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# Ethiopia - Perspectives of Conflict 1991-1999

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAPO	All Amhara Peoples Organisation
AENF	Alliance of Eritrean National Force
ARDUF	Afar Revolutionary Democratic United Front
CAFPDE	Coalition of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia
CETU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDUP	Ethiopian Democratic Union Party
EDORM	Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement
EFJF	Ethiopian Free Journalists Federation
EFORT	Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EMLF	Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Force
ENDP	Ethiopian National Democratic Party
EPDM	Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party
ETA	Ethiopian Teachers Association
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FRUD	Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority for Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEISON	All Ethiopia Socialist Movement
MLLT	Marxist Leninist League of Tigray
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation
PFDJ	Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice
SEPDC	Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition
TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

## Preface

The present paper is part of a series of case studies on the Horn of Africa presented and discussed at the workshop "Early warning in practice: the case of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea" in March 1999 at the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) in London. The workshop was organised by the Swiss Peace Foundation's early warning project group *FAST* (Early Recognition of Tension and Fact Finding) in collaboration with the IFAA and brought together a great number of scholars, local experts, and representatives of NGO's dealing with the Horn region. Providing for an in-depth analysis of the current situation in the Horn of Africa, the case studies on Sudan (Mohamed Suliman), Ethiopia (Patrick Gilkes), and Eritrea (Ruth lyob) shed light on the various political, socio-economic, demographic, and ecological causes and dimensions of the ongoing conflicts in the region.

*FAST's* main objective is the early recognition of impending or potential crisis situations for the purpose of early action towards the prevention of armed conflict. Combined with a collection of statistic evidence and systematic monitoring of conflictive and cooperative events, the present Country Risk Profile is part of *FAST's* early warning methodology linking early warning and early action by relevant decision makers.<sup>1</sup> *FAST* is mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed presentation of *FAST* see KRUMMENACHER, H. and S. SCHMEIDL (1999): "FAST: An Integrated and Interactive Early Warning System: The Example of Central Asia", in *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, forthcoming; and KRUMMENACHER, H.; BAECHLER, G. and S. SCHMEIDL (1999): "Beitrag der Frühwarnung zur Krisenprävention - Möglichkeiten und Grenzen in Theorie und Praxis", in *Friedensbericht 1999*, Chur; Zürich: Rüegger, pp. 77-99.

## Executive Summary

There is a long history of state formation and conflict within the Horn of Africa, largely though not exclusively, centred upon what is now the polity of Ethiopia; ethnicity, religion and control of resources have been at issue within a highly complex region. The present Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government came to power in May 1991 after a long and bitter struggle to overthrow the Marxist military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. It has created an imaginative, and controversial structure of ethnically based federalism in an attempt to solve the problems of government within the multi-ethnic Ethiopian state and the substantial ethnic tensions within the Ethiopian polity.

The current major conflict is that between Ethiopia and the newly created state of Eritrea which acquired *de facto* independence in 1991, *de jure* in 1993, after a thirty year struggle. The EPRDF in 1991 accepted and supported the independence of Eritrea under the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), now the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), its ally in the conflict with the previous military regime. Their conflict in May 1998 was largely unexpected, but it is now clear that it has deep roots in disagreements between the two movements, arising from different ideological allegiances and different approaches to political mobilisation and nationalism within their respective regions of Tigray and Eritrea, despite the common ethnic origin of their leaderships.

In Ethiopia, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the founding and controlling element of the EPRDF, found it necessary to drop its original commitment to Marxism, forcing it to depend upon its historic roots, its ethnicity, as a vehicle for mobilisation of support, both in Tigray and, through other parties, in the other regions of Ethiopia. It did, however, remain a highly centralised organisation and has continued to operate the techniques of the vanguard party. These have been transferred to the national scene and to all aspects of government, administration and professional bodies and organisations. The policy has also involved the creation of surrogate parties in all the regions to try and establish EPRDF control and support in all the

nine states of the ethnic federation set up under the constitution of 1994.

The success of the TPLF and the EPRDF has redefined Ethiopian politics in terms of ethnicity, and left its opponents floundering and divided. Some have turned, or returned, to armed struggle, also basing their activity on ethnicity particularly in the peripheral areas in which central government has traditionally been weak and in which the long term crisis of pastoralism and lack of resources is most apparent. Others have attempted to operate within the new structures. The effect has been to divide Oromos, Somalis, and Afars between pro- and anti-EPRDF factions and provide an uneasy balance of power in most of the regions. The surrogate parties have been significantly less successful than the EPRDF had hoped.

Reasons for this include the continued economic problems faced by the region as a whole. Agriculture remains the central element in Ethiopia and is still climate dependant. Considerable improvements in food supply since 1991 relate almost entirely to a series of good harvests. The costs of the new dispensation are formidable and there is little evidence that poverty eradication is yet making any realistic progress despite the conversion to a mixed economy and the imprimatur of the IMF and the international community.

Serious questions remain over the EPRDF's operation of human rights, despite its much acclaimed trials of the members of the former regime. Not all can be ascribed to failures in the implementation of a new system. Opposition parties have been systematically targeted to prevent their emergence as a real political force, irrespective of whether they have been involved in armed struggle like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) or confined themselves to political activity, like the All Amhara Peoples Organisation (AAPPO). Other aspects of human rights which have been heavily criticised by international organisations have included the electoral processes, the treatment of the press (Ethiopia's record is the worst in Africa), prison conditions, interference in the judiciary, arbitrary and indefinite detention without trial, and extra-judicial execution. The evidence suggests much of this abuse is in danger of becoming institutionalised.

There is an underlying instability to the region, in which various powers, including notably both Ethiopia and Eritrea, appear to have hegemonic ambitions, and in whose strategic

position several outside powers also take an interest. Ethiopia and Eritrea are now making efforts to destabilise each other directly and by proxy, extending their conflict into the collapsed Somali state, arming various factions. The Horn of Africa's potential for conflict was underlined by the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, but this was already well apparent. However successful Ethiopia's ethnic federal experiment may be it also has effects on all its neighbours, and these are not always stabilising, not least because of the cross-border nationalities. Long-term solutions have yet to be addressed.

The Horn of Africa remains a region of crisis; Ethiopia lies at its centre. The regime established in 1991 has developed an imaginative solution to the crisis of the Ethiopian state and the perennial problem of ethnicity and ethnic conflict within a multi-national, multi-ethnic state. It has, however, failed to build up a nation-wide consensus of support or persuade its critics that the federal experiment will hold the Ethiopian polity together, though the conflict with Eritrea has gone a long way to improving the ERPDF's image in this respect. The ERPDF's vision is, however, still threatened by the lack of regional resources, and by the failure of external interests to target aid effectively. Equally dangerous are the regime's own uncertainties and weaknesses, and its failure to allow the establishment of the necessary principles of good governance, in particular a genuine pluralist democracy and a realistic policy of human rights.



# 1 Introduction

The basis of the modern state framework in the Horn of Africa, and of the modern polity of Ethiopia, was laid down in the second half of the 19th. century, by the arrival of the imperialist powers (Britain, France and Italy) and their relationship with the pre-existing, if frequently fragmented, Ethiopian state. The present boundaries of Ethiopia were incorporated by the Emperor Menilik 1889-1913, who had them accepted by the colonial powers after his defeat of the Italians at the Battle of Adua in 1896. The only subsequent change of significance has been in the status of Eritrea, colonised by Italy 1880s -1941, under British military rule and a UN Mandate 1941-1952, federated with Ethiopia 1952-1962, incorporated as a province of Ethiopia 1962-1991, and after achieving de facto independence in 1991, was formally recognised as an independent state in 1993. Ethiopia itself was, of course, briefly occupied by the Italians between 1936 - 1941, unimportant in terms of colonisation, but significant in terms of defining Ethiopian nationalism and the Ethiopian state.

State formation in the Horn of Africa has, however, a far longer history than the late 19th century. A state first appeared in the area, centred at Axum in Tigray region and incorporating most of what are now the Tigringna-speaking parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as large Agaw-speaking areas, about 2,000 years ago. Although the boundaries of the Ethiopian polity have changed considerably with reference to other centres of power, within or outside the Horn of Africa, the linkage to Axum remains of importance. Axum at one time was active in large areas of what is now Sudan, as well as parts of Yemen and Saudi Arabia across the Red Sea. After the collapse of the Axumite empire in the 7th century AD, subsequent centres of state power in the region appeared further south, in the regions of Wag and Lasta among the Agaw and then among the Amhara of Wollo and Shoa regions.

By the 16th century there were three main poles of power. The two major states were the Christian Ethiopian empire, largely centred in the Amhara regions of Shoa and Wollo but incorporating the Tigrean people to the north, the Agaw of Damot and other highland minorities; and the Muslim Emirate of Adal, based upon the Harla, other pre-Somali peoples, various

Somali clans, and other Muslim kingdoms and peoples including the Sidama of Dawaro and Bali. These two powers, representing opposing Christian and Islamic world views, had confronted each other from the 13th century. In the first half of the 16th. century they fought each other to exhaustion, allowing a third power, the Oromo, co-incidentally animist, to expand widely into the territories of both. The Sultanate of Adal was fatally weakened by the Oromo attack and only survived in an attenuated form in the city-state of Harar, and the remote and isolated Afar Sultanate of Assieta. The Christian empire survived by retreating to the north west, essentially abandoning control over huge areas to the Oromo, and creating a re-focused imperial centre at Gondar.

Gondar redefined an Ethiopian and an imperial ideology (and mythology), building upon its past imperial legacy, but its rulers never possessed the powers of their medieval predecessors. For most of the 18th and 19th centuries, the empire was uneasily balanced between different regions and different peoples, notably, but not exclusively, Amharas, Oromos and Tigreans. Power fluctuated - the family of the Oromo Ras Ali the Great in Wollo and Begemder regions for much of 80 years between 1770 and 1850 was locked in conflict with the house of Ras Michael Sehul of Tigray, both attempting to control the seat of imperial authority in Gondar. The imperial legacy passed through the rulers of various regions - Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo, Wag and Lasta, and Tigray, before ending up in Shoa in the later part of the 19th century. Outside these principalities, there were a number of other local political centres, the Oromo and Sidama kingdoms of the south and south west, both Muslim and animist, and a number of Muslim Sultanates among the Sidama, Somali and Afar peoples.

The conflicts between these groups can be seen in terms of religion, and ethnicity, and, equally, within the wider framework of the Ethiopian polity over the past two or three hundred years, as part of a continuous oscillation of centralisation and fragmentation around a friable imperial core. At one level this appears in the rivalries of the feudal princes of the Zemenemesafint (the Time of the Princes, 1770-1850), as earlier in the struggles of the Sultanates of Shoa, and Adal, and the kingdoms of Damot and Hadiya with the Shoan empire; in the later 19th century, it was the interaction of the Oromo kingdoms of the Gibe region and the Sultanate of Jimma, the kingdoms of

Kaffa and Wollamo, and the imperial power, whether somnolent in Gondar or active in Mekelle (Yohannes 1V, 1872-1889) or Shoa (Menilek 11, 1889-1913). The central political fact of the Ethiopian polity since the 1870s has been the slow growth in the power of the centralised authority, though its success in the mid 20th. century was almost immediately followed by sharp reaction from the peripheral regions of the state. As a result the fundamental factor in the Ethiopia state over the last 25 years has been struggle to find an acceptable pattern of government. It is, of course, the common problem of post colonial African states, but in Ethiopia it has been complicated by the long term existence of a multi-national imperial construct, as well the usual interaction with neighbouring colonial and post-colonial states.

In recent years, there have been two general views in the Horn of Africa of what makes a nation state.<sup>2</sup> The "genetic" or "primordial" view has emphasised the definition of a nation specifically by ethnicity and language. Somalia has been seen as a precise example of such a view, though this ignores significant non-Somali minorities within the boundaries of the now collapsed Somali state. It has also been accepted in recent nationalistic writings from Oromos, and Afars; and it can also be seen, in theory and potential at least, in the decision of the present Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government to accept the concept of self-determination "...up to and including secession..." and create an ethnically based federation in Ethiopia. The EPRDF was, and is, the creation of a regional and ethnically based movement, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF).

The alternative "instrumentalist" view is that the nation state is shaped by historical and economic constraints and that its boundaries are consequence of political and social activity, including colonialism. This provides for a much more dynamic view of the nation, and allows for the acceptance of the history of the Ethiopian polity as a nation state within current boundaries. Ironically, it also provides for the theoretical basis for an Eritrean polity. This view accepts that ethnicity is flexible, that individuals may join a group for their own advantage, or may, similarly,

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. SMITH, A. (1983): *State and Nation in the Third World*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books; LEWIS, I. M. (1983): "Pre- and Post-Colonial Forms of Polity in Africa", in: LEWIS, I. M. (ed.) (1983): *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa*, London: Ithaca Press.

withdraw; a considerable amount of evidence for this may be seen in southern Ethiopia along the interface between Somali and Oromo clans. It also defines the state, in part, by its relationship with other political groups external to it. In this sense the state is seen as the political creation of national ideology, defining both identity and difference which together determine a national continuity. It implies a unified collection of ideas and beliefs for political reasons. These may or may not have historical foundations, but the political dimension is a critical element. Ideologically, this tends to be highly flexible, and adjustable, as in the 1970s and 1980s when the Ethiopian state tried to impose socialism and a worker/peasant class alliance as the basis for a "progressive" state in place of its imperial predecessor. More recently, the EPRDF has tried to merge these different views, allowing for some development of ethnicity within a still highly centralised polity. Recent experimentation may have weakened the centralised authority, but it has not affected the existence of the historic nation state, though the full implications have yet to be worked through.

## 2 The Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict

These theoretical differences underlie, to a considerable extent, the current Ethiopian/Eritrean conflict which broke out in May 1998, despite an apparent commonality of interest and background between the respective ruling parties, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), since 1994 the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), both of which had their origin in opposition to Ethiopian absolutism and mal-administration under the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991) and to a lesser extent under Emperor Haile Selassie. The respective approaches used by the EPLF and the TPLF to mobilise support within their original areas of operation reflected significant differences in ideological and political theory despite the fact that both movements originate within the same ethnic group, the Tigrean people of northern Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup>

The central problem for the EPLF was that Eritrean nationalism, in as far as it actually existed in the early 1970s when the EPLF was created, was virtually non-existent in the EPLF's own constituency, which was centred on the Kebessa, the central highlands of Eritrea, comprising the historic provinces of Akele Guzai, Serae and Hamasien. These regions are largely synonymous with the area inhabited by the Tigreans of Eritrea, Tigringna speaking, Orthodox Christian, agriculturists. What Eritrean nationalism there was prior to this period existed largely within the Muslim, pastoralist societies to the west, north and east of the Kebessa. This was, politically, the preserve of the original liberation movement, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), ideologically closer to religious separatism than to any "traditional" African anti-colonialism. Indeed, neither the colonial experience, nor the collapse of the Ethio-Eritrean Federation in the 1950s, actually proved sufficient to mobilise any Eritrean-wide sense of nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The first decade of the armed struggle,

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<sup>3</sup>ALEMSEGED, Abbay (1998): *Identity Jilted or Re-imagining Identity: the Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles*, New Jersey: Red Sea Press; MEDHANE, Tadesse (1999): *The Eritrean-Ethiopian War: Retrospect and Prospects*, Addis Abab: Mega Printing.

<sup>4</sup> TEKESTE, Negash (1986): *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940*, University of Uppsala; TEKESTE,

from 1961 to 1974 was confined almost exclusively to the Muslim lowland areas, and was driven more by Muslim fears of Christian government than by any sense of the concept of an independent Eritrean state.

Most problematic for the EPLF was the fact that the Kebessa had previously been an integral part of the state against which the EPLF was attempting to build up a nationalist agenda. This forced the EPLF leadership to create a new past, to invent their version of Eritrea's history, indeed, to fabricate a history of conflict between the Kebessa and the region of Tigray south of the Mareb river. This has involved claims that Medri Bahri, an old name for the area north of the Mareb and reaching to the sea at Massawa, historically constituted a free and self-governing state under its own rulers, and that this state fought against Tigrean rulers from Axumite times. A corollary was the argument that the peoples of the current polity of Eritrea, and those within Tigray Regional State (*killil*) in Ethiopia, had developed distinct historical personae even prior to Italian colonialism, during which some significant differences certainly did appear. The difficulty for the EPLF has been that the Kebessa and its population share both the history and the "collective memory" of the region to the south of the Mareb river, the area of the Tigray *killil*. The population was (and still is) fully aware that both sides of the Mareb had a single pre-colonial, pre-Italian past, going back some eighteen hundred, two thousand years to the time of the Axumite empire. In terms of the "genetic" or "primordial" view of the state the two areas share, *inter alia*, culture, history, language, religion, territory and race.

One result was that the EPLF's efforts were treated with considerable scepticism by the population of the Kebessa, and the EPLF found it surprisingly difficult to mobilise the population of the Kebessa in support of any nationalist vision of an independent Eritrea as it did in other regions of Eritrea where its own ethnic, religious or ideological position was even weaker. In the final analysis, the major factor in generating Eritrean nationalism was the activity of the Ethiopian government itself, and its almost complete failure to produce an acceptable administration. Significantly, for example, as late as 1981-1982 when the

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Negash (1997): *Eritrea and Ethiopia: the Federal Experience*, Uppsala Nordiska Afrika Institutet; ELLINGSON, Lloyd (1986): *Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985*, Dissertation, Michigan State University.

Ethiopian administration made a short-lived but concerted effort to win hearts and minds within the Kebessa it was able to distribute substantial quantities of arms (over 40,000 in 1980) to peasant associations and organise considerable opposition to the EPLF.<sup>5</sup>

Outside the Kebessa, despite the terror employed by the Mengistu regime against its opponents and critics, a majority within, for example, the Kunama and the Afar people was, at best, ambivalent about the EPLF and to a considerable degree actually supported continued unity with Ethiopia. The towns of Barentu and Assab, in the territory of the Kunama and the Afar respectively, as well as Adi Caieh in the Kebessa, survived the substantial successes of the liberation fronts in 1977-1978, when only five towns, all under siege, held out against the ELF and the EPLF. A major factor in the failure to capture these three towns was the support provided by locals to the Ethiopian garrisons. Indeed, several thousand Kunama fought alongside the Ethiopian government during the war; the Kunama have suffered as a result.<sup>6</sup>

It was noticeable that the EPLF had to use conscription in the later 1980s, something the TPLF was able to avoid in Tigray region. It has continued to employ conscription with the National Service programme launched in 1994, under which some 120,000 18-45 year olds have received six monthly training courses followed by a year's development work. Part of the reason for the programme is, specifically, to try and encourage national feeling, re-create the spirit of the struggle against Ethiopia which EPLF leaders feel has been degraded since 1993. There is some reason to believe that the leadership regard the disputes Eritrea has had with Yemen, Djibouti, Sudan and now Ethiopia as a viable and useful way of inculcating nationalism in the younger generation

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. DAWIT, Wolde Giorgis (1989: *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*, New Jersey: Red Sea Press. Dawit Wolde Giorgis was political commissar in Eritrea in the early 1980s.

<sup>6</sup>Kunama opposition groups currently identify at least fifty prominent people still held in late 1998, detained by the Eritrean government without charge or trial since 1991. They also claim there are several secret underground prisons in use around Barentu. A considerable number of Kunama disappeared after 1991, and there is suspicion they were executed. There have been cases of disappearance and kidnapping in Sudan attributed to the EPLF, particularly prior to the deterioration of Eritrea/Sudanese relations in late 1994, including some leaders of the Gash and Setit Liberation Front, a clandestine Kunama movement involved in low level armed struggle in western Eritrea since 1993.

and those who were not actively involved in the struggle for independence.

By contrast, mobilisation in Tigray region proved relatively simple for the TPLF which could call upon an existing concept of Tigrean nationalism, as well as a commonality of religion, of oppression and a shared myth of the past, common to all the areas in which it operated. One intention was certainly to end Amhara rule; for Tigreans, the Amhara, whether in the shape of Emperor Haile Selassie from Shoa, or Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, had usurped their traditional position at the centre of Ethiopian society. In fact, while the TPLF's original aims were more closely linked to achieving power in Tigray itself, the EPLF's own strategic understanding was always that victory in Eritrea would require a wider role for the TPLF and would be dependent upon breaking the political will of the central government in Ethiopia. The TPLF's successes against the military government led to considerable internal debate over several years. In 1979, when a political programme was adopted at the TPLF's first congress, the references were to "self-determination", but even before complete control of Tigray was achieved at the end of the 1980s, the TPLF leadership had set up the first of other organisations to enable it to expand its activities outside Tigringna speaking areas. The Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (now the Amhara National Democratic Movement) was created in 1980 for this purpose, an Amhara movement, and the first element in the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). It was subsequently joined by organisations to represent the Oromo and the Southern Peoples.<sup>7</sup> Even as late as 1989, however, the issue was still a matter of debate.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the convergence of ethnicity and of a common enemy, the relationship of the EPLF and the TPLF was far from smooth. From the beginning there were irritations. While the TPLF remained grateful to the EPLF for its help when it was founded in the mid 1970s, and for its advice, arms, training and personnel,

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<sup>7</sup> The Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (OPDO) was created in 1990; and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF) in 1993. The EPRDF did also include the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM) in the late 1980s, but its necessity vanished with victory in 1991. No other party has yet been incorporated in the EPRDF though considerable efforts have been made to produce acceptable parties in the Somali, Afar, Beni Shangul and Gambella regions.

<sup>8</sup>YOUNG, J. (1997): *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia. The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, 1975-1991*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



less satisfactory even for those like Meles Zenawi who were seen, rightly, as particularly close to the EPLF was the EPLF's continual assumption that it was the senior partner in any relationship and that its views should take precedence. The EPLF's patronising assumptions of superiority were an active irritant to many in the TPLF and, as has become clear in recent months, led to a considerable amount of resentment.

Disagreements arose over military strategy, with the TPLF arguing that the EPLF's move to positional warfare was premature, and criticising it for moving too quickly to the "third stage" of guerrilla war, to holding fixed positions after 1980, and refusing to withdraw from their base area in the Sahel, and its symbolic, but expensive, defence of *Nakfa*. In 1982, in the Red Star campaign, the Ethiopian army nearly captured *Nakfa* and the EPLF had to throw everything in to hold it. Among those deployed were at least two thousand TPLF fighters under training with the EPLF; the TPLF was highly irritated by the EPLF's failure to consult it in advance.

More serious, were the ideological differences which arose in the mid 1980s, largely revolving around the practicality of how to react to the USSR. This became apparent after Meles' rise to authority and the setting up of the TPLF's ideological party, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, whose roots lay in links with Albania and China. The equivalent element in the EPLF, the Eritrean Peoples Revolutionary Party, originally had links with Cuba and Syria, and was aligned more to the Soviet Union. Despite the changes in Soviet policy and its support for Mengistu's government after 1977, the EPLF always resisted labelling the Soviet Union as imperialist, possibly because it felt it might one day need its vote in the Security Council. The MLLT, however, which also established ideological links with more extreme Eritrean Marxists groups, notably the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea and an ELF faction, the ELF-Central Leadership, was unhesitant about condemning the Soviet Union.

This was compounded in the mid-1980s by a major and fundamental disagreement over ethnicity and self-determination. The issue of self-determination leading to secession had been a serious issue for the students at Addis Ababa University in the 1960s and acceptance of "secession" was a defining element in support for the Eritrean cause and in the EPLF's interpretation of Eritrea as a colonial issue. However, the TPLF's own ethnic base,

and its use of ethnicity as a device to rally support elsewhere in Ethiopia led it to expand the argument to include other nationalities in Ethiopia, including Oromos and Somalis. Provocatively, the TPLF then included Eritrean nationalities in the equation, claiming that a "truly democratic" Eritrea would have to respect "the right of its own nationalities up to and including secession". This appalled the EPLF. Eritrea has nine nationalities, but the EPLF has always built on the unique colonial status of Eritrea within Ethiopia, and consistently emphasised the need to create a single nation out of Eritrea's nationalities, three of which are found across the border in Ethiopia, Tigreans, Kunama and Afar. The EPLF was very aware that any widening of the right to independence would diminish Eritrea's special status as a colonially defined territory and complicate Eritrea's already problematic cohesion. Its somewhat inadequate response was to argue that Ethiopian nationalities had a right to self-determination but not to independence as this was conditional upon a colonial experience.

As the relationship deteriorated, the EPLF closed down the TPLF radio which they had allowed to operate, and, most controversially, refused to allow relief supplies to pass through EPLF territory on the way to TPLF held areas. Many Tigreans found this hard to forgive, particularly at a time of acute famine, when the TPLF had implemented a high risk strategy of encouraging the move of 200,000 people into Sudan to an attempt to try and activate international concern and support. It nearly proved disastrous, and was much criticised by the EPLF.

Relations only improved in 1987-88, after the EPLF victory at Af Abet and the TPLF's successes at Enda Selassie. It finally became clear that Mengistu could be defeated militarily and ousted, and that there was the real possibility of taking over in Addis Ababa. As a result the TPLF took the pragmatic decision to moderate its ideological stance, and to restore its alliance with the EPLF. A four day meeting of the leaderships, in April 1988 in Khartoum, ironed out the main differences, though several outstanding issues (including demarcation of their common border of operations) were simply put to one side. EPLF units then played a significant role in the final overthrow of Mengistu's armies inside Ethiopia and the capture of military bases near Addis Ababa, entering Addis Ababa with the TPLF.

In May 1991 the EPLF (which became the Peoples Front Democracy and Justice, PFDJ, in 1994) took over in Asmara, and Eritrea achieved *de facto* independence (formal, *de jure*, independence came in May 1993, after the referendum). That same month the EPRDF took power in Addis Ababa. There was a general, not unreasonable, assumption that Ethiopia and Eritrea were entering on a new and friendly relationship. The war was over, Mengistu was gone, and the then existing close relationship between the TPLF, the central and controlling element of the EPRDF, and the EPLF indicated the possibilities of a new relationship. Agreements that were made in 1991 and 1993 allowed for the reciprocal rights of citizens, for Eritrea's use of Ethiopia's *Birr*, for an amicable division of assets, and regulated Ethiopia's use of Assab to minimise the effects of its loss of a coastline. A total of 25 protocol agreements were signed in 1993 including one for the co-ordination of development strategies and another to harmonise fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies. There was an apparently clear intention that the ultimate objective was to be economic integration for the sub-region. Any friction appeared to be minor, and certainly solvable with goodwill. Those in Ethiopia who remained opposed to Eritrean independence appeared cowed or, at the least, grudgingly acceptant.

However, the renewal of the relationship and the alliance was founded merely on pragmatic and political decisions based on the events of 1987-1991. None of the longer term theoretical problems were seriously addressed, and, almost inevitably, it almost immediately ran into difficulties. The independence of Eritrea, whether *de facto* or *de jure*, produced an entirely new set of problems, partly because neither side had properly thought through the respective, or joint, strategic and economic effects. The Eritrean government had, for example, expressed the ambition of making Eritrea a regional financial and service centre, without any apparent consideration of how this might affect Ethiopia. In January 1997, a joint Review Committee advised that the 1993 protocols should be completely revised on the grounds that neither side had made any serious efforts at implementation; that both had issued numerous regulations covering trade and investment without consultation; and that no progress had been made, or even attempted, to try and harmonise their macroeconomic policies.

For Ethiopia the problem included the real or, equally important, the perceived effects of having about half a million Eritreans continuing to live in Ethiopia with free access to jobs, at a time when a claimed 150,000 Ethiopians were abruptly expelled from Eritrea in 1991 and 1992. The Ethiopian government's failure to protest over the expulsions was much resented. There was a general, and largely accurate, belief that there was no real reciprocity over access to employment, and that it was Eritrea and Eritreans, particularly those in Ethiopia, largely benefiting at the expense of Ethiopia. Eritrea was seen as obtaining significant trade advantages by the continued use of Ethiopia's *Birr*, acquired in the shape of loans at independence, which were then used to export Ethiopian produce, notably coffee and obtain hard currency for Eritrea rather than Ethiopia. Export figures do not support the wilder claims that Eritrea was able to outstrip Ethiopia as a coffee exporter, but they were widely believed in Ethiopia, almost becoming an article of faith. According to recent Ethiopian claims, Eritrea made little or no effort to meet repayment schedules of loans provided at independence, possibly regarding as war reparations. A growing Tigrean middle class began to show some unease over an apparently "pro-Eritrean" economic policy; and over Ethiopia's involvement in the US-backed anti-Sudan front, widely regarded as for Eritrea's benefit rather than for Ethiopia or Tigray. One effect, indeed, was virtually to nullify the value of Tigray's acquisition of the valuable farming lands of Setit-Humera and of an international border with Sudan under the constitutional changes of 1995.

In Eritrea, there have been a number of similar issues that have caused irritation and concern, from the original refusal of Ethiopia to provide any reparations (though Ethiopia claimed it left significant assets behind), to the growth of industry in Tigray, seen as a deliberate attempt to weaken fledgling industries in Eritrea. Border controls affected food supplies into Eritrea; and Ethiopia's decision to import refined oil products and essentially limit its use of the ageing Assab oil refinery, while commercially defensible, caused financial loss to Eritrea. There was the introduction of the new currencies, the *Nakfa* in Eritrea, and a new *Birr* note in Ethiopia, followed by a much resented insistence from Ethiopia that Letters of Credit and hard currency must be used for all except the most minor cross-border commercial

exchanges. This essentially destroyed the main point of the operation for Eritrea which had hoped to use the introduction of the *Nakfa* to solve its shortage of currency reserves; the major source for these remains overseas remittances.

It is against this background that the complication of border problems should be set, ranging from Om Hager/Humera in the west; Badume and the Yirga triangle around Sheraro between the Merab and the Takazze rivers; Tserona and Zalemessa north of Adigrat; Alitiena and Irob a little further east; Badda in the northern Dankalia depression; and Bore on the road to Assab. The situation in each of these is different, and neither maps nor historical background can necessarily be relied upon to provide solutions. Significantly, several of these areas involve cross-border ethnic groups, the Afar at Bore and Badda; the Saho in Irob; the Kunama and the Tigreans at Badme. All are complex.

At Badme, and in the Yirga triangle, the area has been settled over the past two or three generations by Tigreans from central Tigray regions as well as by groups of Eritrean farmers from Hamasien. Much of the area, however, was previously inhabited, and is still, used, by the agro-pastoral Kunama, whose main centre is Barentu, further north in Eritrea. Historically the Kunama were resistant to the idea of an independent Eritrea, and fought for the Ethiopian government against the EPLF and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) during the independence war; a significant number of Kunama now live around Axum inside Ethiopia, having fled to escape possible EPLF reprisals in 1991 or earlier. With both central Eritrea and Tigray region suffering from land shortages, and the possibility of gold exploitation in the area, the possibilities for dispute are considerable. An additional dimension in this area has been that after 1961 and the start of the Eritrean struggle, this was an Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) operational area. When the ELF were ousted from Eritrea in 1981, by the EPLF in conjunction with the TPLF, it was the TPLF which took over in Badme area, making Sheraro a major base, though the EPLF did keep a presence nearby at Shilalo. Reportedly, there was earlier discussion over the area, and claims that Meles Zenawi did once agree that the area was Eritrean. Whether this is true or not, it was certainly agreed that such problems could be sorted out after the war, and a boundary commission be set up. This did not, however, meet until late 1997, and it was rapidly overtaken by events in 1998.

Similarly, Alitiena, occupied by Eritrean forces in May 1998, is shown by most maps as a part of Eritrea, but it is also usually identified as part of the district of Irob which has always been administered from Ethiopia, and was traditionally a part of Agame, going back to the 16th century. The population is Saho, a majority of whom are Muslim, though the three main lineages in Irob are largely Christian. Most consider themselves Tigrean, though they have at times paid tribute/taxes to Afar sultans. Irob has some significance because of its salt, which is exported through Eritrea; and also because of its position: whoever controls Irob can dominate Badda below in the Danakil depression, and Badda has the best land and water in the northern depression. A further complication is that this is an area of interest to the Afar Revolutionary Democratic United Front (ARDUF) which has been, and is still, fighting for the unity of the Afars, of both Ethiopia and Eritrea, as an autonomous unit within Ethiopia. It is a policy which brings ARDUF into conflict with both the EPLF/PFDJ in Eritrea and the TPLF in Ethiopia.

### 3 The EPRDF and the Policies of Ethnicity in Ethiopia

Eritrean independence, of course, has not affected the existence of the Ethiopian polity, but the EPRDF's acceptance of Eritrea's separate status, and its own decision to opt for an ethnic solution to the crisis of the Ethiopian state, did underline the point that Ethiopia has been going through one of its periodic reactions to over-centralisation since the late 1960s. In fact, the possibility of regional, ethnically based, autonomy was already being explored under Mengistu's previous regime, if with little enthusiasm and largely with the specific aim of weakening Eritrean "separatism". The military government created an autonomous region of Assab which went a considerable way, if only temporarily, towards putting the Afars of Eritrea and Ethiopia under a single, and Afar controlled, administration in 1987. On a political level this had the added possible advantage of safeguarding Ethiopian use of Assab and the route to the sea. The regime also gave consideration towards the possibility of an autonomous region for the Kunama, in south western Eritrea, and in 1988/89 allowed an Eritrean Lowland Group to publicise its aims of creating a separate region for Muslims in the eastern Eritrean lowlands. The military government also set up an Institute of Nationalities which gave a wider and considerable impetus towards the concept of regional, ethnically based administrative units elsewhere in Ethiopia.

These hesitant moves were superseded by the EPRDF's far more vigorous approach after 1991. As already noted the EPRDF grew out of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, and the TPLF was, in origin, regionally based within a region of largely Tigrean population. It was a specifically Tigrean party, whose original strength lay exactly in its Tigrean ethnicity, its Tigrean nationalism. Part of its original appeal, aimed to minimise support for the more conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union which also operated in Tigray region, was to the history of Tigrean struggle against the central Amhara government, looking back to the last Tigrean emperor, Yohannis IV, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to the "Woyane" revolt of 1943 against Haile Selassie. Indeed, the TPLF picked up and used the name "Woyane"; more recently it has also been

used in a slightly derogatory sense, as in "the Woyanes". While it was the local Tigrean element which largely provided the young student radicals of the TPLF with support from the highly conservative peasantry of Tigray, it was their ruthless organisational ability which channelled and kept this support.<sup>9</sup>

As with all the political movements in Ethiopia in the 1970s, most of which originated in the Marxist student movement of the later 1960s, the TPLF did also have an alternative ideological basis. This became most clearly apparent in 1985 when the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) was set up with the intention to provide the TPLF, and indeed Ethiopia, with a hard line socialist vanguard party. The models for the MLLT were Stalin, Mao and Albania. Other nationalities were brought into the EPRDF on the same basis. The Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM) for Amharas gave birth to the Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Force (EMLF), in 1989; the Oromo element in the EPRDF, the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (OPDO), did not produce an Oromo equivalent but its existence is implicit in the creation of the OPDO itself. The main Oromo opposition movement in the 1980s, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) claims that its negotiations with the TPLF broke down in 1988 precisely on the issue of ideology and because the TPLF demanded acceptance of the MLLT's ideological position. However, despite the ideological success of the MLLT within the TPLF, bringing Meles Zenawi, the chairman of the MLLT, to the leadership, by the late 1980s pragmatism had prevailed. The EPRDF publicly converted to multi-party democracy, winning the critical, but necessary, approbation of the United States, and accepting most of the elements of a mixed economy, though it has retained the organisational structures of the vanguard party. The EPLF, in Eritrea, similarly, found it necessary to pledge support for a concept of multi-party democracy to acquire U.S. support for its independence, though subsequent reservations and longer time frame has rendered this commitment nugatory.

The problem for the TPLF, however, was that having dropped socialism it had no alternative ideology to fall back upon to build up an Ethiopia wide party - even if it wanted to; it isn't, in fact, entirely clear how far it might want to produce something different. The MLLT does still exist and its intended, or actual role,

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<sup>9</sup> YOUNG, J. (1997): *op. cit.*, see also GEBRU, Tareke (1991): *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,



in any multi-party, ethnically-based federal state remains uncertain. The TPLF power base was Tigrean and socialist. The overt loss of the socialist element meant the organisation had to depend upon its ethnic base; that in turn meant alliances with other ethnic groups as the Tigrean nationality was simply not large enough to control the country directly. Tigreans in Ethiopia number a little over 3 million, and even if the Tigreans in Eritrea are included, the total (of 4.5 million) is less than a quarter of the number of either Amharas or Oromos. In other words, the TPLF, and by extension the EPRDF, was locked into ethnic nationalism whatever the potential dangers or problems. There is little sign that the EPRDF has evolved from this position, or made any serious effort to build up any Ethiopia-wide party on the basis of issues. This is not to say that the TPLF is uninterested, but, for example, no multi-national peasant party has appeared, nor has there been any effort to create parties on the basis of, for example, labour, the environment or similar issues, possibly because issue-based parties are difficult to organise within an essentially vertically-based system of ethnicity or nationality, in contrast with the class-based, horizontal, systems of western Europe, as President Museveni has claimed in Uganda. It is given some point by the failure of attempts by Mengistu and others in Ethiopia to create socialist parties in the past.

The EPRDF therefore remains a coalition of ethnic regional parties, organised and controlled by its founding element, the EPLF. This has been reinforced by the approach it has used of setting up support for the EPRDF within other nationalities - a specific policy of control through surrogate parties, making it difficult, if not impossible, for parties or groups of parties outside the EPRDF to produce any national or even any separate regional agenda. The Afars and the Somalis have done most in this connection, and significantly these are the two peoples among whom the EPRDF policy of surrogate parties has been least successful. In neither region has the EPRDF managed to create an acceptable party and administration, and in the Somali region five successive elected governments have been dismissed because they proved insufficiently amenable to central government instruction.

At one level, the EPRDF's approach may be seen as a more realistic variant of regional autonomy, (or indeed of 19th century regional princedoms). It is a restructuring of the Ethiopian state on

more democratic lines and on the basis of self-determination, but only within certain very well defined limits, limits which, in fact, seem unlikely to allow any self-determination in practice. There is little reason to think that the EPRDF seriously believes that the Eritrean decision to opt for full independence will be repeated by other ethnic groups. Indeed, arguably, it has made very sure that this won't happen though it does allow a constitutional process for secession, if extremely lengthy and difficult. The parallel should be drawn with the Soviet Union, where secession was accepted in principle, but in every possible case it appeared the time was just never right. The Ethiopian constitution requires a two-thirds majority in favour in the regional assembly and subsequently a majority vote in a regional referendum organised by the federal government. It is the federal authority which is also responsible for organising the transfer of power. The experiences of parties that have backed self-determination in the Somali and Oromo regions certainly suggest that the EPRDF sees this as a theoretical rather than a practical option; in this sense there is little evidence that the EPRDF supports the break-up of the Ethiopian state, and a lot to suggest that its main aim is to keep control of the whole country - though it is not clear if this will satisfy the aspirations of Somalis, Oromos and others which are increasingly moving towards self-determination in the absence of realistic democratic structures inside the country. The independence of Eritrea was something different, however much criticised by opponents of the EPRDF and those emotionally attached to Eritrea as part of Ethiopia. The EPLF won their war, and choose independence; the then Ethiopian government had no option but to accept the decision.

In July 1991, almost immediately after its take-over, the EPRDF convened a National Conference, calling together representatives from 20 organisations to discuss the political future and establish a transitional government. It was, however, very carefully stage-managed - the EPRDF produced the agenda and a national charter for the 87 seat council to accept, organised seat allocations and, indeed, created most of the political groups which attended. It had already decided that an ethnically based federal system, theoretically allowing for self-determination, was the answer to the ethnic problems of a multi-ethnic Ethiopian state. It was not a matter of discussion; the solution was incorporated in the 1994 constitution. It provided for

nine states, based on ethnicity and language, though it is clear that these are not necessarily exclusive. The historic pattern of conquest, absorption, migration and so on has created a more complex structure than a mere nine states suggests. Anomalies persist and remain a problem - hardly surprising in a state with 280 languages in all, and with at least two nationalities (Amhara and Gurage) spread nation-wide. The EPRDF has continued to show some flexibility, particularly on the Zonal level to accommodate local demands.

As noted, the constitution does allow for the possibility of secession, something which caused a great deal of concern, particularly among Amharas. It was argued that the EPRDF had accepted Eritrean independence too easily, that the common Tigrean ethnicity of the EPLF and TPLF leaderships meant that the TPLF had a hidden agenda for a Greater Tigray state, and that the ultimate intention was the destruction of Ethiopia as a polity. The current conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia has gone a long way to satisfying these doubts, and has certainly established Meles Zenawi's own Ethiopian credentials, his "Ethiopian-ness".

Since 1991 a whole series of elections has taken place; local and regional elections in 1992; constituent assembly elections in June 1994, to ratify the draft constitution in December 1994; federal and regional assembly elections for the creation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in May 1995; local, *woreda*, elections, in 1995 and 1997. In virtually all cases, the major internal opposition parties boycotted the elections and external opposition parties either refused or were refused permission to participate, and the reports of international observers in both 1992 and 1995 make it clear that opposition allegations of interference and harassment by the EPRDF were essentially true. Their reports make numerous references to widespread political intimidation, arrests of opposition party officials and closures of their offices prior to the vote. There were also reports of government electoral officials instructing people how to vote and where to place votes for government candidates; of voters being told they would lose land or property if they voted wrongly; and of government supporters with several registration cards at a time. The Norwegian Observer Group at the 1995 elections concluded ..."The Norwegian Observer Group cannot characterise the Regional and Federal elections in Ethiopia as 'free, fair and impartial'. Conducting elections as a

mere formality and claiming democracy without having any democratic public debate is a futile exercise.....[the 1995 elections] did not allow free competition between all legal political alternatives. Moreover, people in rural areas had good reason to fear negative consequences if they did not vote for the EPRDF or its member parties...".<sup>10</sup>

Results of the 1995 elections were a foregone conclusion; of the 49 parties competing, 39 were either members of the EPRDF, or surrogate and satellite organisations created by it. The EPRDF, which had the advantage of being the government, was easily the best organised and financed, and with its allies won an overwhelming victory taking 493 seats in the 547 seat assembly; almost all the remainder were "independents" associated with the EPRDF. One opposition party, the Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP) put forward 85 candidates, but although described by the government press as a "loyal" opposition party only managed to get a single token seat.

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<sup>10</sup>TRONVOLL, K. (1995): *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia - an Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, The confidential report of the 1995 elections, drawn up by the Donor Election Unit, chaired by the then British Ambassador, agreed: "...One DEU mission estimated that over a broad area in several regions more than 80% of the closing reports were incomplete or contained major mistakes...In many polling stations the DEU observed, the secrecy of the ballots were not fully ensured, particularly in rural areas. Public voting and the direction of voters [inside the polling stations] inherently raises questions about the expression of the voter's choice...".

## 4 The Failure of Opposition

While the TPLF/EPRDF has been remarkably effective in redefining Ethiopian politics in terms of ethnicity and federalism, and these certainly cannot now be ignored, this process has left the opposition floundering, and fractured, apparently unable to produce any serious or coherent alternative, and certainly unable to produce any unified policies.

One strand of opposition appeals to ethnic self-determination and possible independence. Often involving armed struggle, it is found among Oromos, Somalia and Afars, but has split all three communities. The original Oromo opposition movement to the previous regime, the Oromo Liberation Front, was involved in the post-1991 Transitional Government for a year. It then attempted to launch armed struggle in mid-1992, accusing the EPRDF, with some justice, of being partisan towards its own Oromo organisation. The attempt was a serious failure, and led to considerable recriminations within the OLF. The OLF has always been affected by the lack of cohesion between its intellectual, radical, often Christian, western Oromo wing, and its more traditional, Muslim and animist supporters in the south and east. There are indications that a significant element within the former group has tried to talk with the EPRDF though without success. In 1996 a new Oromo party, the Oromo National Congress was set up in Addis Ababa. This calls for a common front of all Oromo organisations and rejects what it calls the elitist approach of the OLF, but its policies are close to those of the EPRDF's OPDO on land and it is against secession. It seems designed to appeal to the dissident elements of the OLF, and many of its members are drawn from ex-members of 1970s left wing organisations which had substantial backing from Oromo intellectuals. It seems likely to gain from recent changes in the OLF which elected a new and more military leadership last year, apparently aimed at the over 8 million Oromo Muslims (there were a total of 18.7 million Oromos in the 1994 census), and draw support away from several smaller Oromo Muslim organisations operating in the south and south east. The change of emphasis also appears to be benefiting, perhaps coincidentally, from an alliance with the Eritrean government as a result of the Ethiopia-Eritrean conflict. The OLF, reportedly, has been in receipt of

military largesse from Asmara in the last few months. Its operations remain small scale and local, but it is also able to use both Somali and Kenyan territory with relative impunity. Ethiopia's improved relations with Sudan has meant the OLF presence in western Ethiopia has however been sharply curtailed during the last eighteen months.

The OLF is, however, unlikely to move very far towards Islam as this would risk seriously alienating many of its traditional constituencies among the business community, Oromo professionals and intellectuals to whom Oromo independence has considerable appeal, as it would allow a move away from the economic and political controls of the EPRDF and the central government. Equally, although the OPDO has found it difficult to make inroads into these groups, it has been able to increase its support through its use of the state administration, organising *kebeles*, Peace and Stability committees, local militia units, and the creation of the Oromo Development Association; the widespread use of state appointments has provided the OPDO with a significant core of support particularly within the urban areas. One of its major problems, however, has been the effects of having to implement undiluted EPRDF policies, notably over land. The traditional northern land usage systems of the Tigreans and the Amharas have considerable parallels with the present leasehold system of state owned land. This is not the case in Oromo areas where current state policies are far less acceptable. Oromos originally welcomed the 1975 land reform and the government of Mengistu Haile Mariam precisely because, mistakenly, they believed it allowed them land ownership. Present land policies are a major constraint on wider OPDO support. Nevertheless, despite its late arrival on the Oromo political scene, it is now a genuine political force, and a real rival to the OLF for the banner of Oromo secular nationalism.

Somali regional politics have been overshadowed by a similar split between groups prepared to operate within the EPRDF consensus and those continuing to push for more immediate Somali self-determination. The problems of the region have also been compounded by the differences between the region's largest clan, the Ogaden, and most of the other 14 clans represented in the regional state. The present Somali regional government is the fifth such government since 1992, and four previous presidents have been removed, ostensibly for

incompetence, corruption, misuse of resources and similar allegations. In reality, their major fault appears to have been a failure to control Ogaden and other Somali pressures towards self-determination, and to limit the activities of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) or of al-Itahaad al-Islami. In fact, the ONLF split in 1995 with one small faction being persuaded to take part in the elections; al-Itahaad, following Ethiopian military operations across the border into Somalia in 1996-1997, has decided to concentrate on activity within Somalia itself. Nevertheless, the government of the Ethio-Somali Democratic League, remains fragile and at the mercy of clan alliances. It is seen as an essentially Dir and Isaaq government in which the Darod and Ogaden feel they do not have the role that they deserve. A significant element of the ONLF remains disaffected, and signed a military co-operation agreement with the OLF in 1996; there are reports that the ONLF is now going to benefit from Eritrean military largesse like the OLF.

The Afar region is another where the EPRDF has had particular difficulty in creating an acceptable party, partly because of the existence of parties long pre-dating the creation of an EPRDF backed and supported Afar Peoples Democratic Organisation. These included the Afar Liberation Front of Sultan Alimirreh of Assieta, the major southern Afar Sultanate and the more radical Afar National Liberation Front which appeared under the military government. The ALF has split in the last few years into two wings, each headed by a son of Sultan Alimirreh; and two other northern Afar parties have appeared. These divisions have meant that the APDO has no real rival within the region, but it has also failed to create any consensus to deal with the major unresolved factor in Afar politics, the Afar Revolutionary Democratic United Front (ARDUF) and its Ugugomo militia. ARDUF has brought together several Afar groups operating armed struggle in support of its call for self-determination, within Ethiopia, for the Afars of both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ultimately ARDUF wants an all Afar independent state, including those in Djibouti, but downplays this for now to avoid confrontation with the French and Djibouti governments.

The Afar have a better claim than most of Ethiopia's nationalities to be considered a potential nation state, and the current Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict has highlighted Afar claims because of the significance of Assab. One obvious solution to the

perennial disputes over Assab, which has no viability except as a port of an Afar state or for Ethiopia, would be to accept ARDUF's claims and create an Afar state in eastern Ethiopia and southern Eritrea. It is not a suggestion that would appeal to Eritrea.

APDO also faces what appears to be a general crisis of pastoralism within Ethiopia. The EPRDF would certainly like to take advantage of the problems of the Afar region, as of the Somali region, to begin its declared intention of sedentarising nomadic populations. According to the EPRDF, "objective economic realities" insist that nomadic and agro-pastoral peoples must be settled. It has tried to take advantage of shortages of grazing to encouragement settlement, but there is growing concern in the region over the encroachment of commercial farming on dry season grazing, and on the advance of Issa Somalis from the south into traditional Afar lands. Many Afars believe the EPRDF, which currently needs Djibouti as a route for imports and exports more than ever before, is turning a blind eye to the activities of the Issas, who provide the ruling group in Djibouti. President Hassan Gouled Aptidon and his anointed successor, Ismail Omar Guellah, are both Issa, and Djibouti has lined up with Ethiopia in its conflict with Eritrea. In turn Ethiopia has been prepared to provide troops to help defend the road and rail links from Djibouti to Addis Ababa from attacks by the Eritrean backed Djibouti opposition, the Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie (FRUD) of Ahmed Dini.

A second strand of opposition includes exile based organisations which also claim to be involved in armed struggle but which eschew ethnic politics, basing their activity on an appeal to the integrity of the Ethiopian state. These range across the political spectrum but include elements of several left wing parties like the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces, which brings together the former left wing parties, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON), or the Ethiopian Salvation Party, MEDHIN, as well as factions of the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union Party (EDUP), or of Kefegne, operating in Gondar area. There are also a number of small groups in the south which claim military leadership. These do tap into significant emotional support for the concept of Ethiopia and for Ethiopian nationalism, in general and not just within the Amhara, against the possible dismemberment of the state. Their attraction has waned as it has become clear



that the EPRDF is also opposed to stand up for the concept. The EPRDF's recent successful defence of "Ethiopia" against Eritrean aggression is likely to cause a further decline in support for such groups; total rejection of ethnicity appears to have little political future.

More significant in current internal politics are the non-violent and internal opposition groups, both urban and rural, visible in the All Amhara Peoples Organisation (AAPO), and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) and its component parts, even though they have been finding it increasingly difficult to operate under such heavy government pressure.

Most visible has been AAPO, partly because of the publicity attracted by the EPRDF's treatment of its chairman, Professor Asrat Woldeyes. AAPO was set up and registered as a political party in January 1992 to support the concept of a unitary state in Ethiopia rather than the federal and ethnic state structure of the EPRDF, though it is prepared to work within it; it also opposed the secession of Eritrea, and argued against allowing Eritrea to hold a referendum on independence, suggesting that this was a matter that the whole of Ethiopia should vote on. While drawing much of its support from the Amhara nationality, AAPO claimed registration as a national party rather than a regional or purely Amhara one, in part because it draws support from Amharas living in all parts of Ethiopia. It expanded rapidly, and ran into problems within a matter of months. By May 1994, it claimed that 41 of its central committee members and regional representatives had been arrested or imprisoned, and hundreds of others abducted or killed for supporting or sympathising with it, particularly in the regions of Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo, Hararghe and Arsi. There is no doubt that party officials were often arrested and detained on arbitrary charges; and indeed frequently on no charge at all; members or even suspected members suffered likewise. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) largely accepts AAPO claims over both extra-judicial killings and detentions.<sup>11</sup> Where AAPO offices were allowed to remain open,

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<sup>11</sup>ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (EHRCO) (1993-1998): *Reports, 1993-1998*, Addis Ababa: EHRCO. EHRCO has been extensively criticised by the EPRDF which claims it is a political organisation. The evidence, however, suggests it has been meticulous in its collection of factual evidence without regard to the political opinions of victims of abuse, and it is highly regarded by both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Africa.

they were closely monitored, even when AAPO did not take part in any elections, as in 1995, when the security presence was open and intimidatory around AAPO's headquarters before and during the regional and federal elections in 1995 with scores of AAPO members detained.

More recently, AAPO attempted to take part in the December 1997 *woreda* elections, trying to re-open its Debre Berhane office which had been seized by the EPRDF two years earlier. Following a formal written request the AAPO's representative in Debre Berhane was detained and held for five days; the lawyer hired to pursue the matter was threatened by the court and was intimidated into resigning the case. In the event AAPO did not reopen the office, and did not participate in the election. One opposition party that did, in the Southern Region, was the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition (SEPDC). It won two seats, but subsequently listed a number of complaints: that only 24 of its 102 proposed candidates were allowed to stand, that its members were often refused permission to register as voters, that ballot boxes in a number of polling stations were filled prior to the opening of the polling station, and that there was open intimidation including threats of eviction from land or jobs and the prevention of access to government services including the distribution of fertiliser to farmers. The evidence suggests these allegations are substantially true.

AAPO claims its members are still liable to be arrested if seen reading the party paper, *Andinet Lissan*, in towns like Nazareth, Bahr Dar or in Dire Dawa, away from any possible international media spotlight. It also claims its members face random and irregular house searches authorised by the *kebele* administrations as well as a variety of other pressures including frequent visits by security forces, continuous surveillance, irregular searches, questions about arms or the whereabouts of missing relatives, short-term detentions, possible beatings, ill-treatment or even torture.

AAPO's chairman, Professor Asrat Woldeyes was first arrested in July 1993, with four other AAPO members, shortly after his dismissal from the University, one of 41 academics dismissed or who did not have their contracts renewed that year; 39 of them were Amhara. They were accused of holding a meeting at which violent attacks were planned on the government. All were given

two year sentences. According to Amnesty International, which had observers at the trial, this was on the "*basis of slender and dubious evidence and without direct proof of the alleged conspiracy*". Professor Asrat was subsequently accused and convicted on separate charges of inciting inter-ethnic violence at a AAPO rally although, again, there appeared to be considerable doubt about the strength of the allegations and the evidence produced. Professor Asrat, consistently denied all charges against him, and has been regarded as a political prisoner and as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

His fourth trial started in 1996 and has been notable for the detailed descriptions of torture made by his co-defendants. Their allegations have included claims of continuous beatings with rubber cables, pistol whipping, the beating of shins with iron bars, hands pulled and tied behind the back with electric wire, hands and feet tied together behind the back, refusal of medical assistance, shortages of food and clothing, imprisonment for days in lightless cells, and mock executions. None of these claims have been denied or refuted, though judges at the hearing have refused to order any investigation.<sup>12</sup>

AAPO, like Professor Asrat, has been accused persistently by the state media of "war-mongering", and, in 1996, of having a military wing. This accusation followed the detention of the chairman of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), Dr. Taye Wolde-Semayat and other ETA members. The ETA and the EPRDF had been at loggerheads over the government's language policies, and the ETA had been under severe government pressure. Dr Taye was arrested in May 1996, after he returned from a trip abroad. It was alleged he was the leader of a previously unknown Ethiopian National Patriotic Front, planning to foment violence and overthrow the government, and described as the military wing of AAPO. AAPO immediately denied the charge. The treatment of Dr. Taye, chained 24 hours a day for three months in late 1996, generated international criticism, and all but one of the charges against him were subsequently dropped, though his case continued. Allegations of torture have

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<sup>12</sup> For details see: *Ethiopian Register* - Vol. 4, number 8, August 1997; Vol. 4, number 9, September 1997; Vol. 4, number 12, December 1997; Vol. 5, number 3, March 1998, Vol. 5, number 5, May 1998 and Vol. 5, number 6, June 1998.

also been made by his co-defendants.<sup>13</sup> Professor Asrat himself was hospitalised after a stroke in January 1998, suffering from high blood pressure, diabetes and severe deterioration of sight. Last December, after strong international representations, he was finally allowed to go the United States for medical treatment unavailable in Ethiopia. It is not entirely clear whether the charges in his current trial have now been dropped or merely postponed until his return.

Both AAPO and SEPDC belong to the Coalition of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia, (CAFPDE) a coalition of some thirty groups. Set up in 1993, and finally obtaining registration in 1996, it is one of the few national parties currently active. Most of the smaller regional and ethnic opposition parties went into hibernation after 1995, and the majority are unlikely to reappear for the next regional and federal elections due later this year. There is considerable disillusionment with a system which allows for no possibility of success and very little prospect of even acquiring a token presence in the political institutions. All have found it difficult to raise sufficient funds to operate at any realistic level. CAFPDE itself brings together ethnic and non-ethnic parties, professional organisations and, in theory, exile based groups, including the wing of COEDF which has rejected armed struggle. It's perhaps the most serious prospect for meaningful opposition but it is handicapped by its own divisions, by failures of organisation and shortages of finance. It does provide organised criticism of EPRDF policies and has spoken against state ownership of land and the government leasehold system, and raised issues of human rights. However, it operates under increasingly heavy, and often petty, government pressures, including the arrest and detention of officials, closures of offices, a lack of access to the state media and a consistent campaign of denigration against its chairman, Dr. Beyene Petros.

Despite the difficulties and the problems they face, it is likely that AAPO, SEPDC and CAFPDE will all try and take part in the next elections, if only because the constitution allows for parties which fail to take part in two elections to be de-registered. Their presence will however have little or no effect on the EPRDF's continued insistence on continuing control of regional policies within the federal structure or on the EPRDF's certain success in the

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<sup>13</sup>*Ethiopian Register* - Vol. 4, number 8 August 1997; Vol. 4, number 12, December 1997.

next elections. There are clear indications on the national political scene that decision making is being re-centralised, that the space provided by the 1994 constitution for ethnic identity, for regional autonomy, for local democracy, is being squeezed tighter. In Eritrea, of course, no such space has yet been given and it appears from the Eritrean constitution of 1997 that none will be provided on an ethnic or regional basis. The government of the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), remains committed to a more obviously centralised and controlled system.

## 5 The EPRDF, Democracy and the Structure of Control

Western liberal style democracy is a recent development even in its home area. It only arose out of industrial and urban development during the last 100 years and, as such, does not necessarily have any applicable basis in the Horn of Africa, even though realistic participation in decision making can be fully compatible with a centralised, decentralised, or an ethnic state. The view of democracy held by the TPLF and the EPRDF appears to be based more on the concept of the general will of the people, united in the recognition of various nationalities as linked through the four party EPRDF, composed as it is of parties representing the Tigrean, Amhara, Oromo and a number of Southern Peoples. This concept allows for elections to be interpreted in terms of registration and turnout rather than in terms of the number of different parties or policies involved. Equally, the EPRDF, particularly its main component, the TPLF, still appears to retain a Marxist theory of representation, with EPRDF parties representing the peasantry as an undifferentiated class. This identifies a distinction between the nationalism of the peasantry (protective and non-threatening) as opposed to the ethnic nationalism of the elites, which it sees as competitive within government and regional structures. The concept allows for a multi-nationality federation, providing the first step towards a genuine Ethiopian nationalism compatible with membership of any ethnic group. Access to the federal state, however, is mediated through the EPRDF, which carefully selects and trains local leadership. The EPRDF also interprets the policies of the state. The emphasis on the role of the peasantry certainly suggests that the EPRDF is much more aware of development needs, but the attitude towards, for example, pastoralists suggests this awareness is confined to the agricultural highland peasantry.<sup>14</sup>

The EPRDF is not a party. It is a united front of separate parties, and membership only comes through component parts. Its leadership is made up of representatives from its four parties,

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<sup>14</sup>YOUNG, J. (1997): *op. cit.*

but Meles Zenawi, the prime minister, previously president, is the centre of authority in the TPLF, and therefore in the EPRDF and in the government; the TPLF remains the controlling and organising body. All significant decisions are now taken in the prime minister's office - which operates through committees covering the regions, the ministries and specific policy areas. There are of course non-Tigreans in government, the army and administration, but the majority are members of other EPRDF parties. At the centre remains the TPLF with its very highly organised security apparatus, run under the somewhat misleading title of General Manager of Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs, which inherited virtually all the files of its predecessor. The EPRDF is not overtly dictatorial. Meles prefers to operate through consensus, and he is certainly both flexible and pragmatic. There have been significant disagreements over policy issues within the TPLF, over de-politicisation, and demobilisation of the military, recruitment of non-Tigreans into the army; state ownership of land, land redistribution and rents in Addis Ababa. What there has not been is any weakening of control and authority.

While the EPRDF clearly accepts the devolution of authority as far down the structure as possible, it is also apparent that this is the case only on the assumption that there will be no challenge to the overall system. In the last resort, it is an imposed system, and, in the short term at least, firmly controlled. In this sense, it is a form of democracy which, historically, has been abused consistently. Certainly, the kind of democratic and civil society envisaged by the EPRDF, and indeed by most of its critics and opponents, raise questions over its commitment to accountability, transparency, human rights and realistic popular involvement in the decision making processes. The evidence suggests the EPRDF is continuing to manipulate the political process as it feels necessary. Political parties continue to be created or disbanded as appropriate. The EPRDF has tried to install politically acceptable surrogate parties in every region. They have not proved particularly successful despite (or perhaps because of) incorporating all the Tigrean innovations, "revolutionary democracy", local assemblies (*baitos*), village groupings (*tabia*), self evaluation (*gim gima*), development associations and endowment funds. In theory, this clearly provides an alternative form of democratic discussion as also exemplified in the village or local assembly of elders practised in

Somalia and many other areas. In practice, the reality still appears to be one of control. There have been few indications of realistic democratic activity.

Nor have local and federal assemblies shown much in the way of any signs of independent action. The Council of People's Representatives in Addis Ababa has elected committees to scrutinise policy areas, but there has been little indication, again so far, that the Council will prove more than a rubber-stamp organisation. Government policy suggests it expects the Council to remain so. On the regional level, without opposition parties taking part, the councils have even less democratic validity. One weakness is that, with the exception of the TPLF, all the EPRDF parties came to power as government parties, without a democratic base, and without even having the integrity of a vanguard party. All were created by the TPLF, and they have found it difficult even with state patronage, to build any genuine base of support.

One key element to ensure political control is the *gim gima*. These are public self-evaluation meetings, originally started among TPLF fighters after military operations to draw lessons from a battle. The party rapidly saw the value of the idea and it was soon used extensively to keep discipline first in the party and then among mass organisations, and in peasant associations, *kebeles*. Village assemblies, *baitos* meetings, acquired more than a touch of the concept, which draws on traditional Tigrean culture as well as Maoism, one of the major influences on the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray. It provides accountability and, in theory, offers democratic decision making, but often succumbs to the obvious danger of political control and manipulation and frequently becomes an abuse of human rights as in China under Mao. Certainly it has been extensively used to prevent support from being expressed for opposition groups. Greatly resented, particularly by professionals and technicians, the TPLF finds it a most useful method of control, too valuable to drop, and has extended it to all the EPRDF organisations and into the federal government.<sup>15</sup>

Meles has carried these techniques into the EPRDF to help the TPLF retain the centre of the political stage despite its relatively small size, around 20,000 members. Exceptionally well organised with remarkably efficient security, the TPLF retains a

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<sup>15</sup>*Idem.*



surprisingly high level of secrecy and, at times, near paranoia, arising from its long guerrilla struggle in Tigray as well as its ideological background. It is in keeping with this that its control of the processes of government manifests itself less through ministerial appointments than in appointments at assistant ministerial, commissioner or managerial level. Indeed the only other Tigrean minister in the EPRDF government appointed in August 1995, apart from Meles, is Seyoum Mesfin, the foreign minister. Ministerial appointments are carefully balanced - four Amharas, four Oromos, four from the Southern region and one each from Afars, Hararis and Somalis, but ministers do not make policy, they implement it. Tigreans are significantly placed at assistant ministerial level in all the more important ministries including Defence, Justice (which now oversees the police), Finance and Education.

In the military when ranks were awarded to senior officers in February 1996, two officers from each of the four regions represented in the EPRDF were made brigadier-general. However, the deputy Minister of Defence and Chief of Staff, who works out of the prime minister's office, Major General Tsadkan Gebretensae, is from Tigray, as are the commanders of the airforce, of ground forces, the commando brigade and of training and logistics. Tigreans hold a virtual monopoly of staff, command and communications positions. The army has taken a long time to get organised, reducing numbers from over 160,000 to a manageable 85,000 - 90,000. Recruiting from under-represented areas has been carried out to dilute the numbers of Tigreans but little effort is being made to recruit Amharas, and Tigreans have remained the largest contingent, amounting to over three quarters of those in the regular armed forces. Recruitment to cope with the conflict with Eritrea has changed these proportions, as the army has risen to about 250,000 men in the last year, but Tigreans have remained the controlling element in all areas. There has also been a programme for all officers and men to learn English, with the US providing assistance and training, and officers are being out through high school diploma courses.

The EPRDF has not confined its insistence on control to government and the military. It has tried to ensure compliance if not loyalty from professional bodies and other significant organisations. Associations and union bodies that have been

targeted include the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CETU) and the Ethiopian Free Journalists Federation (EFJF), as well as the judiciary and the civil service. Relations with ETA ran into difficulties over language instruction. The logic of regionalisation/federalisation demanded the use of the official regional language in primary schools. English is to be the language of instruction in secondary and higher education, while Amharic remains the official language of the country - but except in the Amhara region and in Addis Ababa, it has been made a language of choice and not a compulsory subject. There were many complaints. Teachers feared job losses, and parents were concerned that children would be disadvantaged, particularly among the minorities in the Oromo and Southern Regions. The Oromo region's decision to insist on Oromo language teaching in primary school threatened the jobs of 6,000 Amharic speaking teachers. The ETA also had questions over the provision of equipment and the costs of re-training teachers, arguing strongly against what it called the fragmentation of education. It claimed the effect of the EPRDF's education policy would be to destroy Amharic as a means of communication within Ethiopia and its role as the cultural language of the country. According to ETA, government responses included abductions, disappearances and imprisonment among its 120,000 members; with seventeen killed, over 2,300 sacked and nearly 600 forcibly transferred, its bank accounts and nearly all of its 132 branches closed. It successfully took the government to court after EPRDF tried to set up an alternative association, obtaining a favourable ruling in December 1994, but the branch offices remain closed. In 1996, when ETA's chairman and five others were arrested there was widespread scepticism about the alleged plot, almost universally regarded as a rather clumsy attempt to discredit the ETA. The government has continued its efforts to replace ETA, seizing the organisation's headquarters last September 1998 and arresting three of its remaining officials.

Both the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) and the Ethiopian Free Journalists Federation (EFJF) have had similar problems. In 1991, EPRDF closed down the existing trade union federation leadership and put in a committee, headed by Dawit Yohannes, now Speaker of the House of Representatives, to run its affairs. The new body, CETU, was formed in 1993 to

represent nine unions and some 240,000 workers. Within a year the organisation split irrevocably between its secretary, backed by 29 CETU council members, who supported the EPRDF's structural adjustment programme, and the president and 60 others who wanted CETU to have a greater say in the implementation of the programme. The arguments led to court injunctions, and the sealing of CETU offices. Several of CETU's leading officials fled the country and the government has now replaced it with a more pliant body.

Journalists have had a particularly difficult time, in part caused by their own excesses and failure to accept the concept of press responsibility. The EPRDF did bring in a reasonably enlightened Press Law but the provisions allow for considerable control, and journalists have been and remain a major target of the EPRDF government. In early 1998 the number of journalists detained reached 24, following the targeting of two major independent papers, the Oromo newspaper *Urji*, in October 1997, and the Amhara newspaper and magazine, *Tobia*. Eight of these were released on bail in March 1998, just 48 hours before Prime Minister Meles Zenawi met President Clinton in Kampala. However, three more were detained in July 1998, following articles critical of the government's policy of detaining and deporting Eritreans, one consequence of the current outbreak of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Human Rights Watch/Africa has noted that in addition to those detained "...repeated arrests had forced the leaders of the [Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association] and some twenty other journalists into exile." The Austrian based International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) has listed 26 as having fled the country, and in November 1998 named 16 journalists detained, and another 31 with cases pending. Ethiopia has had more journalists detained than any other country in Africa every year since 1991, with the exception of 1997, when it was temporarily overtaken by Nigeria for a few months.

Other pressures on the independent press have regularly included sharply raised printing costs, and routine refusals by government organisations and ministries to comment on stories or provide information for the independent press, followed by accusations that government views were unreported. Circulation is essentially confined to Addis Ababa; security forces normally prevent efforts to send independent papers to other areas, and

critics charge that the independent press is deliberately confined to Addis Ababa to give the foreign community and aid donors the illusion of press freedom. The EPRDF runs its own papers in addition to those of its component parties, and the TPLF has shown considerable interest in the media. It has set up a number of companies - Fana Democracy Publishing, Fana Radio (in theory the only privately owned radio station in Ethiopia), and Mega-Net Corporation, which has a number of subsidiaries covering distribution, studios, transit services, creative arts and Kuraz Publishing, privatised in November 1995.

The University of Addis Ababa has been another target of reorganisation. In 1993, the EPRDF refused to renew the contracts of over 40 academics, and despite denials it seems clear this was related to the fact that all were considered as opponents or critics of the EPRDF's ethnic federal concept. Most were also Amhara. Pressures on the academic community have continued with other senior staff being retired or dismissed. In 1996 the highly regarded head of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies did not have his contract renewed. This was widely believed to relate to his organisation of a conference on the centenary of the battle of Adua (1896) and its significance. It had apparently been intended as an exercise in historical revisionism, downgrading the role of the Emperor Menilek and southern leaders from Shoa and other Amhara regions, and upgrading the role of Tigrean participants. In the event a planned reconstruction of the battle was cancelled, and conference participants provided a re-affirmation of the Ethiopian polity and the battle's role in nation building.

Another body that has been under pressure is the judiciary, which has also been partially decentralised. The EPRDF established a number of Judicial Administrative Commissions in 1993, with the power to help select and, if necessary, discipline judges. The JACs have representatives from the regional councils and justice ministry officials as well as local legal figures. They provide a useful means to keep up standards as apparently intended; they also offer the possibility of control from the centre. Indeed, local judges have complained of intimidation and harassment, with claims they have been subject to political pressure to deal harshly with opposition defendants and leniently with EPRDF cases. In August 1996 the Ethiopian Bar Association expressed its concern over the shortage of judges and the

extraordinarily long delays in cases reaching court. There has been little improvement in either.

A key element in the controlled restructuring of government has been the creation of the Civil Service College. From the outset one of the main challenges in creating a federal system of government was to find a way of making the new states self-sustaining in terms of trained manpower. In the first instance there were sizeable transfers of personnel; an alternative was to send in central government teams, trouble-shooters, as required for political or administrative reasons. The next stage was to create the Ethiopian Civil Service College, specifically to feed regional states with required personnel on a regular basis and "to ensure that the national development strategy of the EPRDF is implemented as necessary". It is this which has given rise to fears that the college will be used as an ideological training ground. The board includes the head of the TPLF's ideological department. The intake of the college has risen fast, from 375 in the first year to over 1200 by 1997.

These efforts to improve the quality of civil service training was accompanied by the Civil Service Reform Task Force, set up in 1993 to review all aspects of administration. From the outset the EPRDF distrusted the civil service it inherited. The Task Force has been steadily carrying out a review of all government organisations and ministries, each followed by new staffing levels being set by the prime minister's office. Significant "downsizing", running into tens of thousands of jobs, has been achieved by retirements, redundancies and by re-deployment into regions as ethnically appropriate. There has been little evidence of "ethnic cleansing", but many of those who lost jobs under this programme and under the structural adjustment programme were Amhara. This was less a function of deliberate policy than of past over-recruitment of Amhara personnel. Recruitment now favours other, possibly "more reliable" nationalities. New salary scales and new training programmes were introduced in November 1994; the EPRDF hopes the end product will be a more efficient and competent civil service, and a more loyal one.

The EPRDF has certainly made it a policy to use Tigreans, either those from Tigray region, or Tigreans born or brought up in other regions and resident in areas outside Tigray, in official positions, though the key criteria may be as much loyalty as ethnicity. There are also a surprising number of senior political

figures in the regions who might be described as *deracine*, among them the secretary of the ANDM, who was born in the Amhara region of Gondar; the president of Tigray region, who is a Tigrean from the Amhara region of Gojjam; the main TPLF trouble shooter in the southern region, a Tigrean born in Gondar; and the president of the Oromo region, also a Tigrean but brought up in the Oromo region of Wollega.

Given the success of the EPRDF, and recently its apparent victory over Eritrea and the re-establishment of its Ethiopian credentials, the creation of any realistic opposition is clearly a long term project. The EPRDF itself is under no threat from any opposition party. A greater danger to its stability lies in the internal divisions within the TPLF, and eventually within the EPRDF. These revolve around ideology as well as traditional regional alliances in Tigray. The TPLF's emphasis on Tigrean nationalism in the face of perceived Amhara and Oromo pressures has so far proved capable of overriding potential divisions. But there are already indications that the social effects of economic development in Tigray will affect TPLF control.

## 6 The economics of federalism

Another area of longer term uncertainty is the economy which Meles has described as a key for defusing ethnic tension. Impressive economic progress is apparent with current GDP growth achieving an average of around 7%, though this is a little misleading as it appears to be almost entirely the result of aid flows and grants. There is still little sign of the substantial foreign investment that is needed. Coffee remains the only significant export and continues to suffer from international market fluctuations. Ethiopia also suffers from a substantial debt burden, and debt servicing in 1995 was equal to roughly half of the expenditure on health and education. A significant portion of this is owed to Russia for arms acquired under the previous government. There were indications that considerable debt relief might be expected in this area, but the effects of the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict are, again, likely to be negative as among Ethiopia's recent arms suppliers was Russia which provided at least \$150 million dollars of aircraft, and probably twice that much. Estimates of expenditure of a million dollars a day on the conflict are liable to be a significant underestimate, and even though significant amounts of money are being generated from Ethiopians in the Diaspora, the effects on the attitude of donors and on the government's cash flow are liable to be serious and long lasting.

In the last few years, the volume of food aid has been falling, due to good harvests and improved distribution. There has been shift from emergency to development linked food aid projects through Food For Work programmes though the programmes have been criticised for poor management and insufficient input. The Food Security Strategy of 1996, with its emphasis on rural development, its employment schemes and plans for accelerated agricultural development and food production has also been controversial. This strategy was presented to the Donor's meeting in January 1998 where queries were raised over the costs (an estimated 1 billion dollars for only four regions), the source of the aid required and the proposed relationship between government and donors. In fact, the government has already announced that food self-sufficiency has now been achieved - though food supply is still largely

rainfall dependent (and on past experience, drought conditions can be expected 3 years out of ten); the sharp effect of poor rains in 1993/94, and again in 1997/98, emphasised the fragility of production. The government has put considerable energy into tree nurseries, hillside enclosures and terracing to try and limit erosion and deforestation, though it is far from clear how much effect these have had; it can be argued that the top-down approach to conservation employed by this government, and by the previous one, has actually had a negative impact on production and income. Efforts to improve irrigation, currently estimated at no more than 4% of potential, have also been ambitious, including the planned building of 500 microdams in Tigray and Amhara regions. Progress has been slow and there are indications the project is unlikely to be completed. While government figures suggest that inflation has been kept well down, even becoming negative in 1997, these should perhaps be treated with some caution. Poverty reduction is still not proceeding fast enough to reduce the numbers at risk in a serious drought in the absence of any programme of population control. One significant area of improvement has been in domestic terms of trade, following the devaluation of the *Birr* in 1992, the liberalisation of grain marketing and the priority addressed to local small scale production rather than, as before 1991, to producer co-operatives or state farms. Even here, however, significant issues remain controversial, including land tenure and land use rights.

The dismantling of the centralised economy has been welcomed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as has Ethiopia's adherence to the stabilisation programmes, though there have been occasional hiccups in their relationship. The result has been significant amounts of aid; but there has been some criticism of the way the TPLF and EPRDF have insisted in controlling a rather slow privatisation process, giving colour to allegations of asset stripping on behalf of Tigray region and Tigreans. Financial activity and political patronage have become inextricably interlinked and a significant element in the TPLF has become uneasy about the high level of living among the leadership. In 1993/1994 there were signs that the party was aware of the dangers following a number of arrests for corrupt practices. More recently, the creation of the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFORT) in 1995 has led to extensive



distributions of shares in EFORT companies to TPLF members. EFORT is divided into 7 divisions, all headed by senior TPLF party members; the chairman of EFORT's Board of Management is a former minister of Defence, and chairman of Ethiopian Airlines. Parallel organisations have been set up in the Amhara and Oromo regions.

The operation of the federal structure is particularly relevant to the relationship between the federal authorities and the potential clash of interests between richer and poorer regions. There are very marked economic disparities. The EPRDF's economic agenda includes re-allocation of income from the richer to the poorer regions through the distribution of federal tax revenues according to a formula related to wealth, population and ability to use the funding. The federal government also funds capital investment in major projects and provides tax inducements to encourage investment. The practical application of the distribution formula has been criticised as has the EPRDF's use of the other inducements. There have been claims that Tigray has been a particular beneficiary, though there is little such effect visible. It is, however, an area in which lack of transparency has raised comment, as have the activities of the regional governments which have been attacked for their bureaucracy, their inefficiency and for corruption. Several regional administrations, particularly those in Beni Shangul and Gambella regions, have been unable to utilise their funding satisfactorily, if at all. Part of the difficulty lies in the failure to have provided any overall comparative evaluation of regional development strategies. Another factor which has not had the attention it deserves is labour mobility and migration, regionally and nationally. There is also a clear need for donors and NGOs to make contact and establish equality at the regional development policy and planning levels.

The relationship between the EPRDF, the regional Development Associations, and locally based self-help organisations, has also become controversial. There are obvious possibilities for self-help developments in all regions, but serious tensions have arisen over the issue of control between government and non-government bodies. The key issue is resource mobilisation. In theory, the Development Associations provide a link between government and local communities, but if they are not locally rooted they merely become agents of the

central or regional authority, and fail to bridge the gap between the local and traditional and the modern approaches. Past experiences with co-operatives and mass organisations under the previous government proved difficult; the issue of local control remains an unresolved difficulty.

Corruption has become an issue, particularly since 1996 when the deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, who was also the chairman of the ANDM, was accused of speculation to the tune of over 30 million dollars. There have been a number of officials sacked in various regions, though political unreliability is as likely to be a cause as corruption. It would appear that the EPRDF (and the TPLF), as a revolutionary party, has been suffering from the usual problem of moving from a revolutionary to an administrative and governmental role, finding it difficult to redefine itself and respond to the challenge of development and to the demands of an urban and bureaucratic middle class while still retaining its peasant roots.

The costs of Ethiopia's new administrative structure are formidable, adding a serious additional factor to an economy already affected by the expenses of conflict, and earlier demobilisation, shortage of jobs following the pruning of the state sector, the slow rate of privatisation, government land and tax policies both central and regional, interest rates and debt overhangs. Some years ago one long term American observer of the Ethiopian scene was arguing for leaders in Addis Ababa "to create the conditions for rapid economic growth, a rising standard of living and an open society in which Ethiopians could exercise their talents for enterprise and self-expression", as a means for ending opposition and allowing a vigorously development Ethiopian state to become a model of prosperity for the region.<sup>16</sup> The political scene has moved a long way since that was written but the point of the analysis remains valid. Without real economic incentives, a free market and an enterprise economy, the development of a pluralist and democratic society is unlikely. Good governance, democracy, human rights and economic growth are the perceived necessities for development and the eradication of poverty. All still remain in short supply in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

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<sup>16</sup>HENZE, P. (1989): *Ethiopian Economic Prospects for the 1990s*. California: Rand Corporation,

## 7 Human Rights

There is no doubt that in many ways a model of ethnic federalism should be the answer to the political problems of a multi-ethnic state like Ethiopia. Meles Zenawi claims to believe now more than ever that ethnicity was the right decision, arguing that ethnic divisiveness has been largely controlled, and that each region is already beginning to see itself, more genuinely, as part of Ethiopia, and that the process of Ethiopian nationalism is being strengthened. Even if this is true, and many would question it, it is however at the expense of human rights.

The EPRDF's main initiative in human rights has been the impressive decision to put on trial the previous regime - the process, lengthy and drawn out, is producing a damning indictment of Mengistu's rule. It is a process of record as well as a trial and in 1997 the Special Prosecutor's Office announced it was charging a further 5,198 people to add to the 67 major figures (22 in absentia) whose trial began in 1993. All will be facing charges of homicide, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, all of which carry the death penalty. One can quibble over some of the elements in these trials - many of the possible defendants were held for six or seven years without charge; but the EPRDF rightly sees it as an impressive and significant investigation of the human rights abuses of the military dictatorship.

Less impressively, however, the EPRDF also seems to believe that dealing with the abuses of its predecessor exonerates it from any necessity to control its own activities. In July 1991, the new EPRDF government promised to respect human rights and freedoms. It has become clear that it has largely failed to implement those promises, despite their repetition in the 1994 Constitution. Numerous reports by international human rights bodies provide widespread evidence of the government's general failure to live up to expectations. Amnesty International in its last annual report on Ethiopia noted that "...hundreds of critics and opponents of the government were arrested including prisoners of conscience. Some were tried but most were detained without charge or trial. Thousands of political prisoners arrested in earlier years remained in detention without charge or

trials. Torture of government opponents was reported as well as 'disappearances' and extra-judicial executions...".<sup>17</sup>

The U.S. based human rights organisation, Human Rights Watch/Africa, concurs. In a report in December 1997, it claims the Ethiopian government "...daily violates the civil and political rights of Ethiopian citizens by denying them the basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and association. The practices of arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torture in detention continue...". The report specifies particular problems, among them: arbitrary arrest and torture, curtailment of the rights of freedom of association (with particular reference to the CETU and to ETA), and of assembly; the absence of effective judicial oversight; curtailment of the exercise of civil and political rights including "routine use of detention and imprisonment" for journalists and editors; and pressures on non-government organisations including human rights monitoring groups. The report also points out that "...Independent voices in Ethiopia have been threatened by frequent crackdowns on the private press, political and labour movements, and non-governmental organisations... [reflecting] a central government effort to limit criticism of its policies and hinder the establishment of civil institutions not linked to the ruling party..."; and it draws attention to the difference between the smaller number of high-profile arrests in Addis Ababa, and the "patterns of large scale arrests in more remote areas...[and] attacks against regional branches of national associations and opposition groups [which] have been particularly effective, forcing the targeted groups to limit their activities to the capital...." .<sup>18</sup>

In its 1998 annual report, Human Rights Watch/Africa also refers to opposition parties still preserving "...a precarious presence in the capital Addis Ababa, following years of relentless government curtailment of their activities, particularly in the countryside..." . It noted that "...wide-scale human rights violations occurred in the context of the government's suppression of armed insurgency and political dissent. The military and rural

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<sup>17</sup>AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (1998): *Amnesty International Report 1998*, 1998, London: AI, see also *Ethiopia: Journalists in Prison - Press Freedom Under Attack*, April 1998; *Ethiopia: Human Rights Trials and Delayed Justice*, July 1996; *Ethiopia: Accountability Past and Present - Human Rights in Transition*, April 1995.

<sup>18</sup>HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA (1997): *Ethiopia - the Curtailment of Rights*, Washington, December 1997.

militia associated with parties affiliated with the EPRDF arrested thousands for months without charge or trial...opposition activists, editors of the private press, and leaders of labour organisations who continued to challenge the EPRDF's monopolisation of political space were systematically targeted through harassment and repeated detentions....".<sup>19</sup>

As noted above, opposition parties, whether registered like the AAPO, or involved in armed struggle as the OLF, have been the target of substantial and continuous pressure and intimidation from the authorities. There is substantial evidence of widespread abuse against suspected OLF members and sympathisers - numerous killings, arrests and "disappearances". Those arrested or detained seldom reach court or face charges; indefinite detention, or "disappearance", appears to be used as a specific policy against critics and opponents. Areas in which OLF guerrilla units operate are particularly subject to arbitrary operations by EPRDF forces and by militia units of the OPDO, which controls the regional government. There is also evidence that the OLF has itself also been involved in atrocities, including extra-judicial killings, and other abuses against civilians on a considerable scale. The externally based Oromo Support Group claims to have the details of over 2,400 extra-judicial killings and many more disappearances in the Oromo region since 1992. Its figures supplement a report by British nurse, Sue Pollock, following a visit in 1996, which detailed abuses carried out in the Oromo Region, including restrictions on movement, searching and looting of homes and the burning of houses, extra-judicial killings running into hundreds of cases from 1993, torture, disappearances, and imprisonment without trial.<sup>20</sup> Much of the government activity appears to be aimed at supporters of the OLF, which is a proscribed organisation, but the government has also continued to put extensive pressure on Oromo organisations which operate within the political structure but which may be critical of the OPDO. Officials of the prominent and long established Mecha/Tulama Oromo self-help organisation, and members of the Human Rights League, were arrested in 1998 on allegations of involvement in terrorist activity;

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<sup>19</sup>HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA (1999): *Annual Report 1998 - Ethiopia*, Washington, January 1999.

<sup>20</sup>POLLOCK, S. (1996): *Ethiopia - Human Tragedy in the Making, Democracy or Dictatorship*, March 1996.

the Human Rights League was set up in December 1996, to investigate infringements of human rights in Ethiopia, particularly abuses in the Oromo Region.

The EPRDF government has dismissed such allegations almost in their entirety, and coupled its denials with accusations that the organisations making them are political groups. Two years ago the government announced that it was planning to set up its own Human Rights Commission, designed to replace EHRCO which it sees as an irritating and independent thorn in its side. A government sponsored human rights conference originally scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa in October 1995 was finally held in 1998, but it confined itself to discussion of a Human Rights Commission and a Human Rights Ombudsman, refusing to address the issue of human rights in Ethiopia more widely. Neither Amnesty International nor Human Rights Watch were invited.

Prison conditions are extremely poor. As of December 1997, at least 28 of those detainees for alleged human rights abuses had died in custody, 19 of them in 1995 alone, largely, it appears, from a lack of proper medical attention and from poor sanitary conditions in prison. Human Rights Watch/Africa has noted that "...the Ethiopia prison system has never been in compliance with the standards defined in the UN's Basic Principle for the Treatment of Prisoners or the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners...". It also identified that the "...current government has revived the practice of using kebele and peasant association "houses" as detention centres". These acquired a very sinister reputation under the previous regime, and appear to be getting a similar one today as hidden and unmonitored places of imprisonment.<sup>21</sup> In May 1998, EHRCO calculated that the prison population had doubled since 1991. According to legal sources in Addis Ababa nearly 80,000 cases are now outstanding in the High Court in Addis Ababa and over 10,000 in the Supreme Court. During 1997-1998, according to the Office of the Federal Supreme Court, the Court managed to produce final decisions in more than 23% of its cases (in itself an improvement of nearly 50% over the previous year).

Other international bodies which have produced reports on human rights in Ethiopia include the International Commission of Jurists; the Committee for the Protection of Journalists; and the

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<sup>21</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH/AFRICA (1997): *op. cit.*

Norwegian Institute of Human Rights.<sup>22</sup> They can be supplemented by the reports of unofficial internal bodies, which provide additional and significant details of the way in which opposition parties are targeted.<sup>23</sup> All these reports draw attention in very substantial detail, to extensive and continuous abuses of human rights in Ethiopia, and to the widening gap between the government's promises and its practices. Even the U.S. Department of State Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997, a document usually at odds with other reports, and prone to repeating Ethiopian claims and allegations without comment, does admit to significant problems in Ethiopia, where "...despite promises by the Government to improve its human rights practices... Security forces [do] sometimes beat or mistreat detainees, and [have] arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens... Prisons are seriously overcrowded, and prolonged pre-trial detention remains a problem. The judiciary lacks sufficient staff and funds; consequently, most citizens are denied the full protections provided for in the Constitution...the law regarding search warrants is widely ignored. The Government restricts freedom of the press and continued to detain or imprison journalists..".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS (1995): *Ethiopia: The Scheduled Elections May 1995*, New York, May 1995; COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS (1996): *Clamp Down in Addis Ababa*, New York, December 1996; NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (1996): *Human Rights in Developing Countries, Year Book*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights.

<sup>23</sup> These include the OGADEN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (1996): *Human Rights Violations in the Ogaden 1991-1996*, Ogaden, OROMO SUPPORT GROUP (1994): *Sagalee Haaraa*, bi-monthly newsletter, Worcester, UK, ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (EHRCO) (1993-1998): *Reports, 1993-1998*, Addis Ababa.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (1998): *Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, Washington D. C.

## 8 Regional stability and instability

The current conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea has pointed up a number of basic instabilities in the region, a fact that was underlined by developments in early 1999, leading to fears that the conflict might spread as both sides apparently attempted to activate each other's dissidents. Eritrea sent several plane loads of arms, via Hussein "Aideed" in Mogadishu, intended for the OLF and the ONLF in southern Ethiopia. OLF activity along the Kenyan border increased considerably after the OLF leadership held talks with the Eritrean government in mid 1998. Eritrea's Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea, broadcasting from Asmara, has recently added Oromo language programmes to its output. Ethiopia also suspected some of these arms, which reportedly included a shipload of weaponry in February 1999, would be used by Hussein "Aideed" against other Somali groups backed by Ethiopia, including the Rahenweyne Resistance Army and the Digil Salvation Front operating in central Somalia, and the Somali Patriotic Movement forces in Kismayo led by General Mohammed Siad Hersi "Morgan"; Ethiopia has also been arming the newly created administration of "Puntland". Whether or not Eritrea is aiming for wider destabilisation in Ethiopia, the continued influx of weaponry into Somalia is certain to contribute to a continuation of instability in Somalia, and by extension more widely in the region, directly affecting both Ethiopia and Kenya.

In turn, Ethiopia has been talking to various Eritrean opposition movements, including the Eritrean Liberation Front of Abdullah Idris which is engaged in armed struggle in western Eritrea, and the ELF-Revolutionary Council, which still probably retains the largest measure of political support in Ethiopia. It has reactivated its support for the small Marxist Eritrean opposition movements it used to back, and allowed an Eritrean radio station to begin broadcasting from Makelle, in Tigringna and in Kunama. In early March 1999, under Sudanese and Ethiopian patronage and pressure, ten Eritrean opposition movements came together in Khartoum to create the Alliance of Eritrean National Force (AENF), under the chairmanship of Abdullah Idris, the former military commander of the original ELF. The prospects for rebuilding the former ELF appear small, but there is a significant amount of actual and potential dissent in Eritrea which the AENF



may be able to capitalise upon. Both sides having also been wooing the Afars, with Eritrea has been providing arms and support to the Djibouti opposition movement, FRUD, in an attempt to organise disruption of the Djibouti/Addis Ababa road and rail link, now Ethiopia's main route for arms imports, and making overtures to the divided Afar Liberation Front of Sultan Alimirreh. The leader of one faction, Habib Alimirreh, one of the Sultan's sons, went to Asmara at the end of the year 1998, and is now reported to be in Assab. Ethiopia in turn set up an Afar Red Sea Democratic Organisation, apparently to try and organise the existing discontent among Eritrea's Afars.

Regional alliances have already been affected by the conflict. Israel has managed to preserve its relations with both countries, though only just. Last year's agreement by an Israeli company to upgrade Ethiopian MiG fighters, although postponed, greatly irritated Eritrea and helped precipitate its current moves towards the Arab world. Eritrea's relations with Libya are now close, with Libya reportedly prepared to fund Eritrean arms purchases. Following the international tribunal's decision in October 1998 that Yemen should have the Hanish Islands, claimed by Eritrea in 1995, Eritrea lost no time in repairing its relations with Yemen. It has even indicated an interest in joining the Arab League, though in the indefinite future. Relations with Djibouti have, however, deteriorated to breaking point after President Issayas insulted President Hassan Gouled at the Ouagadougou summit, and evidence emerged of Eritrean support for the FRUD opposition of Ahmed Dini.

The most visible direct effect of the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict has been on the U.S. backed and orchestrated anti-Sudanese alliance of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda. This, like U.S. policy for the whole region, is now in a state of confusion with Ethiopia moving close to a rapprochement with Sudan, and even a possible alliance against Eritrea. Eritrea's relations with the United States have reached a low point. Eritrea firmly believes the U.S. has been taking Ethiopia's side in the dispute and, in refusing to accept Eritrea's viewpoint, has failed to show the balance required of a mediator. Issayas has been outspoken in his criticisms of U.S. mediation, and equally critical of the OAU's endorsement of the U.S. proposals and, more recently, of the UN's backing for them. His comments have won him a reputation for arrogance and gained Eritrea few friends in either organisation.

Irrespective of whether both sides do use the OAU proposals, based upon the original U.S. suggestions, for a settlement, there is little likelihood of any restoration of the previously close rapport.

There are a number of other destabilising factors in the Horn of Africa. The entire region has been flooded with arms, and both Eritrea and Ethiopia have been buying extensively since their conflict began in May 1998, with Russia and other eastern European countries being the main suppliers with China not far behind. On a slightly wider level the U.S., Britain and France are also major arms suppliers to the Arabian peninsula, and Qatar, at least, has also sold weaponry to Eritrea in a deal financed by Saudi Arabia after Eritrea broke relations with Sudan.

A second factor is the number of refugees still in the region, in Sudan, and in Yemen from Eritrea; in Ethiopia from Somalia, Sudan and now Eritrea. The largest element is the estimated half million Eritreans in Sudan. Eritrea would be hard pressed to absorb or sustain this number or even a fraction of that number. In fact, the majority appear doubtful about returning, for fear of EPLF control and political instability, and the PFDJ itself is reluctant to have the refugees back, for fear that most will support the opposition, as indeed is probable.

A third factor is the Nile and the use of its waters, one of the main factors in Egypt's foreign policy. The Nile Waters Agreement of 1959 regulated the use of the water between Sudan and Egypt, with Sudan using 18 out of 74 billion cubic metres (bcm), and Egypt 55 bcm. Ethiopia, despite producing 85% of the flow, got nothing. By 2025, Ethiopia's population will be 20% larger than Egypt, and it is laying plans to extract 56 bcm for irrigation. Egypt is planning to increase its use by 10 bcm and Sudan has plans for 13 bcm. All this amounts to another 79 bcm which is quite simply not available. In fact, both Sudan and Egypt have issued frameworks of understanding with Ethiopia over the Nile water, but it is far from clear if Egypt has entirely given up what it sees as its natural and historic rights over the Nile, despite a consensus on "just use". There is an obvious need for a full scale agreement on the exploitation of the Nile - one possibility that has been suggested is that Ethiopia should market its excess.

Finally, mention should be made of Islamic radicalism, Islamist politics, or what is perceived as such. It was this which led to the now collapsed U.S. orchestrated "arc of containment and confrontation" with the government in Khartoum. Although

Ethiopia has now dropped out of this and is actively mending fences with Sudan, it remains concerned about the possible effects of movements such as al-Itahaad in Somalia. In 1996-1997, Ethiopian troops were involved a number of times in Somalia in operations against al-Itahaad and occupied several towns for most of 1997.

It would be a mistake to assume that current regional boundaries are necessarily permanent. In recent years, South Yemen has disappeared, while Eritrea and the still unrecognised Somaliland have appeared. There is still an obvious possibility might divide, as might Yemen or even Djibouti, while Ethiopia, still in the throes of organising a controversial ethnic federal structure, clearly remains fragile. It's far from clear that the process of fusion and fission has come to an end. There is, after all, no consensus on the formulation of state structure in the Red Sea or the Horn - Sudan is, currently, Islamic; Eritrea, single party and authoritarian; Ethiopia has a centrally controlled democracy; Somalia remains anarchic with indications of splitting into several parts; Saudi Arabia has feudal monarchy. Reversion to the military/ideological regimes must remain possible, particularly since no assumption can now be made about the sanctity of state boundaries.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Horn of Africa was affected by a spell of innovative political thinking, coupled with relative stability and peace - the governments of Nimeiri, Mengistu, Siad Barre were removed; Eritrea and Somaliland became independent; Yemen was reunited; and with the end of the cold war the U.S. and the USSR largely ceased to trouble the area. The effects have not lasted. Unresolved internal conflicts have again become internationalised. In 1995 Eritrea and Yemen's combat over the Hanish Islands was widely interpreted as Africa against the Arab World. Eritrea's subsequent problems with Djibouti, Sudan and Ethiopia have been largely interpreted as aggression.

More positively, there have been indications of support for the concept of the Djibouti based Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) as a possible way forward in terms of both development and conflict resolution. The parallel is with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and ECOWAS's intervention in Liberia as a possible pattern for the future. The intention is that IGAD's already significant economic

co-ordinating functions should be augmented to develop real conflict resolution capacity. Its efforts over Sudan, and now over Ethiopia and Eritrea, have not augured well. It also remains unclear how far IGAD could become regionally involved in the policies necessary to deal with such related topics as the level of democracy, abuses of human rights, the problem of poverty and the scarcity of resources; or how far it could become involved in additional steps like sustainable job creation, improved access for credit particularly in rural areas, more investment, technical assistance and training for local production and consumption. One major question would certainly be funding. U.S. and EU support would be critical, and current indications are that the U.S., despite its backing for an extended role for IGAD, is unlikely to provide the necessary financial support.

## 9 Conclusion

The EPRDF is a highly centralised authority. All significant decisions are, normally, taken in the prime minister's office, though the front is more diverse and there are many more disagreements than its critics allow, both within the EPRDF and in its component parts. Nevertheless, there has been no real weakening of control in either government or administration. The EPRDF clearly accepts devolution of authority as far down the structure as possible, but only on the assumption that there will be no challenge to its overall system. The structure is imposed; and, in the short term at least, will certainly remain firmly controlled. Political parties in the regions are organised, disbanded and manipulated as necessary; access to state power is through the EPRDF. One major weakness is that these parties are all vanguard parties with little grass roots reality. They may strengthen as they incorporate the innovations that the TPLF implemented in Tigray region during its fifteen years of armed struggle, local assemblies, self-evaluation sessions, and the creation of development associations and endowment funds, but it is clear that organising satisfactory surrogate parties within the Afar, Benishangul and Somali regions is proving harder than expected; even the EPRDF parties in Oromo and Southern Regions are showing signs of instability.

None of these regions are conducive to the creation and imposition of peasant vanguard parties. The Tigray and Amhara regions may be; but even there corruption and land redistribution are raising difficulties. With so small a power base (Tigray has only just over 3 million people compared to the 18 million Oromos or 15 million Amharas), the TPLF's long term survival requires a method of turning the EPRDF into a genuine political organisation, or of creating genuine political alliances with other groups; a major change of policy to allow for a realistic democratic system to operate, which in turn will need a real change of direction in terms of human rights. So far there is little or no indication that the TPLF is prepared to do this, nationally or even regionally. .

The EPRDF's form of democracy is one which, historically, has been consistently abused. There's little indication as yet that any of the local and federal assemblies are prepared to show much in the way of independent action. The Council of People's

Representatives in Addis Ababa elected committees to scrutinise policy areas in 1996, but there has been little evidence, so far, that the assembly is prepared to be more than a rubber-stamp organisation. In this context, opposition boycotts have played into EPRDF hands politically. The TPLF, and the EPRDF, have been remarkably successful in redefining Ethiopian politics in terms of ethnicity and federalism. They cannot now be ignored, but they could be used more successfully and constructively, by both government and opposition.

The relationship between regions and centre, both politically and economically, has been changing radically over the last decade. The results have yet to be finalised, but the critical factor remains that the EPRDF has laid down the rules, and in the absence of opposition within its own framework, is defining the process without argument. Within the last few years there has been a global shift towards democracy (as demonstrated by the collapse of the Soviet empire) and related changes in attitude towards the role and interests of women, the recognition of minority peoples and greater emphasis on human rights. There is no consensus on the end product yet as the variable definitions of democracy in Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia indicate; all three have criticised the western interpretations of democracy and human rights as "inappropriate" for Africa. Eritrea and Uganda have ruled out western style pluralism; Ethiopia allows more diversity, but only under considerable control. In all three states, the view of democracy still appears to be based more on a Marxist theory of representation, with a vanguard party representing the will of the people as interpreted through the party. Another alternative to be seen in the region is Somaliland's adaptation of the traditional elders' *shir*, discussions, in its National *Guurti*, assembly of clan elders.

Ethnic federalism is a model of interest to all multi-national states. Nevertheless, the effects of the EPRDF's far reaching, and, in many respects, valuable changes, have been, and are, being steadily eroded by its insistence on keeping control, by lack of resources allowed to the regions and by adherence to ideological dogma. Last year, a European ambassador put it this way: "It's a question of *Realpolitik*. We do not think Meles is an ideal democrat, but Ethiopia still needs an authoritarian regime without which it will be threatened by disintegration." This may well be the case, but the dangers of over-authoritarianism are

also clear. There is now an obvious need to allow the activity of genuine political parties, not necessarily ones associated directly with the EPRDF, strong enough to build up real popular support so far lacking in almost every region. The issue of limitation on government accountability, transparency, a free press, and human rights in general, needs to be addressed. In their absence, it is much harder to deal with the problems connected with development - poverty, scarcity of resources, sustainable job creation, credit access, investment, technical assistance.

Most of these issues will also be affected by the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Irrespective of the result of the conflict, both countries, or rather both leaders, have had considerable reasons for wanting and needing a victory; both are rather weaker than they have appeared, and see this crisis as a valuable way to tap into national feeling and gain support that has been slipping away. Last year, Issayas referred to the conflict as a matter of "tradition, prestige and pride". He has also had problems over the economy, food supply, land policies, democracy and pluralism, Islam, corruption, human rights and his anti-Sudan policy; there have even been rumbles of discontent in the army, and pressures for changes. Meles has been under substantial pressure, even within the TPLF, to prove his Ethiopian credentials - he was the architect and chief proponent of a strongly pro-Eritrean policy; there has also been growing opposition to government policies over land, democracy, relations with the regions, corruption, and human rights. There were strong political pressures on both sides to fight. These will largely remain unaffected by the OAU's peace plan. Long term solutions will require radical political rethinking, and a degree of good-will which is currently unavailable. At the end of the day, the problems of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa arise from the scarcity of resources, the shortages of usable land, the conflicts over pasture and water, drought and a high rate of population increase, and the failures of democracy and human rights. It is these issues which need to be addressed; it is difficult to be optimistic.

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