Ababa. Simultaneously with the closing of the arms of this huge pincer movement, the Emperor Haile Selassie (brought from England to Khartoum on the 3rd July, 1940) crossed the Sudan frontier and entered Addis Ababa on the 6th of April, 1941.

The odds against the British in the Sudan sector at the beginning of the 1940 campaign were almost 10 to 1: yet Major-General Platt, "supremely cool and competent", and his men succeeded in bluffing the enemy into thinking that our forces were far stronger than they were.

In June 1940, and for some months later, the defence of the Sudan was the limit of strategic possibility. Although the Italians, had they known it, had then almost everything in their favour, they were content to stay in the frontier towns they had captured, fortifying Kassala and waiting for reinforcements.

Towards the end of that year, General Wavell struck at Cyrenaica. After his victory at Sidi Barrani, the Fourth Indian Division was switched south to the Sudan, there to form an invaluable asset to General Platt; and with the disaster in Libya, the Italian



KEREN-ENTRANCE TO THE TOWN

evacuate his troops from the border to the better defences, formed by the hilly country inland, and the fortified triangle Agordat-Keru-Barentu. Thus Kassala and Tessenei were evacuated at night on the 17th January, 1941. By fast moving tactics, Sabdaret, Tessenei, Aicota and Keru were soon in British hands.

It was at Agordat that the first big battle of the north was fought. *Lorenzini*, "Lion of the Sahara", was in command with orders to hold Agordat, since this battle (as his orders said) would seal the fate of Italy in East Africa. On the 31st January, the British had broken through and cut the road to Keren, and the Italians were retiring precipitately across country, leaving behind a thousand prisoners and much war material. Lorenzini had failed to make the most of his resources, or to appreciate his opportunity. Agordat was occupied by the British on the 1st February, and Barentu fell to the Fifth Indian Division next day.

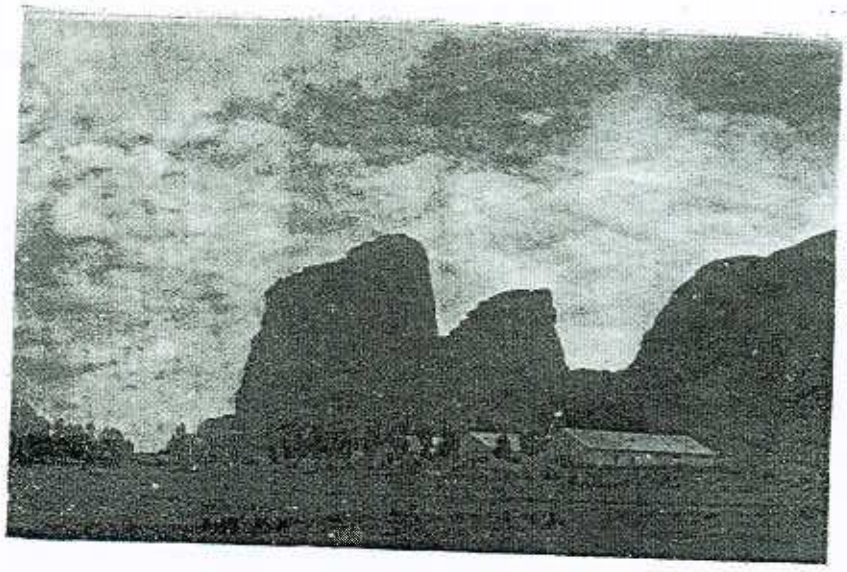
After Agordat came Keren, the spectacular and decisive battle in the campaign. The Italian forces moved up to the mountains and forts of Keren, and when their last formations had passed through the gorge, which is the only approach, they blew down 200 yards of cliff. This great natural fortress was defended by Italian guns, machine-guns and grenades. The British forces advanced into the plain below, a plain 2 miles broad and practically without cover. Beyond the plain towered the massive wall of razor ridges to a height

Peak". To the south were the slightly lower and blunter heights of Dologorodoc (guarded by a fort), Zeban, Falestoh, Sphinx, and Zelade. South of this lay the valley cheerfully miscalled "Happy". Between the two massifs lay the winding road to Keren town, flanked by steep cliffs and guarded by a road block.

The battle for Keren opened on the 3rd February with an attempt by the 2nd Cameron Highlanders to capture Sanchil, one of the peaks in the northern massif. They established themselves below the peak on a narrow secondary ridge which neither they nor their name abandoned : it became Cameron Ridge.

From then on the battle for Keren developed into a four-pronged drive. In the north several attempts were made to scale Sanchil and the adjacent peaks, during which British and Indian troops suffered heavy losses. In the south, Indian troops attempted in vain to turn the enemy's flank by moving up "Happy Valley". Another threat to Keren developed in the extreme north, where a combined Indian and Free French force had entered Eritrea at Karora and occupied Kubkub, drawing off a considerable part of the Keren garrison. Eventually the successful attack came from the centre, where British and Indian troops took Fort Dologorodoc by frontal assault on the 16th March.

The battle raged for another ten days, but the enemy's morale was shaken. The severe barrage from British artillery had a devastating effect. During one of these artillery attacks the Italian commander, Lorenzini was killed. Finally, at dawn on the 27th March, white flags were run up on the impregnable Sanchil and Brig's Peak. By sheer determination General Platt's troops, though vastly inferior in numbers, had achieved the scarcely credible.



ROCKS NEAR SENAFE'

KEREN with 10,000 inhabitants, mainly Muslim, lies in a green, cool and attractive valley surrounded by mountains, Km. 96 from Asmara. Keren has modern streets, with civilian garages and a few shops and modern buildings, in addition to the large native quarters; the latter include a fine mosque and an interesting row of silversmiths. Three good hotels cater for visitors; the country around is excellent for riding, and horses can be hired. Within easy reach are the Coptic monasteries of Debra Sina and Zedamba, both dating from the 16th century. The Keren battle fields are within walking distance from the town, though horses or a car are preferable. They lie, extremely impressive and picturesque, astride the road to Agordat.

On the main road to Dessie and Addis Ababa lie ADI CAIEH and SENAFE', near the highest mountains in the territory. Senafè is strikingly picturesque.

On the southern road to Gondar are ADI UGRI and ADI QUALA. All these small but interesting country-towns can boast of some European cleanliness and conveniences and good modern hotels. DECAMERE is, after Asmara, the largest Italian settlement, but *the traveller will hurry through its shabby ugliness.*

ASSAB, remotest of cities, has some 5,000 Dankalis and 300 Italian inhabitants. Other main native settlements of Eritrea are HARCHICO, south of Massawa, AGORDAT and TESSENEI in the low country towards the Sudan.

All these towns and others are linked by

Asmara.

Asmara, an obscure Coptic village prior to 1897, was from that date until the 1930's a small sleepy colonial capital with a population of some 3,000 Italians and perhaps 20,000-25,000 Eritreans. After 1934 it boomed and expanded at an unnatural speed, as the main base for the Ethiopian War, and a leading city in the new Empire; as a result it still bears the traces of hasty and imperfect planning. The purely European and the purely native parts are still well distinguished, but there is a "mixed zone" in the middle and a number of unattractive, or even squalid, suburbs and settlements outside the city with mixed African and Italian population.

The inhabitants today number some 32,000 Italians, representing a complete cross section of the Italian nation from highest to lowest, from Bishops, professors, judges, high officials, doctors and "big business", to technicians, artisans, farmers, shopmen and labourers of all kinds. There are about 100,000 Eritreans, among whom, besides the great majority of Coptic Christians, are found native Eritrean Muslims, Sudanis, colonies from the Yemen and Hadhramaut, a Greek colony of some hundreds, a smaller Indian Community and some Jews of various races.

The city contains a number of fine streets and avenues, and many imposing modern buildings; among these, besides flats, office buildings and workshops, may be mentioned the Governor's Palace in its Park, Vice-Regal Villa (the residence of the Chief Administrator) the War Office (H.Q. of the Military Command), Eritrea Police H.Q., a number of schools, the Law Courts, the Commissariato, Municipality, banks, Prison, and Hotels. The Catholic Cathedral and connected buildings have considerable architectural merit. The Coptic church is striking rather than beautiful, while the Greek and Swedish churches and the Synagogue make no claim to grandeur. The covered and open markets of the town are interesting, and a fine but modern Mosque adjoins them. There is an abundance of European shops containing a surprising variety of articles — unfortunately too often high priced, *except for controlled goods.*

The public services are fully adequate, electric light is everywhere, and the water supply greatly improved since 1941. Traffic is regulated (driving on the left), and the main streets clean maintained.

CORSO ITALIA, ASMARA

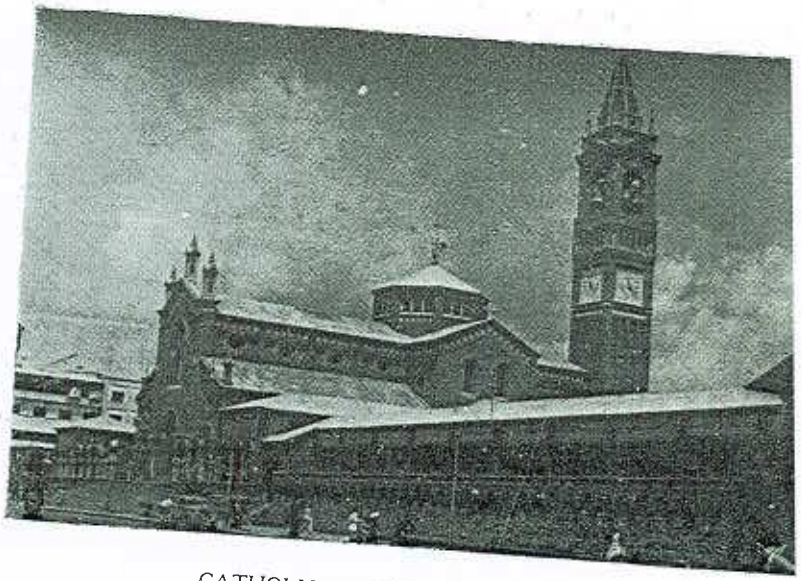
offer Cabaret shows and dancing. There are five cinemas in the town, of which three are modern and spacious. One always, and sometimes others, show English or American films. Italian dramatic entertainments are fairly frequent, and good concerts can be attended.

By way of outdoor sport, there are two or more riding schools where horses can be hired, and the country around is excellent for riding, walking and picnics. There are facilities for polo, tennis, badminton and golf; football, cricket and bowls can be watched if not played. Shooting is reserved for a later page.

For Service personnel visiting Asmara, the Church Army Club offers many amenities, free or at the lowest rates. The same is true of the Y.W.C.A., which welcomes civilians as well.

How Eritrea is Governed

An Italian colony since 1890, Eritrea became, with enlarged frontiers, a province of the Italian East African Empire in 1935. The Viceroy, the Duke of Aosta, thereafter lived at Addis Ababa, leaving a Governor at Asmara. The Italian administration was neither unenlightened nor inefficient. First class roads, railways and many public works were constructed, an Army of officials employed, a high standard of public services maintained, and large Eritrean Native Forces recruited. No expense was spared; and a huge annual deficit could not but result, paid by [illegible]



CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL, ASMARA

Since 1941 — April 1st saw the British entry into Asmara, April 14th into Massawa — the Territory has been garrisoned by forces of Occupation. Supported by these, the Civil Administration of the Territory is entrusted to a British Military Administration, under a Chief Administrator who governs it on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief.

B.M.A. (which changed its title from O.E.T.A. early in 1943) utilizes a great part of the Italian Administration, reduced in scale and closely controlled; such are the Departments of Public Health, Customs, Agriculture, and Public Works, in each of which a small number of British Officers of B.M.A. control and supervise the organisation in all essentials. On the other hand the Departments of Education, Telegraphs (knows as Eritrea Signals), Trade and Supplies, Labour, Civil Posts, Road Transport, and the Port of Massawa have been created anew, though in these also Italian and Eritrean staffs by far outnumber the few Englishmen.

The Eritrea Police — Eritreans under British Officers and Inspectors — are equally a new creation, though remnants of the two Italian Police forces have a place therein. Civil justice is Italian — administered, under Italian Law; but B.M.A. has created Native Courts in some areas, and the Mohammedan Courts run as bef[illegible] The Criminal Courts are partly Italian [illegible]

The property of absentee Italians is watched or administered by a Custodian of Enemy Property and his staff.

There are fully organised Municipalities in Asmara, Massawa, Keren and Adi Ugri, responsible for the town services. The country at large is divided for administration into six divisions (the former Italian Commissariati), each under a Senior Civil Affairs Officer, under whom in most but not all of the Districts (ex-Residenzi) is a Civil Affairs Officer; and at each Headquarters are found representatives of the Police, Public Health, and such other services as are operative there. Native councils have been set up in Asmara and Massawa, and meetings of Chiefs are held from time to time in each Division.

The Headquarters of the Administration is in Viale Crispi, Asmara. The offices of the various headquarter Departments are in various other buildings in the capital.

Health and Medicine

Except for perhaps excessive heat in the western low-country, an evil combination of heat and humidity in summer at Massawa and malaria in one or two localities, Eritrea is healthy and enjoyable all the year round. Epidemics are few and rare. There is little or no dust, and plenty of sunshine, while rain is limited and punctual to the season and almost to the hour.

Supervised and at some points reduced and modified, the Italian Medical Service holds the field. This includes big modern hospitals at Asmara and Massawa, smaller but well-equipped hospitals at half-a-dozen out-stations, and Native dispensaries all over the country. The Maternity Home in Asmara has already seen the arrival of a dozen British babies. First class Italian specialists in most branches of medicine and surgery are available, and there is a choice of excellent dentists, eye-specialists and gynaecologists.

On the whole then, medical services rank high, and include every facility and resource which the most exacting of European residents or visitors can require, while Eritrean needs are widely and sympathetically covered. The towns, if still imperfect in cleanliness, are at least cleaner than ever before in their history! — and compare well with anything in Africa.

Quarantine precautions are taken on normal lines and persons leaving the territory must be in possession of Yellow Fever Inoculation certificates at least ten days old. Inoculation for T.A.B. is usual. The mosquito of the Central Plateau is normally non-malarial, but since

FRUIT MARKET, ASMARA

Schools

Soon after the Occupation of Eritrea it became necessary to reorganise Italian education. There now exist 16 Italian elementary and four secondary schools, and three institutions for higher education with a total of 3,000 pupils with 150 teachers. In addition, four Pre-University courses have begun their second year with 120 students: thus not only is Italian education functioning normally in its previous branches, but in addition higher education has been expanded.

The Administration also created a system of Eritrean education; there are now thirty schools open, with an attendance of 3,000 scholars under 69 teachers. A girls' school exists in Asmara, and in other places girls attend with the boys. Technical education has been initiated with instruction in carpentry, weaving and metal work. Three of the schools offer boarding accommodation. Instruction is given either in Arabic or Tigrinya. Each native school has its School Committee of local Chiefs and notables, whilst the growing public interest is shown by considerable expenditure of local funds on the erection of schools.

Another creation of the Education Department has been the English Institute in Asmara. This

A small privately-run War Service School in Asmara deals with English and a few Allied children, in pleasant home-like circumstances. There are some 40 pupils.

Agriculture

Agriculture in Eritrea is conditioned by geology and climate. Most of the soil is made from the breaking down of the old igneous crystalline rock. The product is a light permeable soil, liable to erosion. Since there is little flat land in central Eritrea, the general aspect of the countryside here is of eroded hill slopes and fertile valley pockets. The wide western plains are undulating or flat.

The climate of Eritrea is influenced by monsoons, the proximity of the Red Sea and of the vast desert areas of Arabia on the east and the north-eastern Sudan to the north, the varying character of the country itself, and nearness to the Equator. Where no mitigating factors exist, extreme heat is encountered. The Red Sea makes the low country on its shores not only hot but exceedingly humid. As these coasts are left and the ascent to the mountains is undertaken, the temperature drops in the normal ratio of one degree F. for each 300 feet of climb. Thus Asmara plateau temperatures are usually about 25 degrees F. below those of Massawa or Assab.

The rainfall varies considerably between the neighbouring districts. In the Pendici Orientali, two climatic régimes (that of the Red Sea and that of the Ethiopian highlands) meet and overlap. With two rainy seasons a year this area has an average rainfall of 46 inches a year. The closest approach is in the near-by districts of Adi Ugri and

Ghinda, which average 31 inches; Asmara and Barentu have only 21 inches; Keren and Adi Caieh 18 inches and Agordat 16 inches. At Massawa, the annual precipitation is only 9 inches. Little cultivation is carried on by irrigation, because the rivers of Eritrea are seasonal torrents.

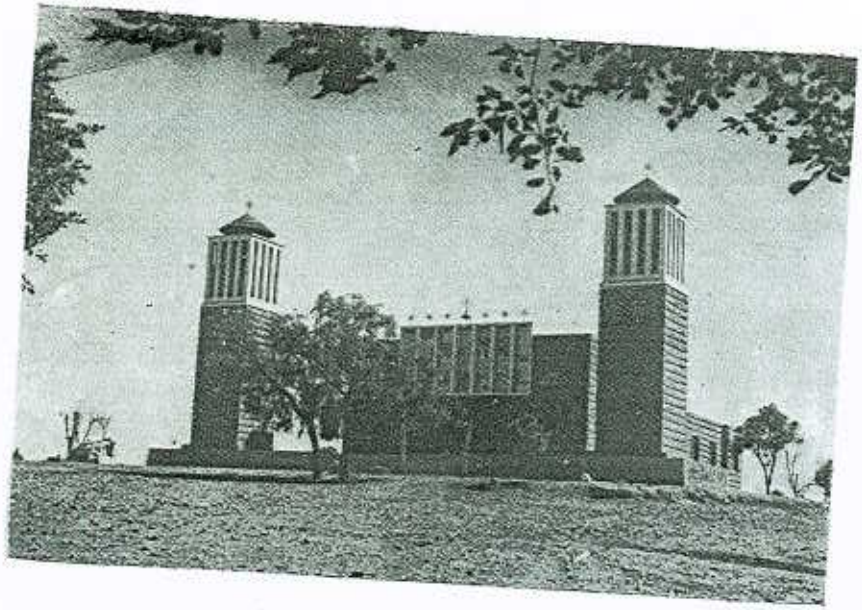
The general conditions preclude all possibility of Eritrea becoming more than self-sufficient in foodstuffs — if indeed it can achieve this: in the past it has never done so.

At no time had the Italian Administration paid much attention to agricultural development: indeed, their policy of importing many foodstuffs that Eritrea could have produced led rather to a local restriction of effort, both in quantity and variety. This remained unaffected by the Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935; but following the British Occupation of 1941, a different policy was pursued. The British authorities were faced by a world shipping shortage which made it imperative that nothing should be brought to Eritrea which could be produced in the country.

The immediate need of the Occupying troops was for fresh meat and fresh vegetables. The meat situation was favourable. In Eritrea and Ethiophia, most of which was simultaneously occupied, the normal cattle population exceeds the meat requirements of the inhabitants, who regard the possession of cattle as a mark of position and wealth. Thus there were large reserves of cattle available for slaughtering.

The vegetable situation was different. For the reasons already explained, vegetable cultivation in Eritrea was limited to minimum quantities of a few types. The Department of Agriculture in 1941 set about augmenting the supply of green foodstuffs. Seeds were imported and the Department took over 12 small farms, aggregating 130 acres, for seed propagation. Thanks to this enterprise, the country is now abundantly supplied with potatoes, beans, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, beetroot, fennel etc. This effort has contributed to the good health of the troops in Eritrea and led to a wider use of vegetables by the Italian population.

The main effort of Eritrean agriculture lies in the growing of cereals. Among these, barley and dhurra (sorghum) predominate, followed by taff (the characteristic Ethiopian grain) millet, wheat, maize, and dagusa (from which local beer is brewed.) Local supplies of these grains must almost always be augmented by import from the



COPTIC CATHEDRAL, ASMARA

Eritrea's wealth in cattle has been mentioned above. Sheep and goats are also extensively kept. In this field, Eritrea is more than self-sufficient though the nomadic habits of the tribesmen deprive the community of this advantage: the milk supply for the towns has proved particularly difficult, and even meat has never cheapened as much as might have been hoped. Pig breeding has made quick strides since 1942.

The fishing industry at Massawa has advanced little through lack of fishing craft and means of cold-storage transport. There is however, some hope of development, and experiments in extracting shark-oil, and making fish meal and fish flour, are in hand.

The Forests of the territory are considerable, though less that they were 50 years ago. Some 40 varieties of wood have greater or less importance. The best — but not the only — wooded areas are those of the Eastern Slopes, where much wood of considerable value exists, but in remote areas involving costly transport. Juniper, balanites and eucalyptus (an Italian importation) are among candidates for exploitation. The euphorbia (candelabra tree) is characteristic of many land-scapes as is the sycamore, beobab, the wild olive, many varieties of thorn, and the dum palm. The goat here, as everywhere, is the young trees' worst enemy. New plan

Industry

Nothing has been more remarkable in Eritrean history since British Occupation than the birth and growth of local Industries. Fascist attitude had been one of stern discouragement, since colo were intended to absorb the products of the homeland, and not th selves to manufacture.

B.M.A., however, confronted with War restrictions on imp and with considerable industrial possibilities in the form of worksh machines and European skilled labour, has pressed on with developn on many lines. The Asmara Industrial Exhibition of December 1 to January 1944 gave a remarkable and justly praised display achievement in this field. The pavilions or stalls of 400 exhibi covered 10,000 square metres of ground, and displayed the ingen and artistic sense of which both Italian and Eritrean communities capable. The Exhibition was an outstanding success, even though W preoccupations and transport difficulties may have prevented the hop for volume of foreign orders.

There is here no room to do more than mention some of the ma factured articles already in production. Among them are beer and (the famous Melotti) both of excellent quality and far exceeding lo needs. Two factories in the country produce buttons, finished and ha finished, from the ivory-hard dum-nut. The production of boots a shoes from local leather has made great strides, and there is now surplus for export. Ham, bacon and sausages are under developme and should, if buyers come forward, increase with the rapid increa of pig-breeding. Caustic soda is produced locally, and with its he good quality Eritrean soap is on the market. Some export of dried salted fish takes place. The glass factory is in full production a supplying adjacent territories as well as the local market.

Garments in fur and leather, and other finished leather good are of high quality. Vegetable oil is produced, but does not suffi for local needs. Fish oil may have an interesting future. Paint of fa quality is made, and alcohol in major quantities. All sorts of hand too are made, and export on an important scale has already begun. Man types of spare parts for motor transport can be produced, and there an oxygen factory. The quality of locally made pottery and crocker is fast improving, and export has well begun.

Taxis, although supervised and restricted, can serve all the needs of visitors. Those designed for town use are producer-gas driven, but petrol taxis can be hired for longer runs. All fares are controlled. Private cars can be hired from a number of private firms, arrangements being made either on a day, half-day, or kilometre basis.

All liquid fuel is rationed, private cars being entitled to amounts at the rate of 2½ litres per h.p. per month. In the case of visitors or for other special reasons additional coupons may be allowed, but visitors are encouraged to use public means of transport to the utmost.

For journeys off the beaten track mules can always be hired through the local Civil Affairs Officer.

There are excellent MAPS of the whole Territory starting with the original Italian 1/50,000 sheets made at the end of the last century, and ending with British maps on a scale of 1/500,000 made during the present war. The range includes a set of Italian 1/100,000 — of somewhat unequal accuracy in the different areas — and one of 1/250,000 printed on linen in the Sudan (and therefore doubly suitable to the tourist) and, finally, the Italian series of 1/400,000. None of these are on sale to the public, but an enterprising visitor may hope to obtain the loan of some or most of them without difficulty.

Places of Interest

Eritrea has relatively few archeological or historical sites. The site of ADULIS, just north of Zula, can be reached by road from Massawa (33 miles); it was founded by Egyptian seafarers, and later became a Greek port and colony. It is said to have been destroyed by an earthquake in the 7th century A.D., and in the middle ages a Coptic village was built on the site. The ruins are largely buried in sand dunes, but some of the foundations have been excavated.

Ancient coins, vessels and other relics found at Adulis can be seen in the Asmara Museum.

A more impressive ruin site is on the COHAITO plateau near Adi Caieh. It can be reached by a rough track branching off from the motor road from Adi Caieh to Senafè (near Km. 121), or on foot or mule direct from Adi Caieh. The ruins belong to the Axum period. In that period a trade route from Adulis to Axum crossed the Cohaito plateau, and the ruins are probably those of a large city which stood on that road. One can see the ruins of six temples or houses, with some of the columns still standing, and a large water-reservoir with

THE WATER FRONT, MASSAWA

blocks of stone. Some ten miles away is another, smaller, ruin site belonging to the same period, known as CARIBOSSO. An attractive feature of these sites is the magnificent scenery of the surrounding country.

A small Axumite temple, well preserved, can be seen from the main road south of Adi Caieh (at Km. 114), near the village of TOCONDA. Other sites of the Axum period are found in more inaccessible places — on the hills of Menah, east of Adi Caieh, and at Ham, a village to the west of the Senafè road close to the Ethiopian border.

A short distance from Senafè, on the road to Mezbah, stands a large obelisk, re-erected by the Italians on the original site. It bears an inscription in the most ancient Ethiopian script so far discovered and the sun and moon symbol of the ancient Sabaean (Southern Arabian) civilisation. The inscription has been only partly deciphered; it commemorates the completion of an irrigation dam.

Among the numerous Coptic churches and monasteries of Eritrea there are a number which repay a visit. Some of the most ancient are built on mountain-tops and ridges and can be reached only by experienced climbers; others are more easily accessible. Of these the most famous is the monastery of BIZEN (founded in the 14th century) situated on a steep mountain near Nefasit. The monastery of ENDA

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOMALI STUDIES

College of the Holy Cross
December 1, 2 and 3 December 1993

The 5th International Congress of Somali Studies will convene in the US in December 1993. We invite you to present a paper at the Congress which will consist of two parts. The first half will be held on the campus of the College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, Massachusetts); the second half will convene as part of the annual meeting of the African Studies Association at the Westin International Hotel (Boston, Massachusetts) from December 4th to the 7th.

The overall theme of the Congress is: ***The Somali Crisis: Relief, Reconciliation and Reconstruction.*** Papers and panels dealing with the theme will receive special attention. We welcome papers in various fields of knowledge and will group them into panels that focus on the following areas:

1) Policy issues and the current crisis: conflict resolution, reconciliation and development prospects;
2) Language, Psychology, Literature and the Arts;
3) Social Sciences (Economics, Politics, Sociology, Anthropology and Political Economy);
4) History, Philosophy and Historical Method.

Each presenter should prepare their papers in advance for circulation at the Congress. Revisions may be made afterwards, prior to publication. Following the Congress, the papers will be published in a volume or two volumes as the Proceedings of the 5th International Congress of Somali Studies.

Please address all correspondence regarding *panels and paper proposals* to Dr Lee Cassanelli, Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa 19104, (215) 898-8443; *Congress Coordinator*, Hussein Adam, Political Science Department, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass 01610-2395; (508) 793-3361; *Publicity Chair*, Department of History, California State University at Chico, Chico, CA 95929-0735, (916) 898-5366.

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Eritrea: A Country in Transition

Okbazghi Yohannes

This article raises questions about the future prospects for the economic and political transition in Eritrea today, for peace and cooperation in the Horn and for the 'nation-state' in Africa. It does this against the historical background of an illegally federated state and 30 years of armed struggle leading to an EPLF victory and the 1993 referendum.

The end of the war in Eritrea marks, not only the beginnings of restructuring the social organisation of Eritrean society, but also the structural transformation of the Horn as a whole. In this sense, the Eritrean struggle has played a pivotal role in providing a crucial external context for the realisation of the Ethiopian revolution. This strategic convergence of the Eritrean and Ethiopian revolutions will possibly serve as the catalyst for a regional transformation.

Nonetheless, the Eritrean military success poses two contradictory dilemmas which will have both immediate and long range consequences. The Eritrean victory represents, on the one hand, a further fragmentation of the international society in general and, on the other, of the state system in the third world in particular. This may have an enduring significance, especially if the Eritrean case is seen as precedent setting or as a premiere model for emulation by centrifugal forces elsewhere. Here, too, the Eritrean experience can readily lend credence to the coherence and legitimacy of the articulation and enforcement of the right to self-determination by military means.

These structural dilemmas pose many fundamental questions: what is the historic and regional significance of the Eritrean experience? how will Eritrea organise itself internally as it crosses the Rubicon of democracy? how will Eritrea define its external relations? will the Eritrean experience advance regional security and promote horizontal interpenetration within the Horn? what will be the structure and institutional character of this regional transformation?

Historical Background

If history is defined as tragedy, as often it is, there is no more tragic history than that of Eritrea. What makes the Eritrean case unique is that Eritrea is the only former colony that was denied the benefit of decolonisation owing to the power politics of the 1940s that pushed the UN to acquiesce in the allocation of Eritrea to Ethiopia.

The year 1941 was the turning point. The British 'liberated' Eritrea from the Italians and placed it under British military administration until its future could be determined at a peace conference after the war. Meanwhile, London reached the conclusion that it was in the British imperial interest to trade the territory to Ethiopia in exchange for the Ogaden, which was to be part of 'greater' Somalia under British control. Britain actively pursued this policy despite serious reservations expressed by some members of the foreign policy elite. Robert Howe, British minister to Ethiopia, for example, posed the fundamental issues in this way:

> *Could we, however, justify handing over Eritrea, which politically is a more advanced state than Ethiopia, to the emperor, when he is not yet able to administer his present dominions? If we can, should we not insist on the employment of foreign advisers in its administration? If we cannot, would a Sudan-Ethiopian condominium be feasible?*

Although they were able to obtain the acquiescence of the US in their policy, the British met with strong resistance from France and the USSR at a peace conference in 1945. Consequently, in 1948, the four powers transmitted the Eritrean case to the UN for resolution. In fact, the transmission of the case to the UN generated an air of confidence and optimism among Eritreans that the problem would now be solved on the basis of the UN charter. According to the instruments of the UN, there were two solutions for the Eritrean case: the first was that the UN would assist the Eritreans in the realisation of their independence; second, if the above condition was not realisable immediately due to the inadequate preparation of the territory, then the Eritreans would benefit from articles 73 and 76 of the UN Charter that would place them under UN trusteeship until such time that the Eritrean people were ready for independence or to make any other informed choice.

Nonetheless, the creeping of power politics into the UN deliberation process pre-empt the materialisation of either option. There were three factors that militated against the Eritrean case. First, the overriding policy consideration of Britain was to consolidate its imperial network in the area by promoting the allocation of Eritrea to Ethiopia. Second, in the context of the strategic location of Eritrea commanding the western shores of the Red Sea, the US, too, actively sought the allocation of Eritrea according to its military security interest as defined then. After all, the US army was already in possession of the communications networks in Eritrea built by the Italians. Third, Haile Selassie astutely cultivated and deepened a relationship with both Britain and the US with a view to obtaining their unconditional support for the absorption of Eritrea into Ethiopia. In fact, at the time when the Eritrean question was on the UN agenda, Ethiopia had completed its evolution into an unofficial protectorate of the US. Thus, from the perspective of the West, there was no better solution than strengthening their regional base in the Horn by annexing Eritrea to Ethiopia.

This plan to annex, however, met with fierce resistance from two directions. First, eight Eritrean nationalist parties and professional associations gathered under one umbrella, the Eritrean Independence Bloc, to collectively demand

the immediate independence of the colony. The Western powers soon discovered that the mass following of the Bloc was so strong that the UN could not ignore the question of Eritrean independence entirely. For example, in a confidential communication to the British Foreign Office (30 July 1949), Robert Mason, the political adviser to the military administration in Eritrea, confirmed that anywhere between 65% and 75% of the Eritreans were in favour of independence. Mason added that

> *the Independence group by any reckoning must be in the majority. There is another factor which is perhaps not fully appreciated; that the anti-Ethiopian feeling of opponents of union is far stronger than the pro-Ethiopian feeling of its supporters. On the whole, therefore, it is the view of most people here with long experience of the country that the idea of independence has aroused more enthusiasm than the idea of union did. I agree with this view.*

Such secret British documents reveal that the surging nationalism in Eritrea would prove to be insurmountable unless something was done to contain it. The problem was compounded by the fact that the pro-Ethiopian unionist party was plagued by defection and corruption and its political viability was in doubt. After all, the UN was preparing to send a commission of investigation to Eritrea to ascertain the wishes of the people there. In the context of these developments, both Britain and Ethiopia began an effort to reinvigorate the unionist party and to undermine the political base of the Independence Bloc. As part of the strategy, Britain sent Brigadier Stafford to coordinate the Anglo-Ethiopian offensive in Eritrea:

> *The important thing is that we have now substantially reduced the number of Christian non-unionists on the plateau. Following this, I have turned to the task of persuading Moslem leaders on the plateau, at least, to break away from the Independence Bloc. I hope within the next few days to be able to inform you of the formation of yet another political party favourable to our cause.*

Stafford added that his next task was to make sure that the coopted elements were 'primed in the right answers to give to the [UN] Commission when it gets to the job of ascertaining the wishes of the population. I have no reason to believe that my activities have attracted any particular attention' (FO 371/80984, 16 February 1950).

If Stafford's activities seemed to go unnoticed, it was because they were carried out from underground and with great skill. The Ethiopian interference was overtly blatant. In addition to pouring millions of dollars into Eritrea to finance the unionist party and to bribe the waverers, the emperor sent a contingent of Ethiopians led by five ministers to Eritrea. The presence of the Ethiopians in such a large number became a matter of embarrassment to the administration such that Brigadier Drew advised London to restrain Ethiopia from excessive intervention in Eritrean politics. As he wrote:

> *The continued intense and open intervention by the emissaries from Addis Ababa in the internal political field has now reached a stage for some considerable embarrassment to*

the administration . . . each [emissary] has been assigned a different political party to work upon. Their activities are carefully organized (FO 371/73846, 10 August 1949).

The British ambassador to Ethiopia, however, disagreed with Drew's conclusion. He argued that the movement toward Eritrean independence had reached such a dangerous point for Ethiopia that it had to use all means to thwart the eventuation of Eritrean independence. As he wrote:

it is quite natural that the Ethiopian government should make these special proselytizing efforts at a moment when, as we ourselves have not failed to point out to them, the local political situation is roughly evolving to their detriment. If they can by such efforts put a stop to the defection from the unionists to the independence camp, it will be politically well worth their while to do so (FO 371/73846, 26 August 1949).

In any case, in light of the tense political situation in Eritrea, Britain, the US and Ethiopia finally became convinced that complete absorption of Eritrea by Ethiopia was unattainable short of political havoc. Seeking the acquiescence of the UN in such a plan also appeared to be a risky undertaking. The dilemma was resolved when the US engineered a federation formula as a 'half loaf' approach to the problem. In full recognition of the political reality at the UN, Washington cleverly crafted the Federal Act in a way that conveyed the impression that Eritrea would enjoy the status of co-equality with the Ethiopian state. Consequently, the federal plan was adopted by the UN and Eritrea was transferred to Ethiopia.

Patterns of Strategic Convergence and National Divergence

Despite the illegality of the process by which Eritrea was linked to Ethiopia under the Federal Act of 1952, the outcome of the process offered a window of opportunity for both countries to develop mutually beneficial economic relations with an economic unit that was now larger than before. Possessing a strong industrial base and relatively well developed human resources, Eritrea had a lot to offer in terms of strengthening the nascent forces of capitalism in Ethiopia. Capitalising on the untapped market in Ethiopia, Eritrea, too, could expand its industrial and commercial operations in a way that could have a spread effect on the agriculturally poor regions of northern Ethiopia. This process of horizontal interpenetration could have organically linked Eritrea to northern Ethiopia.

By the same token, the above process could have been complimented by the transformation of the agriculturally rich regions of southern Ethiopia into agro-commercial centres supplying raw materials and foodstuffs to the northern regions and Eritrea; their prosperity could have been secured. Simply put, the potential for both the horizontal and vertical integration of the two economies was enormous.

In fact, it was precisely the potential of Eritrea for Ethiopia's modernisation

efforts that was frequently cited by US and British officials as an argument in favour of union. British Ambassador Dan Lacelles, for example, argued that the Ethiopian emperor was trying hard to modernise his country and that the addition of Eritrea to his empire would 'leaven the mass' and would put Ethiopia on the track of faster modernisation.

Ethiopia is admittedly a very backward and primitive country. The acquisition by her of the greater part of Eritrea will accelerate this process by leavening the mass. The need of the Ethiopian government for competently trained officials is acute. In these circumstances, can we be at all sure that it would be 'morally wrong and politically an error' to leaven the mass by giving this African territory (Eritrea) to another adjacent African state even if it does mean 'economic and social regression' for the territory in question? (FO 371/7344, 26 August 1949).

In retrospect, that assumption is in fundamental error for the simple reason that the two countries were at different stages of development which was the major source of tension and conflict. Eritrea had a viable pluralist political system and the new distributional coalitions were nurtured in competitive politics under British tutelage. In recognition of this reality, the Federal Act was explicit that Eritrea's political system and institutions would retain their separate identity and that their constitutional character would be safeguarded. A portion of the preamble to the Act, for example, states that the association of Eritrea to Ethiopia would

assure to the inhabitants of Eritrea the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, traditions, religions, and languages, as well as the widest possible measure of self-government (UN Resolution, 2 December 1950).

In addition to the basic incompatibility that existed between the two economies, the political system in Ethiopia was anachronistic to the one in Eritrea installed under international supervision. In the absence of radical defeudalisation of Ethiopia's agrarian structure and without providing a constitutional framework for democratising the country's institutions, the federal arrangement that was supposed to govern relations between the two countries was doomed from the start. The emperor could not be sure that Eritrean nationalism and trade unionism would be contained and diluted before they were emulated by the forces of modernisation in Ethiopia itself and viewed Eritrea's autonomous democracy and separate institutions with hostility.

The actions taken by the emperor between 1953 and 1956 reduced Eritrea to an Ethiopian province in all but name. A ban was imposed on all political parties except the unionist party, the syndicate of Free Workers of Eritrea, and the free press. The old hands of Eritrean nationalism were either thrown in jail or forced into exile. In 1956, Ethiopia committed one of its gravest errors by attacking the cultural institutions of Eritrea when it abolished Tigrinya and Arabic as the official languages of the territory and replaced them with Amharic. It was beyond the class limitations of the Ethiopian authorities to comprehend the fact that the contextualisation process set in motion by such actions was fuelling

Eritrean nationalism. Contrary to the emperor's expectations, the measure inspired even more intense loyalty for Eritrean nationalism. Even the original supporters of union with Ethiopia became disillusioned and joined the anti-Ethiopian agitation movement.

> *A state which does not recognize the cultural [institutions] of its people, which represses the use of their languages, is engaged in a process of cultural genocide (Tubianna, 1983).*

The trade union organisations, too, became an object of relentless Ethiopian assault. First, the organisational maturity of the syndicate of Free Workers of Eritrea and the lively trade union politics existing then were seen by the emperor as a dangerous model for emulation by the Ethiopian working class. In the emperor's calculations, learning from the Eritrean experience through contacts that might develop with their Eritrean counterparts, Ethiopian workers would, over time, demand the formation and legalisation of similar labour organisations, thereby challenging the basis and legitimacy of monarchical absolutism. Thus, as a measure of preemption, the emperor chose to promote obliteration of Eritrean trade unionism. Second, ever since its formation, the syndicate had become the strategic constituency of the Eritrean nationalist parties. The evolution of the relationship between Eritrean nationalism and trade unionism was so organically perfect that it was even obvious to the casual observer that the former could not be emasculated without killing the latter. In fact, when the activities of the nationalist parties were proscribed, it was the trade unions which carried on the banner of nationalism. In 1958, when Ethiopian authorities lowered the Eritrean flag and introduced Ethiopian laws into Eritrea, the Eritrean workers went on general strike, precipitating a showdown with the Ethiopian army in which over 80 Eritrean workers were killed and over 500 more were wounded.

As the working class in Eritrea persevered in its struggle, Ethiopia began to devitalise the Eritrean economy as a way of uprooting the basis of trade unionism altogether. Foreign investment was discouraged and many companies were forced into either shutting down their operations or relocating in Ethiopia. As Lefort (1981) observed,

> *in fact, annexation killed Eritrea's economic dynamism if only because of the pillage that took place. Wholesale factories were disassembled and reassembled in Shoa. The pillage was one of the motors of modernisation of the Ethiopian economy in the 1950s.*

More than anything else, the devitalisation of the economy hurt the Eritrean working class severely. Paradoxically, however, the ban imposed on the Eritrean trade unions ultimately benefited the Ethiopian working class. In light of the progressive destruction of the Eritrean economy, Eritrean workers flocked into Ethiopia following the relocated firms. In the process, they provided the much needed 'mass leaven' for the activation and mobilisation of the Ethiopian labour force. In fact, they played a pivotal role in the formation and evolutionary growth of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions

(CELU). In addition to reinforcing the numerical significance of the Ethiopian labour force, the Eritrean workers provided the needed experience and skills in trade union politics, agitation and organisation. One of the robust ironies was that the fortuitous connection forged between the two working classes was transformed into a historical necessity for a joint struggle against the repressive order, thus marking the beginning of the strategic convergence of interests.

With a flush of realism, the emperor realised that, in the context of the presence of Eritrean workers in Ethiopia in large numbers, the only way to contain labour demands was by permitting limited trade unionism under government control and in September 1962, legalised their formation; that this act preceded the abrogation of the federal arrangement in Eritrea by only two months was no coincidence. It was intended to mute opposition to the act of terminating the federal relationship by showing signs of democratisation but also by creating an Ethiopian context, the emperor hoped to diminish the separate identity of Eritrean workers and dilute Eritrean nationalism.

This act provided for the creation of the Labour Relations Board, a government agency in the Ministry of National Community Development and was authorised to grant unions the right to strike, but only 60 days after the Board had intervened to settle the dispute and failed to do so. The right was granted to a union, not to the collectivity of unions. Moreover, the Board had the authority to arbitrate and even to staff the administration of CELU (Hess, 1970). The effect of such regulative schemes was that no strikes were allowed and were artfully crafted to fragment the unions and to prevent them from forging collective solidarity.

Notwithstanding such constraints, the unions kept up their demands for improved working conditions, better wages and treatment. For example, the number of disputes between unions and employers jumped from 137 in 1963 to 776 in 1965. Additionally, the stubborn visibility of Eritrean workers continued to be a nuisance to the Ethiopian government. In the early seventies, as the maturity and confidence of the unions grew, the government once again resorted to a divide and conquer strategy by requiring CELU to subdivide itself into three zones which was intended to promote effective government control of unions especially those in Eritrea which constituted one zone. Consequently relations between the zones proved to be fractious as they began to nibble away at the solidarity they worked hard over the years to build.

In 1973, after valid elections were held in Asmara, CELU declared the results null and void and single-handedly appointed union officers to run the unions in Asmara without elections or consultations. There was even a plan to dissolve the 25 recalcitrant unions in Asmara. The unions in Eritrea accused CELU of an ethnically motivated anti-Eritrean posture and of being used by the government. In fact, the division between Eritrean and Ethiopian workers became so acute that over 40 trade union organisations in Eritrea stopped paying their dues, accompanied by a threat to form their own labour confederation. The

division remained serious until it was overtaken by the events of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

This unfortunate division, initiated and orchestrated by the government, obscured the strategic relationship that evolved between the two labour forces. The presence of Eritrean workers in Ethiopia and their contribution to the formation and growth of CELU were of particular strategic importance from the Eritrean perspective. The agitation, mobilisation and organisation of Ethiopian workers with the participation and solidarity of Eritreans created conditions inside Ethiopia contributing to the awakening and radicalisation of other classes, especially the students.

Another element which received little or no analytical attention were the educated elements of the Eritrean petty bourgeoisie were so severely affected by the devitalisation of the Eritrean economy that they migrated to Ethiopia in large numbers in search of jobs. Lacking a pool of developed human resources, the emperor made effective use of them to staff lower and middle level bureaucracies, technical institutions and the like. All in all, on the eve of the Ethiopian revolution, there were close to 600,000 Eritreans working and living in Ethiopia. Their political presence was more important than their numerical significance in the sense that almost all of them were products of modern capitalism, committed to a democratic bourgeois order. To be sure, the Eritreans living inside Ethiopia became the bridge between the Eritrean struggle and progressive Ethiopians creating a crucial external context for the struggle in Eritrea as much as providing an equally critical context for the Ethiopian revolution.

Meanwhile, in 1960, realising the inevitable doom of the federal arrangement, Eritrean exiles in Cairo created the ELF with a mandate to initiate an armed struggle. During its initial years, the armed struggle had certainly experienced a number of setbacks, one of which was the bloody internal division that resulted in the creation of the EPLF in 1970. Notwithstanding such an unfortunate division, however, the armed struggle bounced back better organised and more resolved. One of the consequences of the armed struggle was that the war exhausted Ethiopia economically so that the structural contradictions began to ferment in the mid-1970s, deepening and widening the scope of the struggle. Unfortunately, Mengistu's military coup aborted all possibilities of resolving the Eritrean question by peaceful means. The problem was compounded when the Soviet Union switched sides and offered its services to the regime as an international patron, replacing the United States. Obviously, there were divergent views on the motives of Soviet intervention, but their underlying motivation was no different from that of the United States.

First, the Soviets, like the Americans, believed that control of Ethiopia was crucial to controlling and dominating the region. The size of Ethiopia in population and geography as well as its economic potential made it appear more important than its neighbours. Second, the Horn of Africa was too important to be

left under Western control and the fact that it controls the western shore of the Red Sea, the northwestern quadrant of the Indian Ocean and the oil routes from the Persian Gulf to Europe and America. The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed this conclusion in 1978:

> *The Horn of Africa is primarily of military, political and economic importance. The importance of the region is mainly because of its situation where the two continents of Africa and Asia meet. There are many good harbours in the Persian Gulf and in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, there are maritime routes which link the oil producing countries with America and Europe (Bondestam, 1980).*

Analysis of Soviet regional priorities and options in the Horn suggests a striking symmetry in the fundamental assumptions, motives and objectives of the two superpowers. In addition to viewing the Horn as a crucial geostrategic asset for the exercise of control of the Red Sea basin, both superpowers sought to anchor their respective regional policies on Ethiopia, not only because of Ethiopia's relative importance, but also because they wanted to maintain the non-Arab identity of the region. Consequently, the objectives and aspirations of the indigenous forces were viewed as antagonistic by the two external powers to their stated goals and interests. The alleged pro-Arab orientations of the Somalis and Eritreans, for example, were viewed in this light and had, therefore, to be contained or subordinated to the imperative of the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. The trading of Somalia for Ethiopia by the Russians and the initiation and implementation of a series of military encirclements and suppressions of the Eritrean forces were not accidental, but rather reflections of rational decisions and a well thought out strategy in keeping with Soviet motives and interests.

To be sure, the Soviet involvement evolved out of its desire to replace the United States as the dominant regional actor. Its move was a function of the geopolitical importance of the region as well as of its perception about its ability to impose its will on the indigenous forces by using its military capability. By irony of history, however, even though the relationship between the recurrent pattern of Soviet behaviour elsewhere such as in eastern Europe or Afghanistan and its involvement in the Horn was obvious, both the Eritrean nationalists and the Ethiopian revolutionaries failed to see the crucial distinction between Soviet geopolitical ambitions and its rationalising ideology. Rather than objectively analysing the shifts that were taking place in the relationships of regional and external forces, they interpreted the Soviet involvement as misunderstanding of the issues in the region as well as its ideological confusion about the nature of Mengistu's regime. The net result of their relative political impotence in this respect was that they failed to exploit the international contradiction between the Russians and Americans in such a manner as to mobilise Western public opinion and possibly resources in their favour. They were to accept Western mediation and assistance ten years later, anyway.

Fortunately for the Eritreans and the Ethiopian revolutionaries, and contrary to popular anticipation, the new Ethio-Soviet partnership strengthened the strate-

gic alliance between them as they, of necessity, entered into a collaborative military relationship. From the military point of view, there were three events that produced the crucial turning points in the armed conflict. First, in February 1988, the EPLF scored a decisive victory against a 19,000 strong Ethiopian army at the battle of Afabet in northern Eritrea. The entire army was routed and three high ranking Soviet advisers were captured, marking the elevation of the armed struggle from one of defence to a counter-offensive one. Second, almost a year later, the EPLF and the TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front) joined forces against a military stronghold of the Ethiopian regime in northern Tigray, scoring yet another joint victory which led to the liberation of the province of Tigray, placing it under effective TPLF control. In the light of these two military setbacks, the moral basis and fighting capacity of the Ethiopian army began to erode, producing an internal military crisis and a political paralysis. A clear indicator was the May 1989 aborted coup against Mengistu in which over 200 high ranking military officers were arrested and many of them were hanged. Third, in early 1990, the EPLF overran the port of Massawa and achieved a quick victory. In retrospect, the battle of Massawa proved to be the mother of all battles, symbolising both the obstinate determination of the Eritreans and the barbarity of the war as Ethiopia demolished the city from the air using demolition, cluster and napalm bombs supplied by Israel. The battle heralded the inevitability of a total military victory. The victory was complimented by an agreement by several anti-regime Ethiopian movements to gather themselves under the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) and fight for a multinational democracy in Ethiopia.

In this context, the Ethiopian regime made a last ditch effort to salvage the empire from utter collapse. As the Soviets retreated owing to the Ethiopia's inability to pay for arms, Mengistu reactivated his surreptitious connection with Israel, trading arms for Ethiopian Jews. Moreover, as a precondition to Western intervention, Mengistu publicly announced his deathbed conversion to capitalism and subsequently pleaded with the United States to intercede. As Undersecretary of State for Africa, Herman Cohen, told a Congressional committee:

> *Government officials urged the United States to help facilitate a peaceful transition. They affirmed a keen desire to include rebel groups and others in a restructured regime. The United States agreed with this goal and, after meeting with the EPLF and EPRDF rebel groups in Khartoum, invited the government and the groups to a meeting in London to help bring about the peaceful transition that all sides claimed to want (US Congress, 1992).*

The US expressed a willingness to help, but only on condition that Mengistu be removed from power and that a transitional government set up. As the combined EPLF and EPRDF forces closed in on the Eritrean and Ethiopian capitals on 21 May 1991, Mengistu fled the country for Zimbabwe, just one week before the London peace conference. The EPLF and the EPRDF, however, treated Mengistu's replacement by General Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan with incredulity arguing that his elevation to the apex of power represented more a simulation in

style than a change in substance. After all, as commander of the Ethiopian army in Eritrea, Tesfaye had earned the dubious distinction of being the most ruthless campaigner against the Eritreans, and was the key instrument in foiling the May 1989 coup against Mengistu by betraying his co-conspirators and the conspiracy he helped to hatch. Thus, rather than placating the anti-regime forces as the US had hoped, his elevation to power made them even more determined to tighten their grips on the major cities.

Meanwhile, both the EPLF and the EPRDF agreed to participate in the US-brokered peace talks in London scheduled for 28 May. For the first time since the initiation of the armed struggle, the anti-regime forces began to negotiate from a position of distinct strength which was not necessarily amenable to US long term objectives. From the outset US objectives were clear. Washington saw its mediation role between the combatants as an opportune initiative for creating a condition of stalemate so that it could coerce both the EPLF and the EPRDF into accepting US prescriptions for settling the political questions in the area. Long standing US policy in the area has been one of being antithetical to any territorial redistribution of power in the region. In effect, this nullified Eritrea's natural drive for independence. Various public pronouncements made prior to the London conference support this analysis.

For example, on 22 May, just a day after Mengistu fled the country for Zimbabwe, a State Department spokesperson blamed the disruption of famine food distribution in Eritrea and Ethiopia on the 'insurgents' and intimated that henceforth they would be held responsible for the plight of famine victims in the area. This was part of a well orchestrated strategy to improve the international marketability of the so-called 'restructured' transitional regime, and to diminish the international visibility and military prowess of the EPLF and the EPRDF. Echoing this general theme, on 24 May, just three days before the London peace conference, Undersecretary Cohen himself declared that it was still the US position to help Ethiopia maintain its 'colonially inherited boundaries', implying that the Eritrean question would be resolved within the framework of Ethiopian unity (MacNeil-Leherer, 1991). The US position was essentially compatible with the goal the Ethiopian regime was seeking. The regime viewed the US mediation as prerequisite condition for Western intervention in the area in order to preempt a unilateral declaration of Eritrean independence and a seizure of power by the EPRDF in Addis Ababa. At any rate, events on the battleground began to unravel rendering the London peace conference inconsequential. 'At that point, the Addis regime effectively ceased to exist and the delegation in London dropped out of the talks' (US Congress, 1991).

In the context of these developments, the US cautiously retreated from its pro-status position and made a judicious policy adjustment. As Herman Cohen told the Congressional committee, the US abandoned its mediation role and began to play 'a *de facto* advisory role' to the Eritrean nationalists and the anti-regime Ethiopians. The London conference ended with the agreement that the EPRDF would organise a national conference no later than 1 July 1991 to define the

nature and composition of a transitional government. The London meeting also endorsed the formation of the Provisional Government of Eritrea and implicitly recognised the *de facto* independence of the territory.

For the first time the US grudgingly acknowledged that the Eritrean people were never given the chance to express their wishes on matters affecting their destiny. Undersecretary Cohen rushed to claim that the role the US played in the Ethiopian conflict represented the 'conscience' of the international community. But this claim should be treated with incredulity. For those fully conversant with the history of the area, the US was as much a part of the original problem as it was a supporter of the ancien regime by providing huge supplies of arms that were used against Eritrea with full US knowledge and complicity. Even as recently as January 1991, the US tried to use food aid as a political weapon against Eritrea. It ordered the cross-border operations of humanitarian food delivery from the Sudan destined for famine victims in Eritrea to be temporarily halted in an effort to force the EPLF into softening its position on the question of independence and accepting the US plan of territorial devolution of power within the framework of Ethiopian unity.

There were indications that seemed to suggest that the US was wavering on the question of Eritrean independence. For example, immediately after the London conference, Herman Cohen dissociated himself from ever using the term 'referendum' after he was confronted with the question of whether the US endorsement of a referendum for Eritrea at the conference represented a shift in US position. As he stated:

> *I have not mentioned the term referendum. If you listened to my press conference on Monday, I did not use that term. I said that we endorse the concept of self-determination for the people of Eritrea. The question of referendum and how they will exercise their right of self- determination, I think, will depend on discussions between the EPLF and the government that comes out of the conference that will be held in Ethiopia (Cohen, 1991).*

US traditional policy has hardly been pristine when it comes to the respect and implementation of self-determination, anyway. Its Janus-like position on the question of referendum masquerades the fact that it wanted to use the plan as a cooling off period during which conditions conducive for policy reversals by any parties including the US might emerge. In fact, this is exactly what Undersecretary Cohen communicated abroad:

> *We hope that in the two years between now and the referendum there will be a degree of democracy and regional autonomy granted to all parts of Ethiopia to make them see the advantage of remaining associated with Ethiopia and will vote accordingly in their referendum (Cohen, 1991).*

Cohen had been consistent all along on this matter, On 18 June 1991, before a Congressional hearing, he admonished:

> *I would say that the less said about the Eritrean question, the better and that a Congressional statement at this time would probably not be helpful.*

This raised the fundamental question of why the Eritreans accepted a referendum, a condition of stalemate, in the hours of their stunning victory. There are two plausible explanations. First, most probably they accepted the plan in deference to the unipolar status of the United States. From the Eritrean perspective, coming to terms with this reality would enable them to receive substantial aid for economic reconstruction of the country. The corollary is that it would facilitate a *de jure* recognition of Eritrean independence.

Second, the EPRDF had been perceived as a Tigrayan front with close ties to the EPLF, a perception that seemed to be undermining its national legitimacy, making its task of restoring law and order extremely difficult. Thus the rationale had been that immediate Eritrean independence would only aggravate the situation and that the EPLF agreed to a postponement of a unilateral declaration of independence. Undersecretary Cohen's 1991 statement to Congress reflects this rationale:

But there is general if tacit agreement that the long sought referendum and the final determination of Eritrea's status can await a more stable situation emerging in Addis Ababa. We welcome this disposition of the key parties toward realism. We have long believed that the issue of Eritrea's judicial status needs both time and an atmosphere of peace before it is approached. Forcing an early resolution of this matter is a recipe for disarray and discord.

In any case, Eritrea and Ethiopia formally agreed that the referendum would be held no later than April 1993. On the whole, the transitional government in Ethiopia remained firm on its revolutionary commitment to the Eritrean case.

Mapping The Future

Historical reflection has clearly established that the Eritrean situation is not a prima facie case for the trend toward structural fragmentation of the international society. The Eritrean experience is a classic example of an anticolonial drive for independence that was thwarted by higher considerations of international politics. But when it comes to predicting the future of independent Eritrea, one faces an uncharted territory. The Horn of Africa as a whole is a region that is as much politically recalcitrant as it is analytically unpredictable. Hence, presenting a useful road map about the future of Eritrea is not an easy task. Any pedagogical presentation of the case risks moral judgmentalism and analytical subjectivism.

The difficulty of the analytical endeavour is compounded by the state of confusion that currently exists in the world system. In the past we could, at least, point to two opposite directions which any emergent state or government might take: right wing authoritarianism sustained by the West or left wing authoritarianism supported by the Soviet bloc. But today those possibilities are nullified by the withering away of Soviet communism and the resurgent dominance of capitalism. The crisp comment that during the funeral of communism,

everyone jumps out of the coffin to join the procession summarises it all. It is fashionable to reject any ideological proposition that offers itself as an alternative to capitalism. The West is playing the vanguard role in manufacturing the marketing gimmicks for the new world order by packaging them in terms of unfettered capitalism, 'democracy' and 'human rights' as coterminous categories.

Given this objective reality, one can say with a sufficient degree of certainty that Eritrea will take the capitalist road, exuberantly embracing this trend. But whether Eritrea develops a democratic capitalism or any convoluted version of it remains to be seen.

Economic Rehabilitation

The economic destruction wrought by the 30 years of war in Eritrea are of startling proportions. Every bridge was blown up, every road torn up, every factory demolished and every city in the country faces decay. The Eritrean government thus faces the monumental task of rebuilding the economy and the country. The problem of rebuilding the country was compounded by land mines strewn throughout Eritrea by the Ethiopian army; the Eritrean anti-mine squad has successfully removed or detonated over 350,000 land mines and in the process over 30 fighters, 240 civilians, mostly children, were dismembered or killed (Parmelee, 1991). Drought has also been a component of the war; half of Eritrea's livestock died in 1991 and, as a consequence, two million Eritreans were on the verge of starvation. The present situation grimly contrasts to the 1950s when Eritrea was a country of vigorous economic prosperity and productivity and a net food exporter.

The daunting problem facing the Eritrean government today is its rehabilitation efforts. Without a massive infusion of capital it will be exceedingly difficult to initiate this process. It was perhaps the recognition of this reality that prompted the EPLF leadership to delay the declaration of independence immediately after the war in anticipation that such a political concession would make things amenable to US economic intervention in Eritrea in the form of providing generous largesse. If this consideration heavily weighed in the minds of the EPLF leadership, the corollary that the EPLF abandoned its long held tradition of socialist self-reliance in order to allay Western concerns might shed light on why Eritrea would take the capitalist road of development.

There are fundamental question about Eritrea's ability to reconstruct itself economically. However, there is a vibrant sense of optimism in the country that the economic hardships would be overcome quickly. After the war, the entire fighting force of the EPLF was transformed into an economic task force charged with rebuilding the economy without pay for at least two years. In order to encourage inflows of capital and private investment, the government has pledged that Eritrea will nurture capitalism as the 'only road to effective reconstruction'.

Consistent with this economic orientation, the Eritrean government has already begun selling state-owned small and medium firms to private entrepreneurs. But this emphasis on unfettered capitalism is not necessarily the answer to the exigencies of economic reconstruction. In the first place, the country is bankrupt and private capital is virtually nonexistent. In the absence of any degree of capital accumulation, there is little prospect of nurturing home-grown capitalism. Also, the general crisis of capitalism itself is currently not conducive to the inflows of foreign capital into Eritrea. One must not forget that the psychology of private investment is a crucial component here. The transitional character of Eritrean politics, the prospect of long-term stability, the level of skilled labour and the future orientation of the government toward the labour/management relationship are important considerations that will influence any investment package. There is also a large number of countries world-wide competing for the same international capital and most of them have long established credentials as generous hosts so as to receive investment priority.

Under these circumstances, the economic road Eritrea takes requires clear rethinking with primary emphasis placed on the agricultural sector. Even though the coastal regions of Eritrea are arid where vegetation is virtually nonexistent, western Eritrea (where Italian plantation owners prospered during colonial times) can be transformed into a region of large scale agro-commercial plantations. Using agro-technology and state guidance, the region can provide the basis for primitive accumulation. The region produced vegetables, fruits and oil seeds for both local and external markets until the war disrupted production and commercial activities in the 1960s. Eritrea can establish in a relatively short time a comparative advantage in this sector as its immediate neighbours on the other side of the Red Sea can provide a large potential market. Its proximity to the Arabian peninsula allowing for lower transportation costs will give Eritrea a relative advantage over long distance competitors.

Another region which mandates immediate attention is the plateau region. Constituting only 20% of the country's land mass, it houses over 50% of the country's total population. Traditionally, the bread basket of the country, but over the decades, a combination of war requirements and deforestation has diminished the agricultural potential of the region. The mode of land ownership was another contributory factor. Traditionally, kinship-based and communal ownerships were two distinct forms of land holding in the area until they were tampered with by the Ethiopian regime's agrarian policy. In the areas where the kinship-based mode of ownership was prevalent, the principle of primogeniture was absent and selling land was a cultural taboo that would invite a certain social ostracism. Under these conditions, the land had to be distributed among a number of inheritors. With the communal mode of ownership, land was collectively owned by the villagers and distributed every seven years to accommodate new grown-ups. Every land redistribution necessarily entailed a change in the size and location of plots. In either case, the result was rapid fragmentation of the land, making the inhabitants of the plateau region underemployed, not to mention the deleterious cycle of undernourishment

and malnutrition. The trend in the region since liberation is toward restoring the traditional modes of land holding.

There are two ways out of this deleterious cycle. The first is to abolish both kinship and communal ownerships and promote privatisation of land, reversing the process of continual fragmentation and leading to the reaggregation of the small plots into large-scale units until they become agro-commercially viable. The downside of such a policy is that the process will produce a massive displacement of peasants who will then have to drift into the cities in search of a livelihood. Hence the policy mandates the concurrent initiation of a state-guided industrialisation drive in order to accommodate new arrivals. In the absence of international capital, the simultaneous execution of such a bifurcated economic policy is unlikely to produce palpable results. Moreover, privatisation of the agrarian sector in a capitalist fashion does not necessarily promote a harmonious relationship between nature and society in the countryside. Private capitalism by definition is driven by the urge for profit and demands that more and more land be reclaimed for production purposes. This will grossly undercut the urgent need to promote afforestation programmes in order to reverse the partial desertification of the country before it becomes completely uninhabitable. Without the reconquest of society by nature and without vigorous afforestation programmes, the agrarian rehabilitation of the plateau region will be virtually impossible.

An alternative approach would be to strengthen the communal mode of ownership. Each village would be economically autonomous, but would plough the land collectively and share the produce according to the principles of collective agrarian capitalism. The villagers' relationship with the rest of the economy will be governed by market rules. This method would promote quick reaggregation of the land into agriculturally viable units without having to dislocate any peasants. There is another advantage to it; the farmers would not be culturally alienated and thus willing to set aside portions of their land for reforestation. Given proper education and effective communication, they would begin to immediately appreciate that their future prosperity and indeed their survival are organically linked to reestablishing their connection with nature. The state can be helpful in this regard by providing extension services, education on seed improvements and use of fertilisers, afforestation programmes and similar support services.

Over time, each village will evolve into an agro-commercial unit, integrated into the whole economy in a capitalist fashion. Collectively the farm units will become self-sufficient in food production and will be able to supply the cities with foodstuffs. Moreover, they can supplement and compliment the agro-commercial plantations in western Eritrea and together can serve the engine of primitive capital accumulation. To be sure, the country could be well on its way to its long-term economic reconstruction.

Political Structuring

In the political field one faces uncharted territory when it comes to offering a useful political road map. The referendum was simply a formality intended to smooth over the political divorce between Eritrea and Ethiopia and to give it a democratic character. Many Eritrean's would regard anything less than independence as a moral equivalent of unconditional surrender since one million Eritreans were either killed or injured as a result of the war.

In anticipation of inevitable independence, the EPLF began structuring a political framework for the country. The initial task was to emancipate the entire bureaucracy from elements of the Ethiopian regime and to dampen its regulations and institutional bottlenecks. When the EPLF marched into Asmara, there were around 93,000 Ethiopian soldiers and about 52,000 civilians — all connected with the military structure. The initial task was repatriatration and to ease the food supply. In the first two months after liberation and with the limited resources, the Provisional Government of Eritrea repatriated 126,000 Ethiopians.

Currently, the Eritrean government is engaged in refining the ideological basis of its raison d'etre and all indications are that Eritrea will pursue a political system consistent with commitment to the capitalist road. As early as August in 1991, Isaias Aferworki officially declared that Eritrea would nurture a multiparty democracy, an independent judiciary and a government kept in line by checks and balances. As he noted:

> *The EPLF is a nationalist front embracing all sectors of society and many currents of thought. It will be a mistake to turn this broad front into a political grouping which will inevitably mean a one-party state in Eritrea. Who will compete against us? We are simply serving as caretakers during the transition (Afeworki, 1991).*

The commitment seems to be reassuring, but its implementation remains to be seen and raises fundamental questions: how is the EPLF going to break up into competing groups or parties? what will be the nature of political discourse during the break up of the EPLF? what role will religion and ethnicity play in the process? will elements of the ELF be allowed to reorganise themselves and function as parties without any degree of political molestation? Such questions will have to be carefully studied and a constitutional framework must be devised to contain defiant political behaviour that might ruin the political process.

The last question in particular mandates the search for scrupulous political innovation. The ELF was ejected from Eritrea in the early 1980s as a result of the bloody civil war between the two Fronts. Since then some ELF members have regrouped themselves into several factions and have sought refuge in some Middle Eastern countries. The Saudis in particular are providing both sanctuary and finance to some groups and are encouraging them to promote destabilisation inside Eritrea. Their ultimate goal is to introduce Islamic funda-

mentalism into Eritrean politics with a view to thwarting the emergence of a progressively secular state on the other side of the Red Sea. Recent anti-Eritrean orchestrations in various Saudi newspapers reflect the Saudi motivation. Furthermore, the Saudis have been trying to link religion and ethnicity in a way that would promote destabilisation and consequently frustrate the referendum in Eritrea. They have found this weapon in Sultan Ali Mirah, the traditional chief of the Afars, who returned to Ethiopia after 17 years of exile in Saudi Arabia. Upon his return, the Sultan publicly demanded that the Eritrean Afars be united with their Ethiopian brethren and at the same time pledged that he would reimpose the Sharia law upon his unified subjects.

It is worth noting that religion and ethnicity by themselves are not necessarily the cause of political conflicts. When they occur, they are rather the external manifestation of the incompleteness of capital accumulation. Colonial capitalism has brought the various segments of the Eritrean society together, but has not completely supplanted the traditional mode of production and existence. Simply, human relationships in Eritrea are not yet entirely transformed into property relations. Emotive factors such as blood, kinship and religious relationships still matter. If the Eritrean elite develops an instrumental view of the state as a means of wealth-creation and accumulation or if the state is perceived as such by the social and ethnic distributional coalitions, then those who feel economically excluded and politically disenfranchised will begin to invoke symbols to supplement whatever weapons they have against those who wield state power. Under these conditions, religion and ethnicity become an integral part of the agitation and struggle against what is perceived as an unjust political order. When reinforced by external agitation, these conditions can pose a very serious challenge to the fragile Eritrean political order. Therefore, the kind of political relations Eritrea maintains with its neighbours will be as crucial during its transition as its internal policies toward egalitarian democracy, political dialogue and reconciliation.

Regional Cooperation

How Eritrea defines and evolves its external relations will be one of the elements that merit close watching. The steps taken so far toward regional orientation by the leadership are refreshing with a clear understanding, both conceptually and politically, the strategic importance of putting a premium on a regional security framework. The hardly publicised diplomatic initiative undertaken by Eritrea to bring to an end the bloody carnage in Somalia, which claimed over 30,000 casualties, is a promising harbinger of Eritrea's long-term regional orientation. Repeated official pronouncements substantiate this tendency. In a conference of businessmen and intellectuals, Isaias Afeworki reiterated that Eritrea would make the promotion of cordial relations with its neighbours a policy priority:

> *Ethiopia is the first on our list, whether politicians here like it or not, because of geographical and cultural ties, mutual security and economic interests (Parmelee, 1991).*

With its vast natural resources, population size, international attractiveness and market potential, Ethiopia has all the makings to serve as the epicentre for regional transformation and Eritrea can serve only as a catalyst in this process. Recognising this reality, even the managers of the world capitalist system have continued to make Ethiopia the focus of their attention. A glaring indicator is that the transitional regime of Ethiopia after being in power for only eight months, successfully negotiated an aid package of $672 million with the World Bank, repayable over 40 years with a ten year grace period.

The Eritrean government has already begun translating its rhetorical pledges into reality. In January 1992, Eritrea and Ethiopia formally signed an agreement providing Ethiopia unhampered access to the sea through the Eritrean port of Assab, negating the argument that Ethiopia will be landlocked when Eritrea becomes independent: goods entering or leaving Ethiopia will move freely without the imposition of duties by the Eritrean government and Ethiopia will have a customs office at the port to regulate the nature and flow of its commercial transactions with the outside world. Ethiopia also has free access to Djibouti and can still augment its external connections by obtaining similar facilities at Bervera in Somalia and at Mombasa in Kenya, an idea in which all three countries had discussed in the past. From a regional perspective, connecting Ethiopia to as many states as possible in the area can promote long-term regional interdependence in ways that enhance their economic significance both within and beyond the region.

To be sure, the process initiated by the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments ought to be deepened and expanded to other spheres of economic cooperation, setting in motion a process toward regional integration, with various parts specialising in different production activities. The Eritrean and Somali coastal regions, for example, can specialise in manufacturing and energy related economic activities. On the other hand, the agriculturally rich regions of Ethiopia can concentrate on building modern agro-commercial production apparatuses. In this way, the states can avoid unnecessary duplication of production and competition for the same markets by providing homogeneous products and services.

But, as they say, economic questions are ultimately questions of politics. Theorising on regional stability, Ernest Haas had long proposed that economic integration was a function of the political will emanating from the elite. The European experience seems to validate his fundamental assumptions. The useful extrapolation one can make here is that the political elite in the Horn must have a thorough understanding of the ethnopolitical and economic dynamics of the region as well as the political will to undertake proactive measures toward promoting and nurturing internal democracy and external relations as the basis for future integration. Additionally, they must understand that substantial reduction and gradual elimination of all trade barriers, harmonisation of economic policies and deregulation of capital and labour movements are in the best interest of the countries concerned.

The political benefits that derive from the process toward economic integration are numerous, nullifying the tendency toward ethnic fragmentation in the region, especially in Ethiopia, by providing a wider scope of commercial intercourse for the various peoples in the Horn. As capital accumulation spreads and deepens throughout the region, one of the immediate consequences will be the emergence of a complex web of social interdependence that can render the vestigial thoughts associated with ethnonationalism obsolete. If the tendency toward ethnonationalism is contained and political stability achieved, the Horn can also be insulated against the recurrent pattern of external involvement in its affairs.

The Horn is known for its political recalcitrance and analytical unpredictability. At present, there are many forces that can undermine and even derail the cosy relationship that is evolving between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Elements of the old order supported by a galaxy of Amhara intellectuals gathered forces to thwart the implementation of the referendum in Eritrea. They also put pressure on the US and the transitional regime in Ethiopia to reverse their positions on the Eritrean issue and are indeed engaged in the construction of subterfuges to discredit the internal legitimacy of the regime by projecting it as a Tigrayan regime and as a proxy of the Eritrean government. The overarching purpose of such misrepresentations is to create a contradiction between the Oromo and the Tigrayans on one side and the Amhara masses and the Tigrayans on the other.

Such political orchestrations are having some effects on Ethiopia as the regime is facing substantial resistance from some segments of both the Amhara and Oromo population. In fact, the regime has been engaged in some military skirmishes with Moslem elements of the Oromo in the eastern region of the country since November 1991. If escalated, this problem can take on a dangerous socio-religious coloration. At the time of this writing (1991), eastern Ethiopia has remained tense owing to the combined insurgency of the Somalis and the Oromo. Whether this situation will subside or escalate remains to be seen. But it is important to note here that, constituting about 50% of the total Ethiopian population, the Oromos could well prove to be the most serious obstacle to the fragile multinational democracy in the country.

The Amhara opposition, too, has an organisational framework as the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which emerged in 1975 as a multinational marxist front, but has degenerated into an ethnically Amharan and politically right-wing organisation. It has adopted an overt anti-Eritrean posture and vehemently opposed implementation of the referendum. If the EPRP succeeds in mobilising sufficient forces among the Amhara population, then the country could well be on its way to a bloody civil war similar to the current situation in Somalia. Another factor of Amhara opposition comes from within the bureaucracy of the regime. When the EPRDF seized power, it retained the bureaucracy, rather than abolishing it, because it does not have trained personnel to staff it. The result is that the bureaucracy has stalled as the Amhara technocrats engage

in slow down activity. In order to keep the bureaucracy moving, the government removed 49 top technocrats from their positions in November 1991. Indeed, the action could further alienate the Amhara elements of the Ethiopian political system. As the French expression goes, the main problem with the Amhara elite is that; 'they learned nothing; they forgot nothing.' Simply put, the elements of the old order have not yet learned anything from the 30 year old war with Eritrea nor from the tragic experience of the Ethiopian revolution. The reason is that they have not forgotten their old privileges and elite status and continue to demand their restoration. Thus their obsession with the quest for territorial domination may, if successful, result in total anarchy in Ethiopia. This could have serious ramifications for future Ethio-Eritrean relations.

Another area of interest to students of Eritrean politics is the Arab world. By necessity or by historical accident, the national revolutionary process has brought Eritrea much closer to its Arab neighbours than otherwise it would have as the gateway to both Africa and the Middle East. As a consequence, the country has evolved a rich mosaic of Afro-Asian languages and cultures. The potential for transforming its eastward orientation into positive economic and political gains is great. By capitalising on its geography and proximity to oil-rich Gulf States, Eritrea can indeed initiate a process of regional cooperation in ways that would transform the country into a prosperous periphery of the Middle East. Recent Eritrean diplomatic manoeuvres seem to capture the essence of this interpretation.

Relations with the Sudan started on a good footing with borders between countries open for goods and people. Moreover, both countries have expressed interest in broadening and deepening their economic, cultural and diplomatic links. The Sudan was the first country to establish formal diplomatic representation in Eritrea in anticipation of the latter's independence. Of course, relations with the Sudan have one potential liability. Sudanese politics are best characterised by a volte-face, the tendency to drift toward Islamic fundamentalism being the strongest. If this happens, Eritrea may not be able to avoid falling on the slippery slopes of Middle Eastern politics. The chances are that, under conditions of strained relations, the Sudan can serve as a springboard for anti-Eritrean and anti-secular agitation.

In contradistinction to the Sudan, Egypt took an anti-Eritrean posture and in the summer of 1991, made its intentions public to block the Eritrean case from being discussed in any international organisation. In taking this position, Egypt probably was acting on behalf of its regional ally, the Saudis, and its international patron, the US. Since then, however, Egypt has retreated from its original posture, dismissing it as an unfortunate incident. To validate its change of heart, Egypt, too, has established an informal diplomatic representation in Eritrea. Eritrean relations with Yemen are as cordial now that Eritrea has announced the formation of the Eritrean government as when they started. The chances for durable relations between Eritrea and Yemen are great if only because of the latter's tendency toward political moderation. Traditionally,

Yemen was an important market for Eritrean goods and the prospect for developing a durable trading partnership between the two countries is great.

The Gulf States, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, are enthusiastic about Eritrean independence. In the past they have been the most consistent in the region in their support for the Eritrean struggle. Recognising the economic importance of the Gulf to Eritrea, a high level Eritrean delegation has visited the Gulf states and the reception they got was encouraging. But, the future attitude of the Gulf States toward Eritrea and the magnitude of aid they offer may depend on Saudi political behaviour and on their ability to resist Saudi pressure.

On balance, regional cooperation poses challenges and opportunities. The challenges stem from the simple fact that both the Horn and Middle East are volatile regions. The character of the political landscape in each country is unpredictable. At this stage, the opportunities are mere potential even though some initial steps have been taken toward regional cooperation. But Eritrea is well positioned to serve as a catalyst in the promotion of a cooperative regional framework with either its southern or eastern neighbour. But one final point needs to be emphasised. The sufficient development of political democracy is a prerequisite condition for the promotion of a co-prosperity zone in the area. This requires the formulation of prudent and coherent strategies and the judicious implementation of those strategies in ways that preempt discord and disintegration. To be sure, the future political viability and economic prosperity of Eritrea will be as much a function of its internal making as the success of its external relations.

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The Agrarian Question and Politics in the 'New' South Africa

Richard Levin & Daniel Weiner

New right and neo-liberal 'development' discourses have heavily impacted on the politics of agrarian restructuring in South Africa. Mechanisms for resolving agrarian contradictions are being discussed and presented as abstract planning decisions to be made by agricultural and rural development experts. This legitimation of 'neo-classicism', if unchallenged, will reproduce and support current neo-apartheid forms of restructuring.

In this article, we argue for a process of agrarian transformation where rural political mobilisation and the establishment of viable agricultural production systems are complementary. The paper is not an exercise in proposing specific (top-down) 'solutions' or 'models', which has become a recent pre-occupation in South Africa. Rather, we write with the objective of supporting a process whereby democratic transformation in rural South Africa remains possible.

More than three years after the momentous events of 2 February 1990, the course of 'the new' South Africa is very uncertain; this period of negotiations has been dominated by the exploration for an appropriate future development path. With the collapse of 'existing socialism' in Eastern Europe, however, this search is increasingly being limited to imperialist-based strategies. The most recent fascination is with the so-called 'Asian model'.

A primary contention of this paper is the need to look beyond neo- conservative, export-oriented, and technicist development 'solutions' which rely on bourgeois planning models and institutions, towards popular democratic strategies which combine policy formation with political struggle and participation. The crisis on the left should not blind us to the reality that peripheral capitalism has delivered little to the third world masses, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Viable solutions for overcoming socio-economic inequalities have not been found, despite the assertions of many new-right economists. In this article, we also argue that the agrarian question is being shaped by urban politics and urban interests and call for a greater recognition of the class content of contemporary debates and struggles around agrarian policy. Finally, widespread rural demand for greater access to agricultural, grazing and residential land, we contend, provides opportunities for political mobilisation around concrete programmes of national land redistribution.

The recent repeal of the land and group-areas acts and other major apartheid legislation has done little to alter rural power relations. Farmworkers and labour tenants are still losing their jobs and the limited access to land which they have, the bantustans have not been dismantled, and white farms continue to monopolise the land resources with the highest potential. Furthermore, agricultural parastatals in the bantustans remain repressive and grossly unpopular. These grassroots realities, which were punctuated by the recent drought, underscore the urgent need for structural change in South African agriculture. But in the present conjuncture, the balance of forces in agriculture remain very in favourable to white farmers in general, and core white farmers in particular; the one-quarter who produce three-quarters of total marketable surpluses. Some political space, however, is opening up for segments of the peasantry, victims of forced removals and black capitalist farmers.

The Agrarian Question in the post-February 2, 1990 Era

The Policy Debate

The transformation in the terrain of struggle associated with the De Klerk reforms has engendered policy debate on the nature of post-apartheid land and agrarian reform. The regime's White Paper on Land Reform (Republic of South Africa, 1991) paved the way for the repeal of major apartheid land legislation, while leaving agrarian property rights and social relations intact. Marcus (1991:14) summarises the White Paper quite succinctly in arguing that the reforms it proposes 'represent a minimal ameliorative reform package which operationalises 'new right' postulates through 'old order' assumptions and practices'. The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) — a major source of capital for rural development, modelled on the World Bank — has a neoliberal approach. In a major policy document entitled 'Agriculture and Redistribution: A Growth with Equity Approach' (Brand, Christodoulou, Van Rooyen and Vink, 1991), key DBSA ideologues argue that black smallholders should form the basis of more equitable agricultural growth. Affirmative action is central to their programme. Although they argue for 'equitable access to opportunities for all' (p.1) and for a 'democratic, non-racist and non-sexist' South Africa (p.2), their apparently progressive stance must be viewed in the context of their belief that 'the market mechanism should be the primary instrument for facilitating land reform' (p.28). Couched in terms of small farm development, DBSA economists believe in many new right assumptions. If implemented, the DBSA proposals will further accelerate black class formation and effectively reproduce core white agriculture. Despite the good intentions of some individual DBSA planners, the policies advocated would be likely to increase poverty; this, of course, is the opposite of the stated intentions. Another problem is that DBSA money is still channelled through unpopular and repressive bantustan agricultural parastatals. As long as the DBSA continues to associate itself with these apartheid structures, their desired role as an important post-apartheid development planning institution should be resisted.

The ANC's policy guidelines adopted in May 1992 call for a national programme of land reform and redistribution. The programme identifies the establishment of a land claims court as a major priority in order to 'address demands and grievances concerning land restoration and land rights including ownership' (ANC, 1992:26). It also includes a policy of affirmative action 'within a viable and sustainable economic development programme' where the major beneficiaries will be the 'landless, rural poor and women who have been deprived of rights to land through patriarchal systems of land allocation and tenure'. The programme advocates a major restructuring of agriculture with less reliance on plantations to allow for the diversification of agricultural production systems. It recommends a review of the 'unrestricted expansion of forestry, sugar and tobacco and other mono-cultural production systems on high potential agricultural land' (p.28).

An additional issue of importance in the ANC policy document is the question of property rights. The proposed Bill of Rights states:

> *The taking of property shall only be permissible according to law and in the public interest, which shall include the achievement of the objectives of the constitution . . . Any such taking shall be subject to just compensation which shall be determined by establishing an equitable balance between the public interest and the interest of those affected and will not be based solely on the market value of such property (p.8).*

This formulation leaves open several possible political outcomes including expropriation of land as part of a national land reform programme. Given the current balance of forces, however, a status quo resolution is quite possible too. Just compensation has often been calculated using 'market value' criteria, while the concept of the 'public interest' could have many meanings. There is also concern that the courts will represent the interests of the agrarian and urban bourgeoisie as past experiences around the world have demonstrated. South Africa must not be allowed to follow the undemocratic Brazilian route: gross human inequalities associated with the industrialisation of large farms, increasing corporate control of the physical resource base, the repression of peasants and rural proletarians, and an undesirably high rate of urbanisation are already unflattering similarities between the two countries.

These possibilities reveal contradictory class forces within the ANC as a political movement. The right to private property is one that has been denied to all black people until very recently. Entrenched property rights are in the interest of the urban-based black petty-bourgeois and emergent bourgeois forces generally. Nevertheless, an entrenched property clause in a Bill of Rights runs the risk of making it impossible to implement a land reform programme. This is because it will seriously undermine the capacity of a democratic government, given its limited resources, to acquire land for redistribution. Entrenched property rights are, therefore, not in the interest of the landless, the poor peasantry, farmworkers and labour tenants. Debates around private property rights lie at the heart of the agrarian question in South Africa, and are being defended by forces in the ANC and the regime itself. Speaking in Tokyo in June 1992, De

Klerk warned a gathering of top Japanese businessmen that the government would not compromise on 'certain fundamental principles', and that:

> *One of them is the effective protection of property rights such as private property ownership, which must be elevated above arbitrary action by any future government* (The Star, *5 June 1992:3).*

The possible role of petty-bourgeois forces within the ANC was made evident in a recent issue of *Enterprise*, a magazine of 'emerging black entrepreneurs'. Here, the DBSA proudly announced that exiles were 'back to fight poverty' (*Enterprise*, March, 1992:3). A recently returned ANC 'supporter' (p.6) employed by the bank affirmed the DBSA land policy position arguing that 'the bank has set out more consistently than any other organisation the requirements of land and agricultural reform in South Africa' (p.6). Institutions like the DBSA are powerful creations of the apartheid state, and in fighting for survival in a post-apartheid South Africa, have embarked on a systematic strategy of co-option of members of the black petty-bourgeoisie, including ANC members. This raises two very important issues:

1. the realignment of class forces under conditions of social transformation; and
2. the functioning of institutions in the transition process.

Class Formation and Social Transformation

Presently, various social classes exist in the countryside, but the legacy of apartheid repression has meant that diverse class forces have some important common interests, including the demand for greater access to rural resources and, more sympathetic state institutions. It must also be noted that apartheid tended to limit the extent of social differentiation amongst the oppressed majority in rural areas. Post-apartheid agrarian restructuring will both enhance and transform existing social differences and class formation, but this will take different forms, depending on the nature of rural struggle and the form of the post-apartheid state. Democratisation in the countryside will lead emergent petty-bourgeois and bourgeois forces to seek new strategies of accumulation. The new state and its institutions will play a large role in determining the form that class formation is likely to take. The more progressive and democratic the state, the greater the likelihood of conditions under which emergent petty-bourgeois and bourgeois classes will be able to accumulate from below without depending on a close 'individual-state connection' (Mamdani, 1988:84).

A major pitfall of bourgeois reformism in the current conjuncture in South Africa is, therefore, that it could stimulate forms of accumulation from above which are reliant on extra-economic forms of coercion and individual-state connections. The DBSA's current approach which links bantustan agricultural projects and farmer support programmes to the parastatals, is likely to foster accumulation from above by comprador and bureaucratic bourgeois social

forces. The institution of the chieftaincy, for example, could be preserved and developed while continuing to constitute an extra-economic force within the accumulation process. Similarly, as elsewhere in Africa, a direct individual-state connection could become a *sine qua non* for accumulation. The dangers inherent in this approach, must be noted by the ANC if it is to prevent the predominance of various forms of accumulation from above. It also casts doubt on the wisdom of alliances with chiefs and certain bantustan state classes around negotiations, especially since on the ground in many areas, ANC constituencies are in conflict with these forces.

The politics of social differentiation and accumulation are, of course, quite complex, and locally contingent. It is sometimes emergent petty-bourgeois and bourgeois classes who are engaged in struggle with chiefs and the bantustan state, and they are not necessarily reactionary. On the contrary, emergent classes can contain progressive and democratic elements and be an important social force to mobilise for an effective challenge to the agrarian status quo.

The State and Institutions

The failure of 'existing socialism' has led to a policy paralysis on the South African left and a consequent over-reliance on existing neo-conservative and neo-liberal 'development' institutions. It seems unreasonable to assume that these institutions can successfully transform South Africa's agrarian production relations without being fundamentally restructured.

The question of institutions is linked to the philosophy of development planning generally, and imperialist designs in the region specifically. As Fantu Cheru (1989:ix) recently argued:

> *A century after the Berlin Conference of 1885, which partitioned Africa, the continent is once again being recolonized under the guise of Western-prescribed structural adjustment and policy dialogue. The old Christian missionaries have been replaced by an army of western neo-classical economists who peddle their free-market ideology, which, it is hoped, will take Africans to the Garden of Eden. Their message has remained essentially the same: Africa must always look to the West for its image and development. This need not be so.*

We believe that institutions that are fundamentally geared towards propagating capitalist production relations using unproved theories and politically problematic policies are not in a position to successfully transform the apartheid space-economy. In this context, recent visits and subsequent reports by various World Bank teams, and other international 'aid' agencies must be viewed critically.

Existing state institutions in South Africa also need to be viewed with great caution. Ongoing field-work in the Eastern and Northern Transvaal suggests that prevailing state structures and institutions continue to work together to oppress rural people. For example, in an interview with the chairman of the

Kangwane Agricultural Union for the Nsikazi region, continued anger towards bantustan agricultural parastatals was made evident. According to Mr P. Nkosi, Agriwane (Kangwane's agricultural parastatal) operates through unpopular chiefs and by-passes the farmers' union. He argued forcefully that their large-scale projects were turning blacks into 'ordinary labourers', and that their farmer support programmes have greatly increased farmer debt (Interview, 21 June 1992). According to Mr Nkosi, 'they [Agriwane] are trying to keep progressive farmers down. They put money in farmers' hands and then take it back'.

Similar objections were expressed in meetings with farmer union members in Lebowa. At a protest meeting of over 100 people in Mapulaneng, community members raised concerns over the activities of the Lebowa Agricultural Corporation's (LAC) activities in Zoeknog. The LAC liaises with local chiefs to force people into ambiguous contracts which often lead to land alienation and enforced proletarianisation. Sello Mashego, a farmers' union activist, commented that the present practices of the chieftaincy are neither democratic nor traditional. He went further in arguing that the real beneficiaries of many Lebowa projects are the chiefs and their supporters. Decisions on who to support, he claimed, are based more on political criteria than on farming skill (*Interview*, 21 June 1992).

A strong message from these (and other) interviews was that bantustan agricultural corporations need to be democratically controlled, and that some local black people feel confident that they can participate constructively in this process. Bantustan parastatals are viewed as 'white' institutions which are not intended to develop black agriculture; a large 'Rhodesian immigrant' presence reinforces this view. Within the broader community, there is also distrust over the intentions of the DBSA, and there appears to be an awareness that the DBSA funds these unpopular bantustan agricultural corporations. Our discussions with these farmers' union representatives, as well as landed and landless persons throughout the region, point to widespread disenchantment with the role of the state vis-à-vis existing agricultural institutions. Furthermore, while most black smallholders expressed the need for assistance, they do not want to be 'developed' and wish to participate actively in the process of transformation. It was also made clear to us that there is a strong demand for greater access to land *and* water; apartheid planners, it was pointed out, had a good understanding of local water drainage patterns.

On the issue of land, Mr Nkosi argued that:

> *The playing field should be levelled: we need ways and means to occupy land. I cannot even afford the deposit for a farm. Some wealthy blacks are now buying farms for luxury. We cannot say that these are farmers'. When asked whether blacks have the skills to farm, he said half jokingly 'I've never seen a white farmer in South Africa. Blacks do most of the work'. For blacks, 'skills are not a problem'* (Interview, 21 June 1992).

In arguing further that the potential for black agricultural expansion is very high, he told us stories about white farmers who used to kick black farmers out of town, because according to him, they were able to sell high quality produce at cheap prices and had lucrative businesses.

The issue of black farming skills is complex and actual abilities are probably highly variable. Nevertheless our preliminary fieldwork indicates that urban conceptions of deskilled rural blacks grossly underestimate black farming capacity in South Africa. We are not arguing that there is a large peasantry waiting in the wings for liberation, but it is clear to us that development institutions that do not respect or understand local production potentials and the existence of indigenous knowledge are inappropriate for the task at hand. It is in this context that the DBSA's stated intentions to support local initiatives and the reality of repressive and technicist DBSA funding on the ground must be reconciled. If the DBSA wants to be taken seriously as a post-apartheid development-planning institution within rural communities, it must fight legitimately for the dismantling of bantustan agricultural parastatals and support genuine democratisation of existing projects.

Summary

Despite the convergence between the South African state and democratic forces in such important areas as private property rights and the preservation of core white agriculture, and alongside the growing international pressure for status-quo 'market restructuring', some political space for popular democratic agrarian transformation remains. The ANC's policy document for instance, does provide a framework for structural transformation, but this will depend largely on the degree of rural organisation and participation, as well as the willingness of a democratic government to support the majority of rural people. Urban-based policy makers must have a greater appreciation that rural demand for land is quite high. Furthermore, in the context of rapidly growing unemployment, demand for rural land can also be expected from people with urban jobs — returning migrants in particular. What then are the prospects for a democratic restructuring of South African agriculture?

Towards Agrarian Transformation in South Africa

The crisis on the left does not legitimise the planning institutions of the right. Mike De Klerk (1992) has recently argued:

> *For policy makers and academics on the left, who for so long have been locked into critical analysis and for whom Marx and the experience of planned economic systems offer so few positive guidelines for practical policy formulation . . . [policy] presents a particular challenge. It will no longer be good enough to sit on the sidelines and snipe. Nor will it help to rehash policies that have demonstrably failed elsewhere. New thinking and a preparedness to engage with those who have had to grapple at first hand with policy in the past will be required. For some, this may even mean 'going to work for the enemy' for a while to learn the practicalities of institutions (p.28).*

We believe that this type of analysis is problematic. While 'new thinking' is necessary, we would argue that new thinking is often not really very new at all. It often amounts to a reversion to a doctrine of neo-classicism 'which associates the state with the free play of market forces' (Fine, 1992:73). Fine argues that the unbanning of the SACP-ANC has led to a resurgence of neo-classicism as the 'paramount mode of liberation politics'. From this perspective, the proposition of 'working with the enemy' must be treated with extreme caution. In any event, the enemy is part of the problem rather than the solution. It is unlikely that these people will help to liberate the rural oppressed and support squatters, the landless and near landless, as well as farmworkers and tenants in their struggles to access land from powerful people, corporations and interest groups. It is not only the left which needs new ideas when it comes to agrarian transformation. There is a need to critically engage with the *failures of capitalism* as well as socialism. This need not imply a wholesale rejection of any engagement with 'those who have had to grapple at first hand with policy in the past'. Rather it emphasises an awareness of the political dimensions of such engagement, since, as Fine has observed, the 'political strategy associated with neo-classicism has been to cement an alliance around a consensual programme of liberal reform from above and self-restraint from below' (p.74).

The remainder of this paper identifies central concerns for agrarian reconstruction in South Africa. It is argued that transformation is a process and not an event (Bernstein, 1992), and that along with much-needed research, programmes which can support the *process of transformation* need to be established. These programmes should incorporate — at a minimum — the following sets of issues:

Agrarian Research

The debate on land and agrarian policy is being conducted in an environment of great ignorance regarding what is really happening on the ground; in most cases, restructuring policies are being suggested without real knowledge of what is actually going to be restructured. This problem is slowly being redressed by service organisations in the field and several research projects which have recently commenced. The types of information needed are immense and beyond the scope of this discussion. However, we would argue that localised information on what people want and are capable of doing is of great importance. This includes community and household information on land use, agricultural and livestock production and productivity and, the types of inputs being utilised. But, the technical conditions of production must be understood within the context of community and sub-regional social differentiation; the social forces in the South African countryside are the product of a localised web of race, class, ethnic, lineage and gender processes which are mediated, in part, through differential access and control of natural resources. At a more macro-level, information is needed on the dominant farming systems and associated labour processes that presently exist and their potential for economic and political transformation. And finally, the research agenda must be truly participatory and move beyond the conventional — and reactionary — treatment of poor rural people as merely objects of study.

Property Rights

The process of transformation is contingent on the ability of a democratic state to identify and access South Africa's natural resource base. The National Party's current proposals are aimed at closing off this option. The entrenchment of property rights in a Bill of Rights in post-apartheid South Africa runs the real risk of reproducing historical agrarian power relations. Historically, property rights have been the preserve of the white minority. These rights lie at the heart of white South Africa's fear of socio-political transformation. In responding to this fear, the ANC's policy document proposes the entrenchment of property rights in an ambiguous way that may or may not facilitate national land reform. The consequences of entrenching private property rights in the constitution, and leaving the issue of just compensation in the hands of the courts, however, are unpredictable and difficult to reverse (Bauman, 1992:104). Moreover, as Budlender has noted, the courts are uncomfortable when dealing with policy issues centring on matters of substantial public interest. Judges, he argues

> *are also not well equipped to deal with those issues particularly in a changing society. You do not have to believe that the judges are simply the representatives of the ruling class to believe that by their background and experience, judges will inevitably lean towards protecting familiar vested rights. Further, I doubt whether the courts are a suitable institution to decide what are really disputes about conflicting priorities in the use of the society's resources. Surely this is precisely the function of the political process (Budlender, 1992:215-6).*

The ANC's legal and constitutional department needs to think more carefully about the consequences of entrenched private property rights and payment of just compensation for a national land reform programme. A starting point could be an investigation into deferred and non-cash payment of compensation, for example in the form of government bonds over 15 or 20 years. For seriously indebted farmers, just compensation could be linked to farm debt repayment. In the case of corporate plantation agriculture, is just compensation appropriate at all?

The current debate regarding property dwells on the rights of present property owners and, despite great political sympathy for the 'victims of forced removals', the issue of just compensation and property rights is being debated as it relates to the beneficiaries of apartheid. 'What is missing is a serious discussion of the *right* of the property-less to what they need for a decent life — because that, too, should be understood as a property right' (Budlender, 1992:213). Can the courts offer 'just compensation' to the generations who have suffered under colonialism and apartheid? The proposition — *property rights for whom?* — is a simple, but fundamental question.

At present, black people hold land under differing tenurial systems. The ANC (1992) argues that 'people should have security of tenure which does not necessarily mean individual ownership of land and the dwelling unit. Provision will be made for different forms of tenure' (p.36). It also asserts that subject to women not being denied access to land rights, 'the diversity of tenure forms in our country . . . shall be recognised and protected' (p.28). The aim here is to facilitate the development of a legal framework within which 'communal' forms of land tenure can be protected. Cross (1992) argues that presently, many communal systems 'have gone a long way towards transforming individual use of land into individual ownership of land', and that what 'remains with the community as a group is more properly a right of oversight rather than shared ownership' (p.5). This correctly suggests that the notion of communal tenure is a misnomer as the current basis of these systems is not communal.

In the broader African context, 'communal' tenure systems tend to be patriarchal forms of social regulation under the control of male elders. The transformation of the chieftaincy under colonial and neo-colonial social relations has generated new forms of oppression and domination in rural areas. The impact on lower-class women and households has often been severe. In Uganda, for instance, Mamdani (1987) has shown how in a context of inequality, the co-operative form of various 'traditional' practices has been transformed into fundamentally unequal relationships. In Swaziland, the chieftaincy, aristocracy and other 'traditional' relations lie at the heart of a regime of extra-economic forms of accumulation from above (Levin, 1990). It is important, therefore, when recognising different forms of existing tenure to note how they impact on the politics of production. Communal forms of tenure have the potential to become democratic if administered and allocated by popularly elected local bodies where women are properly represented.

Core White Agriculture

Also missing from the current policy debate is a serious discussion on the future of core white agriculture. Legitimate concerns over domestic food supply are often accompanied with false assumptions regarding the land-use characteristics and efficiency of the whole of white agriculture. It is still generally believed that core white agriculture utilises most of the potentially arable land available, while peripheral white agriculture underutilises potentially arable land. On the basis of this, among other, assumptions, land transfer involving core white agriculture is quietly been pushed off the agenda. As a result, there is a tendency to identify peripheral white agricultural land as the prime target for redistribution.

In previous work, we demonstrated that much of South Africa's highest potential agricultural land is being underutilised and used inappropriately for plantation agriculture and livestock grazing (Weiner and Levin, 1991:98). We also suggested that productivity differentials between 'white and black' agriculture in maize production are not as great as generally assumed. This work indicates

that the issue of 'inappropriate' land use must be taken seriously and put on the political agenda. Only half of the potentially arable white farm land in the relatively high potential eastern Transvaal and Natal regions is under crops or fallow. On the other hand, overutilisation of land is highest in the lower potential regions of the country and in sections of the maize triangle. Furthermore, timber plantations are occupying greater amounts of good land and there is much livestock and sugar production on land which is well suited for grain production. Throughout South Africa, there are situations where repressive and overly industrialised farms that grow non-food crops lie adjacent to — and within — bantustans that have high levels of landlessness, unemployment and malnutrition.

Domestic food production is fundamental to post-apartheid South Africa. If black farmers, on whatever scale, are to contribute more to domestic grain and livestock production they must have access to greater areas of better quality land. It is against this background that we are suspicious of populist advocates of black small-farm development who do not appear to be prepared to challenge the current monopoly of medium and high potential land. It must also be noted that current discussions about establishing mechanisms for redistributing land are unfolding in the context of the opposite process: a tightening grip of large-scale land owners on core white farming land *and* the expansion of estate and contract farming into the bantustans. This is one reason why the ANC's calls for reviewing white agriculture in high potential regions, and for challenging the agricultural monopolies generally, are of the utmost importance.

Considerations of socially appropriate land use need to be incorporated into the debate on agrarian restructuring. Identifying models is meaningless without access to more land of good quality. The issue of just compensation and a possible 'willing seller/willing buyer' type clause in the constitution is linked to the land-use issue. The Zimbabwe experience demonstrates that the 'willing sellers' tend to be in poorer agro-ecological regions. The 'willing buyers', therefore have limited choices. Agriculture, of course, is not just about politics and economics. Access to soil and water is central to successful agrarian restructuring. The material reality of current new-right and neo-liberal thinking is the reproduction of South Africa's historical political ecology.

Institutions

There is general agreement across a range of ideological perspectives that the institutions of apartheid need to be transformed in order to better service the needs of black rural people. Central to DBSA and neo-liberal thinking generally, is this very notion. Johan Van Zyl, Dean of Agriculture at the University of Pretoria believes that institutional transformation must be the centre-piece of agrarian reform in South Africa. Using Zimbabwe as a rare African success story, he argues that:

without question, there is little theoretical, conceptual, or empirical literature on rural institutions in Africa to guide policy makers on how to develop efficient and equitable institutions to serve communal farmers and herders. This explains why Zimbabwe's experience over the past decade is relevant to South Africa (Farmer's Weekly, *12 June 1992:13).*

Indeed, the Zimbabwe experience is instructive (Weiner, 1989). Existing institutions were expanded to include black producers. Extension, credit, greater access to fossil-fuel inputs and markets, successfully stimulated smallholder production. But for the most part, these technicist forms of institutional transformation left historical agrarian relations intact. As is now well known social and spatial differentiation has intensified significantly since independence (Cousins et al, 1992). Zimbabwe's current political crisis and chronic drought impact problem must be viewed against this background.

In South Africa, where the peasantry is much more marginalised than in pre-independence Zimbabwe, a primarily technicist and production-oriented institutional transformation is likely to generate even greater levels of inequality and to further empower the already powerful. Given the already highly skewed character of bantustan agricultural production, it will take much more than affirmative action programmes to truly overcome socio-economic inequalities.

We believe in *institutions for structural transformation and sustainable development.* Existing technicist institutions, continue to draw their inspiration from outmoded modernisation approaches to development. For example, Van Zyl (p.12) argues that 'most communal farmers in Africa are at an earlier stage of scientific, institutional and human capital development than their counterparts in Latin America and Asia'. Certainly, African agricultural productivity needs to be enhanced and technology should be part of that process. This however does not mean that the experiences of agricultural development elsewhere in the periphery should be uncritically applied here. Van Zyl's Rostovian notion of (capitalist) stages too simply assumes that western industrialised agriculture is desirable. A rapidly growing literature on sustainable agricultural development forcefully argues differently (Goodman & Redclift, 1991).

Institutions are historical products of definite power relations. The institutional structure of agricultural development in South Africa has been created to service the needs of the apartheid state. This is why the ANC's policy document argues that the 'present system of regulatory mechanisms, agricultural control boards and the operations of the parastatals will be reviewed and amended' (p.33). But the ANC goes further in recognising that a more systematic transformation of agricultural institutional structures will be required in order for black agricultural producers to gain access to the sector:

The hidden monopolies and controls that exist in agriculture by virtue of the control linkages between agricultural credit, marketing, commercial co-operatives, the Land Bank and the SAAU, must be broken up to enable new farmers to enter the sector (ANC, 1992).

Breaking the monopolies will require strong political will. Institutions for agrarian transformation in post-apartheid South Africa will have to move beyond the mere creation of the technical conditions of production to support new and presently emerging forms of democratic social organisation and land use. This will require a sensitivity to people's needs on the ground as well as critical non-technical components to production and productivity enhancement. Greater appreciation of indigenous knowledge and local natural resource use must be part of this effort. The reality that transformation is a process that will take time must also not be overlooked.

Popular Participation

Successful institutional transformation is not possible without popular participation in decision-making. The fact that current debates regarding agrarian transformation in South Africa are taking place in North America, Western Europe and conference centres in South Africa, with minimal involvement of South Africa's rural people, is a warning sign that a democratic resolution to the problem is not in sight. As Shivji points out:

The current debate on democracy in Africa is stimulating, but many views are rooted in liberalism, justify it in terms of 'development' or see it as an absolute good. Little attempt is made to situate it in historical processes of people in struggle, resulting in a mistrust of the masses . . . The very way the debate is constructed must also be democratic and should reflect the people's own strivings, not the 'negative' models of the East, or the 'positive' models (and pressures) of the West (1991:79).

Shivji's comments underscore the urgent necessity for involving ordinary rural people in contemporary policy debates. Given existing constraints, the ANC has thus far initiated a democratic process of policy formation. Land commissions have been set up in each of the ANC's 14 regions to debate policy issues. These function with varying success, but it is not possible at this stage to estimate the level of grassroots participation within the commissions. The ANC also faces a major contradiction between its national negotiations strategy, and its functioning at a local level in rural areas. This is because, as noted above, the alliances forged in the negotiations process with bantustan and tribal leaders, often contradict the nature of popular struggles on the ground. This could become even more dangerous if negotiations are elevated to the movement's single strategic perspective. Developing a national rural organisational strategy which can respond to local needs is a major challenge facing the ANC and the democratic movement in the current period. It is a historical reality that the South African democratic struggle has increasingly been forged in an urban milieu, and this has led to a certain amount of urban bias in the strategies and tactics of the ANC and other liberation movements (Bundy, 1984). This legacy may yet prove to be one of the major obstacles to a democratic resolution of the

agrarian question. Programmatically, the ANC should gear itself towards helping urban people become more aware of, and sympathetic towards, rural needs. This need not be problematic since many households reproduce themselves through both urban and rural means.

Technicist strategies are a major threat to democratic rural-policy formulation; policy itself is all too often construed as a set of technical solutions. Productivity, narrowly defined, becomes the primary objective of rural development planning. Policy formation is as much a problem of social and political organisation as it is a process of technical change and diffusion. The overwhelming experience of the third world is that progressive policies, in the absence of political mobilisation and participation, tend to reproduce the status quo. Progressive policies can, however, provide an important framework favourable to popular struggles, and in this context, 'The Land' section of the ANC's (1992) policy document does provide auspicious conditions for genuine democratic social and technological transformation.

Race, Class & Agrarian Transformation in South Africa

Throughout the world there is an arrogance surrounding new right thinking — some economists believe that they have the solutions for third world economic development problems. These often lie in structural adjustment programmes for macro-economic planning. Third world governments it is argued, are guilty of not listening to first world experts. Imported to South Africa, the more extreme forms of this 'neo-classicism' (Fine, 1992) have a racist twist. For example, Henry Kenney of the Economics Department of the University of the Witwatersrand recently argued that:

> *the ANC has a first year economics student's problem: difficulty grasping the connection between property and economic performance . . . the ANC is still hung up on the notion that redistribution will resolve black poverty. Evidence proves the opposite: economic growth causes inequalities to narrow* (The Sunday Star, 7 June 1992:28).

We feel sorry for first year economics students who are taught by Henry Kenney. More seriously, and putting Kenney's patronising attitude aside, his understanding of development is ahistorical and factually incorrect. We agree with Saki Macozoma, an ANC spokesperson who responded to Kenney in arguing that

> *the experience of Reaganomics and Thatcherism is that savings did not go into reinvestment and new jobs, but into pleasure boats, resorts and further conglomerations.*

The issues raised in this debate indicate that race and class are intertwined in contemporary policy debates. Advocates of new right thinking are more often than not white men in power positions aligned with third world ruling classes. The victims of structural adjustment programmes tend to be non-white. The idea that 'the market' should be the major mechanism for redistribution has no historical or empirical basis anywhere. The market remains an abstraction, and

it is certainly not free: it costs money to play. Furthermore, the Asian 'market economies' often seen as a model for South Africa, owe their 'success' in part to land reform and a strong state. Current new-right thinking in South Africa is adopting the export component of the Asian experience while ignoring other central dimensions of Asian transformation.

In South Africa, neo-liberal thinking, which is articulated by the DBSA amongst others, appears to have gone beyond racism in its transformation proposals. Their proposals, however, are likely to entrench forms of accumulation from above in South African agriculture despite other possible intentions. Affirmative action programmes will not level the playing field for more equitable market-led growth as suggested. Implicit in the notion of affirmative action is the assumption that black people are inferior farmers and that existing institutions, aside from their racial character, are unproblematic. Mamdani, commenting on the post-colonial experiences of African settler societies, argues that 'affirmative action tended to strengthen and legitimate colonial institutions and practices by removing from them the racial stigma' (1992:16). He also asserts that 'embracing the language and vision of affirmative action' runs the risk of obscuring the fundamental task of 'institutional transformation'. New right and neo-liberal policies are likely to buttress comprador and bureaucratic elements of the emergent black bourgeoisie in the countryside and relatively productive black smallholders.

We are not arguing that emergent farmers should not be supported; indeed they could play a progressive role in agrarian transformation. But to truly generate democratic growth, agricultural restructuring must be broad-based and be built upon the range of labour processes that currently exist in the countryside. New forms of rural social organisation cannot simply be planned from above. Genuine social reconstruction involves transforming existing relations of production through the creation of conditions under which peoples initiatives can be supported. At best, a democratic state can create the conditions under which progressive alternatives can evolve. In such a context, a variety of agricultural and livestock production systems should be supported. For example, the existence of socialised labour in South Africa suggests that there might be some potential for developing worker self-management schemes. Input and tractor cooperatives which support individual smallholders and pre-cooperatives also might have significant support in a more sympathetic political and economic environment. There is also some re-colonisation of white farm grazing land abandoned during the 1980s droughts which needs to be investigated. The range of production alternatives, we believe, is greater than generally assumed.

The essence of our argument is that fundamental transformation of apartheid race, class and gender relations will require policies and programmes which go well beyond new-right and neo-liberal thinking. White agriculture has historically been oppressive, and related legislation has been at the centre of the development of apartheid. We are not arguing for the dismantling of the whole of

white agriculture; segments of white agriculture certainly have a role to play in 'the new' South Africa. We are, however, arguing for the creation of progressive democratic alternatives which can challenge the hegemony of white agriculture and truly support local production and reproduction initiatives. Fostering a rich peasantry and a class of black capitalist farmers on its own will not achieve this. *The legitimation of neo-classicism will actually reproduce and strengthen neo-apartheid forms of transformation initiated by the 2 February 1990 De Klerk reforms.*

To move beyond the undesirable material realities associated with neo-apartheid restructuring — for example, enhanced social differentiation, rapid poverty formation and, the reproduction of unpopular technicist planning institutions — the ANC should not succumb to unfounded white fears and threats from the international community. 'Big capital', both domestic and foreign is not truly concerned with the welfare of the majority of South Africans. An important counter to technicist and imperialist-based proposals for South African agriculture, therefore, lies in the further mobilisation and organisation of rural people. Land hunger in the South African countryside is real, and constitutes a powerful basis for popular mobilisation. Rural people are currently demanding land for residential, grazing and agricultural purposes. Returning migrants and the growing urban and rural squatter population often want land too; the land question is a rural and urban concern. In the present conjuncture, when the ANC views mass action as a pillar of struggle which complements the terrain of negotiations, the land question could become part of a powerful political programme to strengthen the organisation's mass base. Land redistribution must be a central component of the ANC's election campaign.

Land occupation should also be part of the ANC's transformation strategy by, for example, providing a powerful counterweight to the De Klerk regime's unilateral decision in 1992 to grant one million hectares of land to the bantustans. This would require strategic planning, community participation and incorporation within a broader national democratic strategy. One of the central lessons from Zimbabwe is that land needs to be struggled for. Presently almost half of the total area of Zimbabwe's resettled land is land that was abandoned by whites during the liberation struggle. It is amongst the best quality resettled land in the country. In South Africa, the future of trust land, vacant land, unused and underutilised white farm land, highly indebted farms as well as inappropriately used plantation land, need to be put on the political agenda immediately. We also believe that restructuring agricultural parastatals in the bantustans — which occupy the best land in these areas — must also be part of the transformation process. The best way of ensuring that this agenda is fulfilled is to facilitate the participation of the rural oppressed whose expectations are extremely high in this current conjuncture.

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