# Reconfiguring Ethiopia: The Politics of Authoritarian Reform

Edited by
Jon Abbink and Tobias Hagmann

ROUTLEDGE

# Reconfiguring Ethiopia: The Politics of Authoritarian Reform

This book takes stock of political reform in Ethiopia and the transformation of Ethiopian society since the adoption of multi-party politics and ethnic federalism in 1991. Decentralization, attempted democratization via ethno-national representation, and partial economic liberalization have reconfigured Ethiopian society and state in the past two decades. Yet, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate, 'democracy' in Ethiopia has not changed the authority structures and the culture of centralist decision-making of the past. The political system is tightly engineered and controlled from top to bottom by the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Navigating between its 1991 announcements to democratie the country and its aversion to power-sharing, the EPRDF has established a *de facto* one-party state that enjoys considerable international support. This ruling party has embarked upon a technocratic 'developmental state' trajectory ostensibly aimed at 'depoliticizing' national policy and delegitimizing alternative courses. The contributors analyze the dynamics of authoritarian state-building, political ethnicity, electoral politics and state-society relations that have marked the Ethiopian polity since the downfall of the socialist *Derg* regime. Chapters on ethnic federalism, 'revolutionary democracy', opposition parties, the press, the judiciary, state-religion, and state-foreign donor relations provide the most

comprehensive and thought-provoking review of contemporary Ethiopian national politics to date.

This book is based on a special issue of the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

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# The politics of authoritarian reform in Ethiopia, 1991 to 2012

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In the context of contemporary African politics, Ethiopia takes a special place.[1] First, it has a political regime that came to power after waging a successful armed struggle and has instituted a unique political system in Africa: an ethnic-based federation whereby the old unitary state was given up and sovereignty was vested in the country's "nations", "nationalities" and "peoples". The new rulers' emphasis on ethnicity was seen as the answer to the ethno-region-ally based conflicts and inequalities that had marked Ethiopia before 1991. It led to the official recognition of ethnic diversity as a politically relevant fact, and to basing administrative divisions and state policies on it. This return to ethnic politics was exceptional, as most if not all post-colonial African states rejected such an approach as "tribalist". Second, unique was the rise to power of a post-Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), with its institution of a home-grown governance ideology called "revolutionary democracy". The latter is a political concept derived from Lenin, used during his party's struggle for power in the nascent Soviet Union in 1918. A third relatively inimitable fact is Ethiopia's economic dynamism of the past decade, with varying and contested claims to "double-digit" annual GDP growth and major investments in infrastructure and construction, but

coupled with mass poverty, enduring food insecurity and proneness to famine for millions of people.

More than twenty years after the change of power in Ethiopia it is apposite to critically evaluate the impact of EPRDF's revolutionary democracy and ethnic federalism, and to survey a few milestones and problems of its 20-year's effort to restructure and develop the country. This undertaking is visible in a rapidly expanding literature on Ethiopia, with many political science and sociological studies now available.[2] But in this book we intend to elaborate a few recurring themes prevalent in the scholarly discussions to date. We do this in a series of case studies on Ethiopia's federal governance, politics, social, religious and ethnic relations, and international positioning. They are mostly based on empirical research in the country done by the contributors over the past years. The emphasis is necessarily selective, and concentrates on the most significant political developments, state practices and institutional changes that have shaped political life and society in post-1991 Ethiopia.

Given the diversity and complexity of Ethiopia's socio-economic, cultural, geographic and political landscape this collection is but a modest attempt at investigating some of the recurrent patterns that have marked local and national politics. All contributors provide important insights into societal and political developments in Ethiopia in the last two decades. While they cannot cover the many events and processes that made their mark during this time period, the core principles and trends evident under the EPRDF regime are analysed here.Lacking are in-depth studies of the (political) economy and economic policy under EPRDF.[3] This subject is, however, referred to in various papers as part of the system of political governance. This proviso of selectiveness is compounded by the fact that most developments analysed in this book are ongoing, as the ideological model of "revolutionary-democratic" state-building in Ethiopia is still in full swing, although some redefinition and adaptation might be expected after the death in August 2012 of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who was the key architect of the entire political system.

## Overview of the chapters

The 10 chapters fall into four subject categories, addressing: (1) the new foundational formula of "ethnic federalism" cum "revolutionary

democracy" advocated by the post-1991 government, and its impact on collective identities and inter-group relations; (2) legal-constitutional aspects, opposition politics, and the independent press in the context of a dominant party state; (3) various related societal changes regarding the role and place of local-level politics and religious communities; and (4) Ethiopia's international positioning.

The first and largest set of papers starts with a general overview of the impact of ethnic federalism on ethnic relations and socio-political life. Jon Abbink emphasizes the mixed record, with achievements and problems in the ethno-federal experiment: it has empowered certain ethno-linguistic groups, but also instituted a more exclusivist ethnic discourse that may pre-empt national cohesiveness, relies too much on coercion and blocks local-level political processes. This paper is followed by an analysis by Sarah Vaughan making sense of complex party-state and state-society interactions. She deciphers four historic periods of state-building in post-1991 Ethiopia and in doing so accounts for the evolving strategies with which the TPLF/EPRDF maintained power among changing political circumstances. Jean-Nicholas Bach subsequently unearths both the ambiguity and contemporaneousness of EPRDF's doctrine of *abyotawi* or revolutionary democracy. This doctrine serves the ruling party primarily as a discursive weapon against internal and external enemies and is fundamentally different from mainstream, liberal democracy.

The second theme – the role of judiciary, opposition parties and the media – is treated in the papers by Assefa Fiseha, Asnake Kefale and Nicole Stremlau. Assefa's chapter presents several key challenges faced by the Ethiopian judiciary, in particular federal and regional supreme courts. The latter have little judicial autonomy from a dominant executive whose policies and acts are rarely subject to legal review. Asnake accounts for the recurring fragmentation of opposition party coalitions, which have attempted to confront the ruling party at the ballot box since 1991. This effort has been mostly unsuccessful due to a number of internal and external factors. Nicole Stremlau examines EPRDF's media policy and the emergence of the private press after 1991. Private newspapers have played a significant role in chronicling and amplifying political debates in Ethiopia before the crackdown on pro-opposition media following the 2005 elections.

The third set of papers unites studies on the state-society interactions and government policy through the prism of religious relations, and the perplexing ways in which ethnic federalism has redefined local communal identities, co-existence and conceptions of the state. Rony Emmenegger, Sibilo Keno and Tobias Hagmann analyse recent administrative practices by *kebele* and *sub-kebele* officials as part of the latest phase of local government decentralization. They highlight both the expansion and limits of state power in Oromiya's rural hinterlands. Jörg Haustein and Terje Østebøanalyse the growing competition between Muslim and Christian faith groups and their narratives of Ethiopian nationhood. These continued the interruption of the historic alliance between the state and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) that occurred in c. 1975 under the Derg and which was further solidified after 1991. Fekadu Adugna provides a salient example of how state-sponsored ethno-nationalism intersects with local competition over pastoral resources in Ethiopia's Oromo-Somali borderlands, creating frictions among former allies.

The final theme is addressed in Dereje Feyissa's contribution, explaining why Ethiopia has managed to obtain increasing amounts of foreign aid from Western (and other) donors despite their constant, though hesitant, undercurrent of criticism of the regime's democratic deficit. His paper identifies both ideological differences and common interests between Ethiopia and her "partners".

## Twenty years of change: the political background

When in May 1991 the insurgent movement TPLF/EPRDF took power from the military-socialist Derg regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam and concluded a 17-year civil war, the country was in dire shape. The EPRDF, under its leader and later Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1955–2012), proceeded to install a transitional government and set out its programme of political liberalization, ethno-political freedoms, and economic recovery and development. Such benchmarks of change announced by the new government 20 years back figure as important points of reference in most discussions on the achievements of the incoming regime. However, it is not our chief aim to judge "how well" the EPRDF government has done. Rather, our scholarly interest is in assessing the Ethiopian experience via these empirically based and thematic studies from a wider comparative

angle, and ultimately relating processes of change and development to sociological, historical, legal, and political science concerns.

In the past 20 years EPRDF has reshaped Ethiopia on the basis of a new political and economic model. Major societal changes were the result, although continuities with the past remained clearly visible. The radical restructuring of the Ethiopian polity has included the introduction of formal multi-party politics, recognizing ethnicity as the political idiom of public life, holding elections, redrawing administrative boundaries, decentralizing or rather deconcentrating bureaucracy, and liberalizing different sectors of the economy. A grand underlying concern, in line with the aim in 1991 to link up with Western donor countries and international public opinion, was to "democratize" Ethiopian society. Compared to the reviled Mengistu regime and its Ethio-Communist ideology, this has occurred to some extent. Yet as the aftermaths of the 2005 and 2010 federal and regional elections have proven, Ethiopian "democracy" is of a peculiar form: it continues to be strictly controlled by the EPRDF-led government and its old-time elite, and political alternation is not an aim.[4]

The tension between the ruling party's promises of democratization and its reticence to live up to these principles has been a defining feature of post-1991 Ethiopia. The EPRDF unabatedly lauds its recent achievements in terms of economic (GDP) growth, ethno-linguistic self-determination and formal political participation for previously "marginalized" and "oppressed" groups. Yet most observers point to a continuity of authoritarian policies and practices and the persistence of old problems, such as land ownership, disappointing agrarian policies, impunity of violent abuses, and top-down rule. Analysts point to the regime's unwillingness or incapacity to share power, its *de facto* rejection of political pluralism and its disregard for civic rights and political freedoms, notably of suspected opposition adherents, independent NGOs and critics, and a weak and unpredictable justice system. In recent years many analysts have contended that the state is more and more identical with the ruling party, whose members fill all leading positions and spread its ideology as that of the state. An organized system of regular ideological and policy training of civil servants, state employees and teachers from all state-linked institutions and enterprises under the auspices of the EPRDF is in place. All this is perceived to stand in stark contrast with the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, but also with conventional

understandings of liberal democracy, which, as the EPRDF has proclaimed, is not applicable to Ethiopia. Consequently, if one were to characterize Ethiopian politics and government after 1991, EPRDF's own notion of "revolutionary democracy"[5] might be most appropriate to start with, but to what degree it is indeed democratic has to be closely examined. Briefly, this ideology of the current regime in Ethiopia entails a set of governance and power techniques marked by vanguard party rule derived from the Marxist-Leninist tradition, a dominant role of the party-led state in politics, economics and society, the party ruling in the name of the "rural masses" (rather than urban constituencies), a commitment to the neo-Stalinist rights of nationalities (autonomy "up to and including secession"), the state as owner of all land, cooptation of civil society as much as possible, elections with a strong supervision role of the dominant party,[6] and a political evaluation of public servants and office holders via party-led "evaluation sessions" (called *gim gema)*, not elections. Hence, "revolutionary democracy" has the trappings of multiparty democracy with parties allowed, elections held and some extent of a free press media permitted, but with an unshakably dominant rule of the vanguard party, that assumed power in armed struggle and therefore does not relinquish it.[7]

It is rarely clear by which normative benchmarks Ethiopian (and African) politics should be assessed. Incidentally, this is less a task for social scientists than for the Ethiopian public as well as donor countries and international aid agencies, which all set certain aims for their aid effort. If this task is taken up, the question can be posed if, for example, Ethiopia's democratic record must be evaluated in terms of "Western" norms of liberal democracy? Or in terms of agreed upon international and UN charters on human and political rights? Or is, as donors always appear to suggest, the previous Derg regime the yardstick by which political modernization and progress must be gauged? Alternatively, one could also discuss EPRDF's achievements in comparison to neighbouring or other African states. As is always the case, the vantage point that one privileges partly determines the conclusions that one draws about political change or stasis in "post-socialist" Ethiopia.

Our position tends to be that we depart from ideals and expectations that are extant among the general Ethiopian population, often informed by local or customary norms and expectations of deliberative practices and consultation. We can also take seriously the promising clauses on freedoms,

legal guarantees and political and economic rights announced in the Ethiopian Constitution. Furthermore, in historical and political-legal research it has been demonstrated that more “universal” ideas of democratic and deliberative decision-making, timely change of power holders (i.e., alternation) and respect for elementary rights of people are shared widely across political and cultural boundaries.[8] Departing from the feelings and manifestations of discontent, gross inequalities and deficient access to justice among large sections of the population, as well as of the achievements and changes that (other) people perceive, one can to a significant extent reconstruct the state of the Ethiopian polity and its development trends between 1991 and 2012.

## Transformation and continuity in post-1991 Ethiopia

Looking back on 20 years of revolutionary democratic Ethiopia, the key question that arises is to what degree the Ethiopian polity differs today from pre-1991. Which politicaltransformations have taken place in the past two decades and what have they meant for both state and citizens? This question is a source of heated debate and considerable political friction, among Ethiopians, the Ethiopian diaspora vs. the home country, and analysts. Much of EPRDF’s credibility, political identity and claims to legitimacy to rule draw on the purported democratization, modernization, citizens’ inclusion, and development of the country. The official narrative accords a central role to the toppling of the Derg and the liberation of Ethiopia’s “nations and nationalities”, commemorated in the annual *Ginbot Haya* (May 28) national holiday. Although the ousting of the Derg is foundational of EPRDF’s rule and has ushered in its new political regime, many of the government practices of pre-1991 Ethiopia have reappeared in post-1991 Ethiopia. Hence, a quite mixed picture emerges when one considers both transformation and continuity in post-socialist Ethiopia.[9]

Among the major changes wrought are, obviously, ethnic federalism,[10] rights to ethno-national self-determination, a new cultural and language policy. Minority groups have largely welcomed the right to speak and write their own languages (although this was to some extent already the case under the *Derg* regime) and use them in local administration, as well as appoint local government officials from their own ethnic group. That this has in practice led to discrimination and nepotism is seen as secondary.

There was also active creation of local and regional elites loyal to the ruling party, periodic elections with multiparty candidates, a new definition of ethnic-based citizenship and group sovereignty, and a significant opening up of the economy, although strictly controlled by the party state, which is the major economic player. Land, for instance, is still state owned but the lease system has led to the *de facto* sale and purchase of (urban) lands[11], and recently to the leasing out of huge tracts or rural land to foreign investors. There are also more – although still non-transparent and legally unpredictable – possibilities to start private businesses.

Although Ethiopia's political landscape is quite differentiated on the basis of urban and rural or regional and economic conditions, political polarization and "ethnic" competition have been common denominators in the past two decades. While institutional politics in many instances continue to be dominated by an older generation of politicians, several new political actors, including youth or international actors (e.g., EU observers during the 2005 elections), have entered the scene, though with little success. In addition, the proclaimed conflict-mitigating potential of the 1995 constitution and the reformed ethno-political system is not as evident as was expected in the early 1990s.[12] Persistent conflicts about regional marginalization have resurfaced in Oromiya,[13] Afar[14] or Somali region[15] and new local-level confrontations about borders, identities and access to federal and regional state resources have emerged. They give the Ethiopian ethno-federal order a particular dynamic based both on political as well as economic factors that partly undermine the institutionalization of a democratic order.

However, a number of continuities are discernible between socialist and revolutionary democratic Ethiopia. They account for comparable political practices among party and government officials in spite of regime change and the above-mentioned transformations. Among the structural characteristics that define revolutionary democratic Ethiopia is, first and foremost, the permanence of top-down ideology-driven policy making, from the federal level to the regions, zones, *woredas* and *kebeles*. This continuity is by and large the result of the Leninist political heritage of "democratic centralism". Although formally a federation, Ethiopia's central power holders keep a tight leash on sub-national entities. While the centre cannot control all political processes everywhere, its capacity to dictate policy, via allocating fiscal resources and nominating all key regional

personnel (whose careers depend on federal approval), remains unchallenged. As noted, continued state ownership and control of rural lands and agricultural inputs are equally important pillars of the post-1991 regime, allowing the government to keep peasants in check.

Equally noteworthy is the absence or very marginal role of free media and civil society associations including independent human rights organizations and trade unions. In 2009 Ethiopia was home to almost 4000 local and international NGOs. Since the adoption of the anti-NGO legislation, which came into full force in 2010, their number is seriously reduced[16] and they mostly had to concentrate on strict "development" or humanitarian aid, i.e. non-political service delivery. In 2005 EPRDF identified Western-funded NGOs in Ethiopia as a culprit ofthat year's electoral troubles, dubiously contending that they had supported and funded critics and opposition parties. In response, it drastically expanded government oversight over civil society organizations, limiting their elbow room with the adoption of the Charities and Societies Proclamation in 2009. The ruling party thus successfully monopolized political representation, resource allocation and the public sphere after 2005. It co-opted, undermined, made redundant or threatened civil society organizations that did not fully share its political agenda. Despite its participatory rhetoric, EPRDF's approach to development is state-centered and state-driven. International aid resources and domestic revenue must primarily accrue to state institutions that plan and implement "development" on behalf of the citizenry. Not unlike the Derg, development plans in today's Ethiopia are rarely rooted in popular consultation, but reflect the logic of a well-organized bureaucracy accountable only to higher echelon party and state officials. Since the state determines what development is and how it must be organized, the ruling party even labels its critics as "anti-development" and "anti-peace".

Finally, continuities between Derg and the EPRDF are apparent in how party and state organs overlap. Although relations between party and state have evolved since 1991, giving more or less autonomy to bureaucrats at different times and in different locales, EPRDF's grip of state institutions has long been documented.[17] The fusion of party and state here again reflects the Leninist heritage of the TPLF as a vanguard party based on mobilizing the rural population via mass associations and a widespread cell-based party structure, with reporting duties of all members to higher

levels.[18] This system is still in place and explains the continued grip of the party on the population and the "stability" after the death of Meles Zenawi in August 2012. EPRDF's capture of virtually all public institutions in Ethiopia not only reflects the organizational skills of its cadres but is also the result of coercion and the *threat* of recourse to coercion, as evidenced in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. All security organs of the state – the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), the federal police, the rapid response forces (or *Fät'no därash* in Amharic), regional police and local militia – are led by EPRDF loyalists. The role of the police in defending public order as defined by the ruling power against opposition supporters appears to be as crucial for the survival of the regime today as it was during the Derg and the Imperial government.[19]

The contested 2005 federal and regional elections were a break point: following these EPRDF has embarked on a veritable restoration of the one-party state, seen as the only guarantee of stability and correct policy. Both the 2008 local elections and the 2010 federal and regional elections in effect amount to a reversal of earlier stated commitments to multi-party democracy.[20] The sustained harassment and intimidation of journalists, human rights campaigners and opposition politicians after 2005 are telling of this policy. For many Ethiopians everyday encounters with the state continue to be marked by submissive obedience and compliance with local representatives of the party-state.[21]

EPRDF may have tried, but has not broken with the authoritarian legacy of its predecessors. This raises the vexed question as to the enduring influence of an authoritarian political culture or collective habitus that transcends subsequent regimes since the Imperial period. The present editors are not in unison on the explanatory role of political culture,[22] but that itplays a role seems more than likely.[23] Ethiopianists have recurrently emphasized the reproduction of hierarchical relations within families and between rulers and ruled in the central highlands[24] as well as the specific zero-sum game conception and "indivisibility" of power. Similarly, one can argue that EPRDF's control over increasingly smaller administrative units of local government is but the latest phase of a historic project of "encadrement"[25] that spans from the Imperial to the current era. While many of EPRDF's technologies of governing are broadly identical with those of the Derg and the Imperial government, for example current

counter-insurgency tactics in the Somali region,[26] EPRDF's rhetoric has been very dynamic and diversionary in the last two decades.

When coming to power EPRDF staked its legitimacy on its ability to confront the three policy challenges of "democratizing" the country, resolving the "national" question, and alleviating poverty and underdevelopment. Since then its discourse has significantly evolved in terms of the priority accorded to these goals. Initially, EPRDF propagated democracy as the prerequisite for the country's pull-out of mass poverty. Contrary to the Derg, it presented itself as the party realizing the democratic and political aspirations harboured by Ethiopians in their repressed, ethnic form. In the 1990s the idea that Ethiopia's poverty was partly the result of authoritarianism and ethnocracy was at the core of EPRDF's legitimacy construction. Yet as its own democratic performance waned – and essentially disappeared after the 2005 elections – it sought new ways of justifying its rule. In a reversal of its earlier principles, it vaunted the idea that democracy could only be attained if development in the form of economic growth was realized.[27] "Double digit" growth and a number of development successes thus became new sources of legitimacy claims. In a nutshell, EPRDF's message to domestic and international audiences was that "we might lack a genuine mandate from our electorate, but at least we brought about economic improvement as a result of our economic and development policies and investment in infrastructure". It is in this context of EPRDF's quest for renewed recognition against the backdrop of international condemnation of its democratic deficit that one must understand Meles Zenawi's attempt to equate his administration to a developmental state, a model publicly reaffirmed by the EPRDF leadership after the prime minister's death.[28]

More recently, narratives vaunting EPRDF's economic exploits have been replaced, or rather complemented, by a rhetoric that emphasizes stability as a precondition for development. This implies that only the incumbent can ensure stability *cum* development and must therefore stay in power. Two conjoint registers are manifest in this argument. First, ever since the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998–2000, EPRDF has embraced a more pan-Ethiopian nationalist discourse. For example, it instituted "Flag Day" in July 2008 although leader Meles Zenawi had once famously derided the Ethiopian flag as "just a piece of cloth".[29] Or, immediately after election day in the May 2010 elections, government supporters, rallying in Addis Ababa

with neat placards printed well in advance, told the international community not to "second-guess" the Ethiopian people. Second, there is a strong security agenda tied into the government's rhetoric, positing that development requires stability. These security concerns are present in the "anti-terrorist" legislation adopted in 2009. They resonate not only with EPRDF's designation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) as "terrorist groups", but also with foreign powers' concerns about terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa, e.g. the violent Islamist al-Shabaab in Somalia.[30] The evolution of EPRDF's discourse from democracy in 1991 to stability some 20 years later is indicative of the difficult trajectory of democratization, made subservient to the consolidation of power. There have been no clear indications of political change after the death of party chairman and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in August 2012.

In a comparative African perspective Ethiopia is noted for persistent one-party rule under a post-Leninist regime, which has in several aspects reproduced patron-client relations and top-down state rule familiar from other African countries (e.g. Angola, or Rwanda).[31] The only difference is that, rather than the continuation of old elites adapting to changed global conditions and donor discourse demands, a new political generation replaced them, but one which fell easily into a pattern of similar autocratic governance techniques and of a new but pervasive patronage system. This also would point to the continuation of a certain political culture extant in the country.

## Revolutionary economics between party, state and market

While economic issues have received only scant attention in this book, the economic dimensions of the 20-year history of EPRDF rule are significant. Although EPRDF has steadily privatized the Ethiopian economy since 1991, many market sectors are *de facto* oligopolies dominated by state and party-affiliated businesses.[32] While the share of private companies has been growing in the last two decades, the ruling party through its affiliated businesses remains the most important economic player.[33] EPRDF's reluctance to fully liberalize the economy harks back to ideology and pragmatism. On the one hand this is explained by its continued belief in state-led development. On the other hand the ruling party refused to

relinquish command over the economy, as it provides formidable patronage opportunities and party loyalty. Despite market volatilities, recurrent food insecurity and military campaigns against Eritrea (1998–2000) and Somalia's Islamic Courts Union (2007–2008), Ethiopia's agricultural productivity has increased over recent years. However, between 2008 and 2012 skyrocketing food and commodity prices have pushed a significant portion of the population to the edge of survival, including urban masses. The potential of social unrest resulting from inflation and growing income inequalities has raised some concerns for the government, but not much remedial policy. There is a widening gulf between a small, but resourceful party-connected elite and struggling and impoverished middle and lower classes that has been tackled only by EPRDF's rhetoric of supporting so-called "development forces" rather than "rent-seekers". [34]

EPRDF's economic strategy after 1991 has combined contradictory elements, namely promises to international donors to institute a market economy, a condemnation of "neo-liberalism" rooted in the TPLF's Marxist-Leninist origins[35] and the creation of multiple private companies controlled by members of the EPRDF party-state. Already during its armed struggle against the Derg, the EPRDF – particularly its dominant element the TPLF – had carefully planned an economic strategy in order to gain and consolidate political control. In a first step, the TPLF harvested donor capital, including humanitarian and relief aid, through party-owned, controlled or affiliated companies.[36] Today, senior EPRDF officials hold important shares in many party-affiliated businesses that give preferential treatment to party supporters.[37] Although a 1994 law prohibits political parties from owning businesses, EPRDF's constituent parties have transferred their assets into holdings with different legal forms.[38] These holdings occupy dominant positions in Ethiopia's industry, mining, finance and trade, construction, transport and agriculture sectors.

Parallel to the creation and consolidation of such party-affiliated NGOs in the early 1990s, the TPLF established share and private companies whose owners were high-ranking officials and close associates of the party leadership. The capital invested was nominally theirs, but in reality came from TPLF's war chest and from funds accumulated by REST.[39] In 1995 the TPLF created the Endowment Fund for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT). Legally, EFFORT was a nongovernmental public charity, but it was strictly TPLF-controlled,serving as an umbrella

organization for over 25 party-controlled companies.[40] Active in agriculture, industry, import-export, transport, insurance, mining, communications and banking, EFFORT was directed by TPLF central committee members.[41] EPRDF's other constituent parties – the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopia's Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF) – established similar business conglomerates with the help of the TPLF.

By the late 1990s Ethiopia's private sector had begun to emerge, but EPRDF-affiliated companies still matched their business rivals in almost all industries. Private companies were often more flexible than their party-affiliated competitors in responding to market changes. By 2001 a number of prominent EPRDF affiliated companies and banks were on the brink of collapse. At the end of May 2001 several businessmen were arrested on accusations of corruption in collusion with EPRDF politicians and other officials. However, by 2005 the government's anticorruption effort lost steam and some of the defendants in the "show trial" were quietly released on bail.[42] While liberalizing the economy, EPRDF has repeatedly frustrated competitors. Stories by private business people are replete with tales of sabotage, unfair practices and fake legal threats. The ruling party generates support by awarding its members from the business community with economic benefits, thereby exchanging economic patronage for political loyalty. In return EPRDF expects its clients in the business sector to contribute financially to both the party and major government program such as the planned Millennium Dam. In particular party-affiliated enterprises have hindered competitors from raising capital among what the ruling party considers its own constituencies.[43]

Despite some modest criticism and a serious row in July 2011 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the accuracy of its macroeconomic figures, the Ethiopian government has broadly received support from the Bretton Woods institutions and followed most of their policy recommendations. EPRDF has outlined and implements its macro-economic policy on the basis of successive five-year plans, most recently the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) (2011–2015).[44] The corner piece of EPRDF's revolutionary economics is the much-debated strategy of Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), which foresees enormous investment in infrastructure and rural markets. Combined with administrative decentralization, EPRDF has considerably invested in and

expanded service delivery in the past decade.[45] Improvements in service delivery were also claimed as the result of the Public Sector Capacity Building Program and the deeply unpopular Business Process Reengineering exercises, implemented in several federal and regional agencies. Comprehensive infrastructure development projects currently under way include investments in the energy, transport, health and education sectors. Although the Ethiopian government expects to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), it has so far managed to resist pressures to open its banking, insurance and telecommunication sectors to foreign investors. From the government viewpoint the current financial crisis vindicates its scepticism towards the deregulation of its financial services, but this has not prevented its own share of problems, e.g. very high inflation and unemployment,[46] millions of people on food aid, and – with the exception of large-scale land leases – stagnant foreign direct investment.

All in all, Ethiopia's economy has shown growth: according to the official figures, the average annual GDP growth between 1992 and 2000 was over 4% and double that figure after 2003. The comparatively impressive growth rates, despite population growth reducing it by 2–3% annually, have led to reduced long-term poverty in Ethiopia and attests to EPRDF's macroeconomic skills. However, partly as a result of the global financial crisis, GDP growth has considerably slowed in the last few years.[47] For a long time economists have also harboured doubts about the veracity of Ethiopia's growth figures, including itsagricultural statistics.[48] This has not dented the massive aid flows that go from (largely) Western donors to Ethiopia, despite the problematic human rights record, the mounting corruption, and the difficulties of Ethiopia's top-down economic policies: the country remained a 'donor darling', receiving per annum on average U$ 2 billion aid in grants, loans and programme assistance during the last couple of years.[49]

In the past the National Bank of Ethiopia accepted inflation as an unavoidable side-effect and proof of the "effectiveness" of the government's forced growth policy. Yet, since 2008 consumer prices have been growing to worrying levels. Despite five generally good years of grain harvests, staple food prices doubled, tripled or quadrupled between 2007 and 2010, and again in 2010 – 2011. Prices for cooking oil, housing and kerosene have also been rising alarmingly. If beneficiaries of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)[50] – a wide-ranging food security and social

protection programme that benefits over 8 million Ethiopians – preferred cash over food at the in 2005, they had reversed their preference three years later. Apart from global market developments for food and fuel, domestic overspending partly on non-transparent budget items since 2005, a too lenient credit policy, speculation on grain prices by domestic traders have contributed to the price surge. To curb inflation, the government scaled down domestic credits, ordered a freeze in government borrowing, and devaluated the Ethiopian birr against the US dollar at the beginning and in mid-2009 and again in September 2010. It also subsidized fuel and grain, but was unable to prevent price increases. An effort to control rising prices by price caps in 2011 was a failure, leading to scarcity and urban discontent. Economic policy is not subject to critical review in parliament, because the government has, since the 2010 elections, a 99.6% majority there, and few alternative views or opposition voices are discernible, thus preventing the government from having to account for or adjust its policies.

**Development, the developmental state and donors**

Another subject significant for understanding post-socialist Ethiopia is the relationship that Ethiopia entertains with the "donor community" and its foreign partners in general. Such relations are very important notably in view of the shifting global landscape of donors and trading partners. Traditional donors like the US or the European Union are losing influence in Ethiopia-and in Africa in general-due to the rise of new economic powers, such as China, India, Turkey, South Korea, Iran or Brazil. Ironically, traditional donors remain the ones giving large sums of emergency aid to Ethiopia and other African countries in times of crisis, such as during the 2011 drought and famine threat when the USA alone supplied more than U$550 million, in aid, while China offered barely U$55 million.

While development assistance is still a very significant concern in Ethiopia's relations with the West and other donors, with contested achievements to date, its rationale and motivation are subject to change. Notably, of course, the Bush administration's "war against terror" boasted relations between Ethiopia and the US. Under President Obama, the US maintains significant geo-strategic interests in Ethiopia, which became the third largest recipient of US aid in Africa, already receiving U$500 million

in 2008. But US patronage does not allow it to more or less dictate policies to the Ethiopian government. Within the donor community there is consensus that applying direct pressure on the government is not a successful tactic. The EPRDF leadership, having the country and the population under its control and seeing no contenders, so far did not care about threats by the Donor Assistance Group (DAG) to withdraw aid. The regime is also aware of European donors' apparentpassing interest in human rights and democracy. In addition, Ethiopia has fostered economic cooperation with China and other countries less concerned with democracy, human rights and governance. Therefore, despite doubts about Ethiopia's democratic credentials, most donors are willing to accept a heavy dose of authoritarianism in return for "stability" and "for the sake of the Ethiopian people", who cannot be held responsible for the mistakes or abuses of their government, as is often said. This attitude is reflected in the apologetic donors' reply to the 2010 Human Rights Watch report on the political abuse of international aid in Ethiopia.[51] Western diplomats' greatest fear is a disintegration of multi-ethnic Ethiopia, which would further destabilize an already fragile Horn of Africa region. A similar shortsighted attitude was taken toward the autocratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East in the past – many of which recently entered a major phase of violent turbulence and instability, resulting in regime change in three cases.

In any case, the shift towards "Eastern" donors, notably China and India, has greatly increased the leverage of the Ethiopian leadership[52] as well as its business contacts. Foreign investors have happily jumped on Ethiopia's economic growth trend, and the government has successfully attracted foreign capital in recent years. In the fiscal year 2007/2008 a record U$627 million direct foreign investment reached Ethiopia. China will construct an entire industrial zone south of Addis Ababa, while Indian and Turkish businesses are investing in a host of economic activities ranging from information technology to floriculture to cement production. The most remarkable new projects, with a potentially great impact on energy production as well as on local societies and economies, are the large-scale land leases to foreign countries. Under this arrangement tracts are given out cheaply for agrarian investment – with most produce to go to the home countries of the investors – and donor-funded mega-dam building for hydropower generation in the Omo and Blue Nile Rivers. These schemes cannot be discussed here, but it seems they have not been thought through

properly in their long-term effects on ecology, environment, and local peoples, who are not asked or involved in them.

## Conclusion

More than twenty years after the downfall of the Derg Ethiopian politics under EPRDF's revolutionary democracy remain subject to strong contestation and polarized views, notably within the large Ethiopian diaspora, but also in press and donor community circles. Government officials and academics rightly refer to 1991 as a fundamental turning point in Ethiopian history, on a par with the 1974 revolution. While it holds true that one regime was replaced by a fundamentally different one, a closer look at predominant political patterns after 1991, however, reveals many continuities with the previous era. But what we observed in Ethiopia is not the substitution of one type of politics – military-socialist one-party dictatorship with another – ethnic-based multi-party democracy – but rather the gradual sedimentation of heterodox state policies and narratives, which EPRDF has amalgamated under the rubric of "revolutionary democracy". The latter is thus a syncretistic political narrative, incorporating both past (pre-1991) and present (post-1991) political visions and modes of running the Ethiopian state. As a result the ruling party implements inherently contradictory policies. Most notably, EPRDF claims commitment to multi-party democracy, yet is markedly intolerant of political pluralism if that would mean relinquishing power. Similarly, it promotes ethno-federalism, but maintains very strong central government oversight over the regions and districts. Maybe more than any other label or adjective, it is these and other paradoxes, which best characterize Ethiopian politics after 1991.

The Ethiopian government regularly uses the revealingly tautological notion of a "democratization process" to describe the current (non-)existence of democracy in Ethiopia. This expression implies that although imperfect, democracy is rooted in the country under its reign. In post-1991 Ethiopia "democracy" – literally, the rule of the people – has been fully absorbed and monopolized by the government, not as an actual political model or practice, but as a rhetorical figure that is omnipresent in official speeches and declarations. In Ethiopia, "democracy" and "democratization" have become promises of an almost spiritual nature that are constantly renewed, but never really fulfilled, as EPRDF has shown no

willingness to share power with other constituencies ever since it came to power. It is of little surprise then that the steady hollowing out of "democracy" by the government has left many Ethiopians, both the urban and educated middle classes as well as the rural people, deeply disillusioned.[53] The widespread repression of opposition supporters in the aftermath of the 2005 federal and regional elections was a clear signal to Ethiopian voters that democratization will indeed remain "a process" for the foreseeable future. It is this combination of lack of political alternatives, government intimidation and- for some constituents – material incentives to support the ruling power, which accounts for EPRDF's overwhelming electoral "victory" in the May 2010 elections.[54] Apart from this, the socio-economic dynamics set in motion by the current regime is notable and deserves full attention, both in the way it may further comprehensive "development" as well as bring major social, cultural and political changes to Ethiopian society, including socio-economic inequality, disempowerment of local people, and more internal divisions.

It is neither useful nor possible to foretell the future but given Ethiopia's diversity, and complexity and its turbulent history within the Horn of Africa's ever unpredictable political dynamics, continued scholarly attention is profitable and will tell us more about the political, economic and social phenomena and trends analysed in this special issue. This is even more so the case as Meles Zenawi's death raises important questions as to the future of revolutionary democracy, ethnic federalism and the EPRDF party-state. While socio-political analysis and field-based research have often been difficult and the conclusions and observations were often received with scepticism if not disdain by ruling circles,[55] there is no doubt that they continue to be necessary. Research results are beneficial for public debate, and inform the policymaking not only of international institutions and donor agencies, but also of the various domestic government agencies. It has to be recalled also that studies on politics and development policies, while important and revealing, are only one part of a wider field on scholarly studies on Ethiopia[56] that continues to gain strength and has produced an amazing body of knowledge on and understanding of this complex and fascinating country. We hope that this collection of studies will further inspire research and debate on the unique history and socio-political development of Ethiopia as well as highlight the elements it shares with other countries, both in Africa and beyond.

## Notes

1 This is a revised version of Hagmann and Abbink, “Twenty Years of Revolutionary Democratic Ethiopia, 1991 to 2011”, in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 2011, pp. 579–595.

2 For a survey, see Abbink, *A Bibliography of Ethiopian-Eritrean Studies*.

3 Neither addressed in the papers are the impact of ethnic federalism and multi-party politics on gender and women, or Ethiopia’s international relations (specifically with relations with Eritrea or with other neighbouring countries).

4 Cf. the statement in a 1993 EPRDF document, still in force: “We can attain our objectives and goals only if Revolutionary Democracy becomes the governing outlook in our society, and only bywinning the elections successively and holding power without letup can we securely establish the hegemony of Revolutionary Democracy. If we lose in the elections even once, we will encounter a great danger.” Cited in: “TPLF-EPRDF’s Strategies for Establishing its Hegemony and Perpetuating its Rule” (English translation of a 1993 document in Amharic), in *Ethiopian Register* 3, no. 6 (1996): 26. This approach is still in force, cf. the comments by Gebru Asrat (2012), a former TPLF member now in the opposition party *Medrek:* “Speech to the Ethiopian community meeting in Atlanta, USA, 23 September 2012” [www.ethiomedia.com/2012_report/gebru_asrat_atlanta_speech_2012.pdf; in Amharic, accessed 26-09-2012].

5 EPRDF, The Development Lines of Revolutionary Democracy.

6 See Merera, “Elections and Democratization.”

7 But not independent radio, TV or Internet servers.

8 Cf. An-Na’im, *Cultural Transformation*.

9 In allusion to Clapham’s classic book Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia.

10 Turton, *Ethnic Federalism*.

11 A new Urban Land Lease Holding Proclamation, passed on 12 October 2011, however, has declared all private urban property as state property, falling under urban lease.

12 Cf. Abbink, “Ethnicity and Conflict Generation.”

13 Cf. Merera, “Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralization”; Abebe, “A Comparative Welfare Analysis.”

14 Cf. Müller-Mahn, Rettburg, and Getachew, “Pathways and Dead Ends.”

15 Hagmann, “Beyond Clannishness and Colonialism”; Devereux, “Better Marginalised than Incorporated?”

16 See Tsige, “1154 out of 3822 NGOs.”

17 See Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power; ICG, Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism;* also Vaughan, “Revolutionary Democratic State-building” (this volume).

18 Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*. See also Aregawi, *A Political History of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front*.

19 Cf. Toggia, “The State of Emergency.”

20 Cf. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The End of Democracy?”; Tronvoll, “Briefing.” This is, however, a moot point. EPRDF never stated its aim as being a mainstream parliamentary democracy but as one in which democratic rights were to be achieved primarily via ethnic rights. Observers have underestimated what leeway this gives for federal divide-and-rule and control policy.

21 Lefort, “Powers - Mengist - and Peasants”; Pausewang, “Ethiopia: A Political View from Below.”

22 See the polemic: Hagmann, “Ethiopian Political Culture Strikes Back”; Abbink, “Interpreting Ethiopian Elections.”

23 See also Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 21.

Tronvoll, *War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia;* Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of*
24 *Power*.
25 See Clapham, “Controlling Space in Ethiopia,” 14, 28.
26 Hagmann and Korf, “Agamben in the Ogaden.”
27 We are indebted to Jean-Nicholas Bach for this observation.
28 The late PM Meles Zenawi outlined this in a text, “African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings,” reportedly a zero draft of a projected PhD thesis, at http://cgt.columbia.edu/files/conferences/Zenawi_Dead_Ends_and_New_Beginnings.pdf (accessed June 2, 2009). See also: “Meles Prescribes Developmental State Paradigm for African States,” NewBusinessEthiopia.com, March 29, 2011 (accessed May 6, 2011), and compare ‘Ethiopian Ruling Party Confirms Hailemariam as Meles’s Successor’, Bloomberg News message. 15 September 2012, and the new PM’s acceptance speech, on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aayZhWpGi3c (Accessed 26 September 2012).
29 Tronvoll, *War and the Politics of Identity*, 58.
30 Cf. Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment.”
31 Paulos, ‘Clientelism and Ethiopia’s post-1991 decentralization’.
32 The oligopoly character of Ethiopia’s economy is particularly visible in the import sector and is compounded by the absence of anti-trust legislation.
33 See also Vaughan and Mesfin, *“Rethinking Business and Politics in Ethiopia”*, on the EPRDF-linked EFFORT business empire.
34 EPRDF, Strategy of Revolutionary Democracy, 7.
35 See Bach, “Abyotawi Democracy” (this volume).
36 In 1978 the TPLF established the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), which became the lynchpin of its economic empire. REST tapped the resources of the donor community, which was reluctant to deal directly with an armed guerrilla movement, for relief and development efforts in the TPLF-controlled parts of Tigray (BBC news message, “On the Trail of Ethiopia Aid and Guns,” March 4, 2010). REST later on became a major player in the commodity market; buying and selling agricultural products and inputs and monetizing food aid. By 2000 it had more than 1000 employees and was considered Africa’s biggest NGO (Clark, Civil Society, NGOs, and Development, 9).
37 Anonymous, “From the Bullet to the Bank Account.”
38 Paulos, “Ethiopia, the TPLF, and the Roots of the 2001 Political Tremor,” 45.
39 Anonymous, “From the Bullet to the Bank Account,” 26.
40 EFFORT played a leading role in TPLF’s involvement in the financial sector and became the largest shareholder when the private Wegagen bank was formed in 1997. See Vaughan and Mesfin, *“Rethinking Business and Politics in Ethiopia”*.
41 See *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, January 11, 2002.
42 See “Amidst Election Fever Jailed Businessmen, Bankers Given Surprise Bail,” *Capital* (Addis Ababa), May 25, 2005.
43 Anonymous, “From the Bullet to the Bank Account.”
44 The GTP was preceded by the *Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty* (PASDEP) (2006–2011) and the *Sustainable Development and Policy Reduction Programme* or SDPRP (2002–2006).
45 World Bank, *Well-Being and Poverty in Ethiopia;* IMF Country Report No. 08/260, July 2008.
46 Notably the persistently high unemployment rates among urban educated school graduates are worrying; cf. Serneels, “The Nature of Unemployment.
47 See “IMF Cuts Government’s GDP Forecast by Half,” *Reporter* (Addis Ababa), March 8, 2009.
48 See Dercon et al., “In Search of a Strategy.”
49 See Feyissa, “Aid Negotiation” (this volume).
50 Bishop and Hilhorst, “From Food Aid to Food Security.”

51 See Human Rights Watch, *Development without Freedom;* DAG Statement - Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report: Development without Freedom - How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia, October 21, 2010, http://wwwdagethiopia.org, (accessed April 5, 2011). See also the BBC documentary documenting aid abuse, screened on August 5, 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/9556288.stm (accessed August 5, 2011).

52 There is also a growing ideological affinity with China's strongly authoritarian developmental state. Cf. an interview with then Ethiopian Foreign Minister Hailemariam Desalegn: "Chinese Place no Conditions in Terms of Ideology," *Africa Confidential* 52 (February 4, 2011): 8.

53 Cf. a nationwide Gallup poll of 2007 on Ethiopia, www.gallup.com/poll/104029/few-ethiopians-confident-their-institutions.aspx (accessed July 29, 2011). Cf. also the very interesting paper by Orgeret, "When Will the Daybreak Come?"

54 Perhaps in addition to election fraud or some doctoring of ballots.

55 The government's impatience with domestic and foreign scholars has grown after 2005, and academic freedom in Ethiopia has shrunk. Most Ethiopian academics working for one of the country's 31 public universities had to join the local EPRDF affiliate party as institutions of higher learning have become thoroughly politicized. This has led to a decline in critical work and public debate by scholars.

56 Abbink, *A Bibliography of Ethiopian-Eritrean Studies*.

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# Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years

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One of the core principles instituted by the post-1991 government in Ethiopia that took power after a successful armed struggle was ethnic-based federalism, informed by a neo-Leninist political model called revolutionary democracy. In this model, devised by the reigning Tigray People's Liberation Front (later EPRDF), ethnic identity was to be the basis of politics. Identities of previously non-dominant groups were constitutionally recognized and the idea of pan-Ethiopian identity de-emphasized. This article examines the general features and effects of this new political model, often dubbed an "experiment", with regard to ideas of federal democracy, socio-economic inclusiveness, and ethno-cultural and political rights. After 20 years of TPLF/EPRDF rule, the dominant rhetorical figure in Ethiopian politics is that of ethnicity, which has permeated daily life and overtaken democratic decision-making and shared issue-politics. The federal state, despite according nominal decentralized power to regional and local authorities, is stronger than any previous Ethiopian state and has developed structures of central control and top-down rule that preclude local initiative and autonomy. Ethnic and cultural rights were indeed accorded, and a new economic dynamics is visible. Political liberties, respect for human rights and economic equality are however neglected, and ethnic divisions are on the increase, although repressed. Ethiopia's recent political record thus shows mixed results, with positive elements but also an increasingly authoritarian governance model recalling the features of the country's traditional hierarchical and autocratic political culture. This may produce more debate on the need for "adjusting the experiment".

In this article I discuss the general features of the post-1991 regime under the ruling party (and former insurgent movement) Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF, with its core the Tigray People's Liberation Front or TPLF) and the effects and results of its policies toward ethnicity and ethnic relations in Ethiopia in the past two decades. I here largely follow a growing scholarly consensus on the political state of play

regarding Ethiopia as an ethno-federal state, but my approach is more anthropological, i.e., looking at politics and unfolding ethnic relations as a social and cultural process with its own dynamics, though set in motion by cumulative decisions in a political arena. The issue of ethnic federalism and its impact has been studied extensively from the legal, sociological and political scienceangles. In a paper published two years ago (2009) I tried to inject a new element in this debate by looking at the *republican-democratic* aspect of Ethiopia's politics, instead of predictably focusing on the ethnic-democratic element, but this was not to deny that ethnic identity remained the defining feature of the country's political system.

In 1991 Ethiopia accommodated ethnicity as a formal political element in the new state order. This makes the country relatively unique in Africa, where ethnic relations may be an obvious factor in national politics but not in any recognized form. If we look at Kenya, we see that every election is determined by a subtext of ethnicity, locally called "tribalism", and that virtually all parties have an overwhelming although not exclusive ethnic basis, but formal ethnic parties are not allowed. In Ethiopia they are the norm. Ethiopia's adoption in 1991 of ethno-linguistic identity as the prescribed basis of politics in the new federal state is explained by three factors: (a) the military victory in 1991 by an ethno-nationalist movement – the TPLF – over centralized tyrannical military rule after a successful ethno-regional mobilization of insurgence; (b) the ideological idiom of student opposition movements and later of the armed opposition in the later years of the imperial regime and the military *Derg* regime that saw "the national question" as the main cause of Ethiopia's problem, above all others; and (c) the need of the ethno-regional insurgent movements, present among an important number of Ethiopian population groups in 1991, to come to a shared political agenda to address perceived or real "ethnic grievances".

In 1991 the TPLF thus presided over the deconstruction of Ethiopia as a nation-state seen as dominated by one ethnic group and reconfigured it on the basis of a model of an alleged "voluntary federation" of the 75 or so ethnic groups in the country. This was a new model dictated partly by necessity – how could an ethno-regional minority from Tigray suddenly rule a large, diverse country without secure "ethnic allies"? – and partly by an ideological programme aimed at reversing "ethnic" hierarchies, ousting the perceived elites in place, and impose a new political dispensation. It was

accompanied by a tortuous and to many people painful rhetoric of ethnicization that declared Ethiopians first and foremost a member of "their ethnic group" and only second as Ethiopian citizens. This model was held to liberate groups and to defuse the "national question", as no group could be allowed to claim political dominance – except perhaps the one proclaiming an end to ethnic dominance. In this sense, the EPRDF-TPLF replaced a perceived "Amhara/highland"-dominated ethnocratic state with a multi-ethnic state, but with one clear leading core group.

This ethno-federal idea was elaborated in the Transitional Period Charter, promulgated after a national conference in June 1991 and in the Federal Constitution adopted in December 1994 and that came into effect on 21 August 1995.[1]

Twenty years later, ethnicity is the dominant rhetorical figure in political discourse in Ethiopia and has permeated people's identities and daily politics, whether they like it or not. It has inspired the governance model, the division and administration of the regional states, educational-linguistic policies and party politics. My argument here will be that, while initially liberating and potentially "empowering" – coming from a background of suppression and delegitimization during the imperial and *Derg* eras – ethnic discourse in Ethiopia in both its ideological and practical-administrative forms, may have become somewhat of aconstraining factor in the political, economic and social sense, and may need amendment. This interpretation implies "benchmarks" to evaluate the post-1991 experience. These may be difficult to provide if a non-normative assessment is aimed at, but one could propose a few key indicators in view of the stated aims of the political transition in 1991: contribution to (ethnic/regional) self-determination; ability to defuse/prevent ethnic-based conflict; exercise of ethno-cultural rights (to use people's language, develop their own culture, etc.); democratic-consultative decision-making; an open economic arena and economic partnership; and non-discriminatory, issue-based politics for the federation as a whole.[2] I here start from the metaphor of Ethiopia going through "an experiment" – as its prime minister once said, back in 1991[3] – and if an experiment shows serious problems or unexpected results one can amend it and change some of the conditions of the experimenting. The "experiment" meant here is a political model adopted by the new regime and implemented on the basis of ideology. In this sense it can be changed. But the wider social and cultural *effects* it already has had may already be

less amenable to retrospective engineering: the (often unintended) consequences have gone to reshape Ethiopian society from top to bottom. A case could be made for amendments if we look at the ambivalent record: unintended forms of discrimination, non-federal elements, economic disparities, and (violent) conflicts that reportedly still mar the federal system in practice.[4]

In assessing these "benchmarks" it is useful to recognize their variegated expression in the phases that the Ethiopian 20-year federal experiment has gone through. The period is not unitary, neither in its political emphases nor its economic policies, and has seen various shifts in policy and practice, despite the fact that the ideological and constitutional order has officially not changed much. One might distinguish at least the following four phases of the Ethiopian ethno-federal model: (1) transition and stabilization – democratic opening, political self-definition, and liberalization, 1991–2000; (2) nationalist reconfiguration and ruling party reaffirma-tion, resulting from the 1998–2000 Ethio-Eritrean war and the internal TPLF division, 2000–2003;[5] (3) broadening EPRDF party reach via incorporating and creating (new) regional EPRDF party elites beyond the TPLF, 2003–2005;[6] (4) building the "developmental state", since May 2005. This entailed a full emphasis on nation-wide economic development, whereby "political" considerations would be secondary and legitimacy would be sought in the economic growth achievements (infrastructure, road building, hydropower mega-projects, "double-digit" GDP growth, foreign investments, etc.). The powers of the central/federal government were hereby reinforced, via new laws and executive organs. This "technocratic" approach was pursued after the shock 2005 elections, with a narrow and controversial win for EPRDF, the killing of close to 200 people by security forces, and a very bad press for Ethiopia and serious criticisms from donor countries. This developmental state phase is still in full swing – witness the huge foreign land-lease deals, the emphasis on investments (any investments) and growth figures, the mega-dam building, the road construction – and has entirely trumped the quest from democracy, civil society facilitation, and plurality in domestic politics. Indeed, a spate of post-2005 laws (Press law, NGO law, Anti-Terrorism law), with narrow and restrictive clauses, has thwarted the development of civil society organizations and a concomitant democratic culture. The government's

2010 *Growth and Transformation Plan*[7] is the best indication of this fourth phase, stressing economic growth and not much else.

## Shaping the experiment after the end of the war: the second phase of the Ethiopian post-imperial revolution

Looking at the formal structure of post-1991 federalism, let us start with the observation that when speaking with politicians, academics or students from other African countries one usually hears: "We do not understand Ethiopian politics. How can they go and institutionalize tribalism. This was the one country in African with a non-colonial history, an indigenous state that had some unity and a centralist tradition, and now they follow us and go back to fragmentation. Why?" True or not, this very common remark might give us some food for thought.

Back in 1991 the TPLF-EPRDF ideology of ethnic federalism could have been seen as "the best possible model" after the ravages of the civil war and a regime marked by harsh centralist government suppression of ethno-regional sentiments and interests, and a relentless war. Mobilization of rebellion against this *Derg* government, led by lt.-col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam, had been successful on the basis of an appeal to this ethno-regional or ethnic aspect in people's identities, and it found resonance among some other large ethnic communities or their elites. It was also a convenient ideology of rule, which made sense to the new leaders back in 1991.

Historically, the instituting of ethno-federalism was also the realization of the *second* element of the programme of the revolutionary student movement in the 1960s–70s: solving the "nationalities" question.[8] The first phase of that revolutionary ferment in the 1970s had been the class-based "anti feudalist, anti-capitalist revolution of the masses" against the imperial elites, and was adopted and rhetorically expressed by the military *Derg* regime under the guise of centralist revolutionary socialism (Marxism), globally in vogue at the time. When the *Derg* refused to yield to a form of transitional or civilian government, "revolutionary military socialism" became its dominant model of ideology and governance. The state became a unitary one, entertaining the precepts of Marxist-Leninist ideology – also shared by the armed opposition fronts of the time, like the EPRP, MEISON, OLF, TLPF, SLM, and others[9] – and did not recognize or respect regionalist

tendencies. One-party rule gradually took shape under a dictatorial strongman.

It has to be noted that under the *Derg* the nationality discourse was first introduced: following Stalinist theory and practice, popular among the student movements, a new "Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities" (ISEN) was set up to make an inventory of the Ethiopian nationalities and their territories. Maps and ethnographic profiles were duly produced. Also literacy campaigns were started in a number of indigenous languages next to Amharic.

When the TPLF-EPRDF assumed power after its military victory in May 1991, it largely took over the ISEN maps and ethnic classifications and proceeded to work out a new regional and district division of the country, closely following the ethno-linguistic lines put on paper by the ISEN experts. Later, the ISEN was turned into the National Electoral Board (in the same building), as the electoral constituencies were based on ethno-linguistic districts. This minute ethnic cartography was seen as needed to tune the emerging democratic structures to the new "ethnic party" structures: every ethnic group had to have its own political party, under the aegis of the ruling EPRDF. These were of course the so-called PDOs – "People's Democratic Organizations" – ethnic satellite parties among the various ethnic groups set upand controlled by EPRDF cadres, without much grass roots influence. In a later phase several smaller and related groups were merged in one PDO party.

As a result of the classificatory work started under the *Derg*, the EPRDF conception of ethnicity and politics provided space for the self-expression of specific ethnic and language groups. It also led to a strong territorialization of ethnicity: ethnicity was territory, with exclusivist tendencies, and forms of mixture did not really fit the scheme, especially in the towns and cities, which were almost by definition mixed and pluralist. But also in the countryside, there were some problems, as rural districts were, *contra* reality, held to be the territory of *one* "original" ethnic group, and of one only. Here we see a perhaps well-intentioned programme leading to essentialist group images and classifications of minorities or migrants as "strangers" or "latecomers" that are difficult to accommodate. While the legal basis for this perception may be absent, practice tends to confirm the picture, especially in regard to members of minority groups or caste groups that are too small to be recognized politically.[10]

## The legal framework: progress on paper and a basis for development

The legal framework that underlies Ethiopian politics is an elaboration of the political ideology of the party that won the civil war in 1991, the TPLF/EPRDF, and has not changed much. While the 1991 Transitional Charter first indicated the strong ethnic basis of the future political dispensation of post-conflict Ethiopia, the basic document is obviously the Ethiopian Constitution, drawn up by a committee appointed by the ruling party and ratified in the transitional parliament in December 1994. The two most salient and still much debated elements here are: (a) the definition of "political sovereignty" – this is vested in the "nations, nationalities, and peoples" of the country (article 8); and (b) the secession clause in article 39 – any nation, nationality or people (= ethnic group) that wished to secede from the federation can do so after following the required three-step procedure. This most unusual clause (only found in the old Soviet Union constitution) is a perennial bone of contention – and rightly so, because it reflects the underlying emphasis (or dilemma) of the Constitution as a document emphasizing the differentiating instead of unifying elements of the federation. On the basis of the documents, 64 NNPs received the right to establish self-governments, as enumerated in Proclamation no. 7 of 1992.[11] While it has created a legal and political reality, it was practically never tried, and is unlikely to be allowed to be put into practice.

Many have commented of the strongly static, primordialist definition of "ethnic groups" (i.e., of what in Ethiopian legal texts are called "nations, nationalities and peoples", here abbreviated as NNPs). For example, in article 39(5) of the Ethiopian constitution it says:

> A "nation, nationality or people" for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

This is still the official view on the NNPs in Ethiopia, although it does not cover all groups. It assumes a certain static view of the groups and does not reflect the views ofethnicity as a social "part-identity", invoked situationally. Numerous critical reflections have been offered in academic work and evaluative reports showing that this view does not reflect reality

and cannot work together with democracy.[12] But it is maintained anyway because it is a convenient framework elaborated in territories, electoral districts and control structures, e.g., via ethno-regional parties linked to the ruling party. Next to the three categories mentioned, a fourth category is added in another article of the Constitution (art. 53.2): the “minority nationality”: one that is too small to form a regional or district self-government or a voter district of its own.[13] Twenty-two such “minority nationalities” always receive one seat each in the parliament, the House of People’s Representatives.

A federal institution worth mentioning is the second chamber, the House of the Federation (HoF),[14] which is largely a constitutional control chamber made up of people from the Regions and has elected members from the regional state parliaments. Here the ruling party EPRDF has also great influence. The HoF has members from all the 74 recognized ethnic groups (NNPs) in the country. Its chief role is to interpret the Constitution (at the exclusion of the Judiciary), to mediate in disputes between zones or regional states (article 62.6) and to contribute to decisions on formulas for regional state revenue sharing. In the past 20 years it often mediated relatively successfully in ethnic group boundary disputes. Still, the HoF is not a very active institution; perhaps understandable, because is has no legislative function.

There is also a Ministry of Federal Affairs, directly under the Prime Minister, that is concerned with dispute resolution and “capacity building” of the regions. It has been growing in importance in the past decade and has more impact than the HoF because of its closeness to the Executive and its capacity to enforce its decisions. The Ministry of Federal Affairs (issuing from the previous Regional State Issues bureau in the PM’s office) also runs prisons and is in charge of security in the peripheral, lowland regions. The existence of such a Ministry (at the federal level and in a supposedly federal political system) indicates the continued objective of the central government to manage the ethno-regions. This may produce contradictions to the basic idea of federalism. At the same time, this Ministry has been able to help defuse several ethnic group conflicts in the west, south-west and south of the country.[15]

Part of the federal structure is the aim of decentralization and devolution of power and decision-making to the ethno-regions: regarding budget, revenue collection, self-administration, the judiciary, and local development

planning. This programme of decentralization has had limited results over the past two decades, but it can be seen in the adoption of the locally dominant languages for administrative purposes and the staffing of the new bureaucracy by ethnic locals. A great problem is always said to be “the lack of capacity”, but the more important one has been that of corruption and nepotism.

A final notable element of ethnic federalism is the public celebration of ethnic diversity. The colourful folkloric aspects of this diversity are advertised on large street posters, on national TV programmes on ethnic dance and song, on postage stamps, via touristic products, and in cultural festivals such as the annual “Nationalities, Nations and Peoples’ Day”, a national meeting day for representatives of the many peoples in the country. There is also a cultural policy document[16] that in principle promises to enhance or preserve culture and heritage throughout the country. In practice, however, such aims of preservation and respect of cultural diversity are hemmed in and undermined by laws about “development” (to whicheverything should be subsumed), policies toward the abolition of “harmful traditional practices” (controversial;[17] determined by the federal government, not the communities themselves), and by frequent statements by government spokesmen and leaders that the livelihoods of such groups are not sustainable and that they cannot be preserved like natural species or museum pieces.

The federal order is a very complex structure. This is evident from the constitution, the many additional laws and proclamations issued since 1994, and the institutional layers established top-down. It has in actual practice led to the emphatic presence and interference of the federal government via the ruling party and its officers/employees (cadres) to create an effective governance structure and monitor or sanction “deviations”. Recently one Ethiopian observer even said that the federation does not show enough devolution of powers, and that “there is absolutely no political freedom at the state level. Today … the government of Ethiopia operates more like a unitary state”.[18]

## Ethnicity and the ideology of “revolutionary democracy”

Many commentators have discussed the ideology that runs across the ethno-federal constitutional structure: that of “revolutionary democracy”. This is

not the place to elaborate on this[19] but suffice it to say that this ideology of the ruling TPLF/EPRDF party is a hybrid ruling ideology derived from Leninism, infused with some democratic principles, and confronted with or applied to ethnic diversity in the country. For our purposes here, I only note that "revolutionary democracy" was seen by EPRDF in 1991 as the way to implement the "democratization" of Ethiopia by way of according ethnic rights and exercising local, ethnicized power via derived, satellite ethnic parties in the newly established ethnic districts and regions.[20] In this governance venture, the use of political advisers, i.e., the ruling party "cadres" as they are called, is vital. They are active across the country training and "guiding" local administrations. Inevitably, this phenomenon enhances the intertwining of ruling party, government and state,[21] and reflects the revolutionary-democratic party ideal of so-called "democratic centralism". The democratic content of this formula is, however, limited or let us say, peculiar.[22]

Ethiopia's ethno-federal democracy is of course not a liberal parliamentary democracy as commonly accepted.[23] It is rather centralist and vanguardist, under a ruling party. As said, it is a direct product from revolutionary Marxist-Leninist thinking and does not entertain the possibility of a possible loss of power in elections, although of course elections have been held. The EPRDF stance is that liberal democracy cannot work in a developing country like Ethiopia and that the country needs a dominant party (now called *awra party* in Amharic: the "dominant" party). This was substantiated in all elections so far, where the EPRDF always came out as the overwhelming winner. Interesting is that this idea of the impossibility or "undesirability" of liberal democracy was virtually refuted by the 2005 elections, a remarkable phase of electoral performance in that the opposition parties of the time gained a very large following and had been allowed to appear in state TV debates and to campaign, etc. Here we saw a real dawn of political pluralism. But only when it appeared that the opposition parties could win the vote and thus jeopardize the entire revolutionary-democratic programme, the process was probably interfered with and the ruling party still won in the end.[24] But the point is: voters (we will never know how many exactly) knew what to vote for and wanted in manydistricts to vote the EPRDF out of office. There are some data for various regions,[25] suggesting that support for parties did not follow predictable "ethnic" or urban – rural lines. At the level of the National

Electoral Board, however, votes disappeared in a non-transparent counting exercise. When a coalition government would have been formed in 2005, the Ethiopian political experiment would have entered a new democratic phase, and the ideology of the ruling party would have to be modified and adapted in political practice. To sum up, as the EPRDF won all elections on any level since 1991, the revolutionary-democratic model, with its strongly centralist approach, was retained, and the federal democratic model has not really been put to the test.

## Ethnic diversity and the ethnic regions – a new socio-political structure of group relations

Numerous legal and logical analyses have been made of the nature and effects of the federal structure of Ethiopia, and many reach similar conclusions. I will not repeat them here. But to draw up the balance of the almost 20 years of ethno-federalism one has to look at the facts of the ground: how has the model fared in reality. Only a brief survey can be given here.

- The innovative and encouraging aspect of Ethiopia's ethno-linguistic based federalism in the 1990s was that it initiated a liberating phase of ethnic and linguistic self-expression. People used their freedom for ethnic, linguistic and cultural expression. For instance, a whole series of new ethno-historical, language and folkloric publications written by members of the groups themselves was published, and still is. According to law, no ethnic group or individual should be afraid or to be ashamed of performing his/her ethnicity. Old denigrating categories, such as "Shanqila" used for the black, southwestern ethnic minorities, are forbidden by law and can lead to court cases for group insult.[26] Local administrations can pursue their affairs and meetings in the dominant local languages, such as Sidama or Wolaitta or Gamo or Afar. All this does not preclude the continued existence of prejudice and of denigration of certain groups by others. Nor did these rhetorical acts construe equality between the groups: ethnic ranking and hierarchy, e.g. of highland groups towards lowland groups, continues.[27]

- Specific local cultural policies according to the ethnic make-up of a region or zone or district can be developed and pursued. Research on local languages and folklores is facilitated more.
- There has been decentralization and devolution of powers, at least in outward from and appearance. Much of it is, however, more akin to deconcentration. More funds have been flowing to regional authorities, and some regional state can act autonomously in securing external (even foreign) project aid.
- New institutions for conflict mediation were instituted through state organs like the HoF, the Ministry of Federal Affairs, district or regional courts and the ruling party branches. Also some recognition was given to the role of local community elders and religious authorities (i.e., if they are not serious matters like assault, highway robbery, homicide or specified "political crimes" as defined by the government), although ruling party/government officials usually kept control of the proceedings.
- There has been a resurgence of sub-national and ethnic identities, sometimes with political overtones. One example was the fight over "WoGaGoDa" in the Wolaitta area in 1999–2000, discussed below. This has an economic dimension in that new ethnic entrepreneurs seek to foster specific types of ethnic belonging for instrumental reasons: a rational response to an institutional system that puts a premium on ethnic group rights.
- Local border and identity conflicts, often incorrectly dubbed "ethnic" conflicts, have however increased. A fair number of newly emphasized ethnic groups pleaded for their own separate administrative division. Often they got a special district (*liyyu woreda*). Some of these border disputes became very lethal. All this has resulted in more local intolerance and exclusivist claim-making. People may have the right, and may feel happy, in asserting a newly found identity, but mostly the process seems to be shaped by a political economy of claim making for local power, jobs as well as federal budgets.
- Territories have become mono-ethnic, even if they were not so historically; they cannot be shared by two or more groups. Acrimonious conflicts and personal drama have often been the result. One case was the repeated expulsion of northern (re)settlers

of “Amhara” origin from Wälläga in 2000[28] (and later in 2005), which reportedly happened with the connivance of the local authorities. It is to be recalled also that various Regional State constitutions carry the clause that the “sovereignty” in the Region resides in the majority ethnic group or people, thus excluding the other inhabitants.

- Especially pastoralist groups have become more vulnerable as the state and the regional authorities want them to “settle” and suspect them of fomenting instability and over-exploitation of the environment.[29]
- The actual power and interference of the federal government in regional and local affairs has become stronger than under any previous regime.
- There is strong normative social and cultural pressure on minority ethnic groups to conform to highland society lifestyles and to abandon traditional livelihoods and so-called “harmful traditional practices”.
- The federal structure is undermined, and thwarted at times, by the political ideology of the government (=ruling party), i.e., revolutionary democracy, as the party retained all real power at the centre and has not sufficiently “democratized” the federal structure: the say of the regions and the zones on any policies is very limited.

## Conflict and mediation – some examples

Conflict in the federation has not been scarce. On the national level there are two ethno-regional movements that offer armed resistance: the Oromo Liberation Front for Oromo autonomy rights in various parts of Ethiopia, and the Ogaden National Liberation Front for autonomy or independence of the Somali in Eastern Ethiopia (Region 5). Granted that these two movements are violent, have in the recent past made several incomprehensible decisions and killed scores of innocent civilians and bystanders, there is also a historical basis for their grievances, which were not yet handled adequately by the state. I will not discuss the movements here, but it seems that in itself article 39 of the Constitution has allowed orencouraged some ethnic-based organizations in the country from

historically underprivileged groups to develop secessionist programmes. Obviously, ethno-regional insurgent movements existed before the promulgation of the 1994 Constitution, but article 39 has given their cause a legal basis, and both movements mentioned have appealed to it. But any stirring in these respective regions to start a process towards more autonomy or secession was suppressed and institutionally thwarted; and no region will, despite the right to do so, ever have the practical possibility to secede from Ethiopia. So the principle of conceding secession seems vacuous in the face of the very strong federal state and its Executive. It serves as a rhetoric device in back gear, the constitution drafters assuming that because of its formal presence and enticement value it will never be resorted to. This has, however, undermined the sincerity of the federal idea.

I now turn to some elements of conflict perception, amongst which are the following. As noted above, the classification of Ethiopia's citizens primarily in terms of their ethnicity as well as the strong *territorialization* of groups has been accompanied by and perhaps been a casual factor in, numerous *new* local-level conflicts about who is what, and to heavy pressure on people to "come out" for one ethnicity (e.g., of the father) and not the other.[30] Also conflicts erupt frequently about the right to have a job in the local ethnicized administration, about voting or candidature rights, and especially of course about *borders*. Borders between regions, zones and districts have been the recurring issue of dozens of conflicts, many of them violent and with numerous casualties (I counted c.5000–6000 people killed over the past 20 years in such "ethnic" and "border" conflicts). This however is not to say that all resulted from state-induced border arrangements.

There is also *minority discrimination and ethnic inequality*. While some authors claim[31] that ethnic conflicts do not really occur in Ethiopia because the new regions and districts are staffed and led by members of the locally dominant ethnic group and thus cannot suppress their "own people", reality is different. We have seen conflict and repression of people by the local administration or security forces from nominally their own ethnic community, examples of armed clashes and expulsions of people of a certain ethnic group from certain areas, and the barring of qualified locals for jobs in the local administration or school system because of their preferring another political party.

Solutions have to be found here for the practical consequences and the mechanisms of "enemy making" on the local level that produce this. While the formal ethno-political structure as such cannot always be held responsible for violent abuse, it may by its rhetorical construction and governance practices stimulate difference and antagonism.

One would say that this aspect of conflict production in the federal political experiment needs amendment or at least elaboration, optimizing the use of available procedures for conflict prevention and resolution given by the Constitution and by additional laws, e.g. on "alternative conflict resolution mechanisms" (as announced by the government in 2006 and tried several times, e.g. in 2007 in the Ethiopian Southwest, when a settlement between several warring pastoral ethnic groups was reached).

Some well-known examples of conflict and mediation of recent years, closely related to the ethno-federal political framework, follow below.

### *Wogagoda*

Wogagoda was the name of a composite Omotic language in which the federal government wanted to conduct local administration and the education system, in order to save costs and "unite" four groups: the Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa and Dawro, all speaking closely related languages.[32] But the groups resisted; notably the dominant Wolaitta, who feared being overruled by others and rejected cultural-linguistic "colonization". Protests erupted in November 1999 in which c.12 people were killed and millions worth of school books and property were destroyed. In the Wolaitta capital Soddo, local people turned on members of other groups, e.g., Gamo people who were in the police force, to vent their anger. An initial federal government clamp-down was followed by negotiations and abandonment of the language plans. The problem was thus "solved" on the federal, not on the regional, state level. Wolaitta as a result was also granted a new status as a separate Zone and was detached from the larger North Omo Zone. Proper consultation in advance to these perhaps well-intentioned language plans could have prevented the casualties.

### *Anywa-Nuer relations*

In Gambella regional state there has been perennial competition and conflict between the indigenous sedentary Anywa people and the agro-pastoral Nuer, many of whom have since 1991 migrated in large numbers into Gambella, and since more than 15 years appear to form the numerical majority. The EPRDF initially supported an Anywa-dominated local administration, but later shifted towards support of the Nuer. Other local minorities as well as "highlanders" (Amhara, Gurage, Oromo, Tigray) were left out of the local administration, not being "indigenous". The features of this conflict have been repeated clashes, persistent border disputes, and rounds of killings, the worst one in 2003 when dozens of people died in Gambella town. The federal government contained the problem but has not been able to find a durable solution for the division of power.[33] It was also accused of sometimes fanning the conflict.[34]

***Benishangul-Gumuz regional state***

In this small and rather marginal regional state (0.5 million people) a conflict erupted in the mid-1990s between the various population groups, indigenous Berta, Gumuz and descendants of later immigrant groups like the Oromo, the Amhara and other "highlanders", about political representation, ethnic districts, and the regional presidency. As the groups did not differ much in population size and as there was no majority ethnic group, fierce competition started among the two indigenous groups for the leadership and for resources via claims for new ethnic district units. Under the federal system's rules, the highlanders (counting c. 35% but not being "indigenous") were excluded from the leading positions: they were so-called "non-titular" groups. After inter-group rioting (Gumuz vs. Berta and Berta vs. Amhara/highlanders) and boycotts of the regional government by either the Gumuz or the Berta representatives, a commission of the House of the Federation could successfully intervene by negotiating a complicated compromise formula with ethnic quota, formation of a new "special *woreda"* for the Amhara resettler population, new councils, and a structure of alternate power holding. Peace in the region ismaintained due to federal control and intricately balancing the ethnic interests, although at the exclusion of the largest group, the highlanders. Stability does not seem durable.

### *Somali–Oromo relations*

In the vast border area of the Oromo and Somali regions in southeast Ethiopia there are ongoing disputes about land, border and identities. First of all, there have been frequent disputes between the Boran-Oromo and Somali clans since 1991. Secondly, Somali and Oromo identities are not unambiguous; some groups claim to be both Somali and Oromo, like the Garre, Garrimarro, or Gabbra, and what they emphasize may depend on wider perceptions of their interests and access to power and resources. Even the "ownership" of the regional town of Moyale (on the Kenyan border) was contested by the local ethnic/clan groups. In 2003–04 there were disturbances in the area on regional borders, along a *new* fault line of Gerri (originally Darod Somali) and Jarso (who are Somalized Oromo). Interestingly the two groups previously had an alliance of more than a hundred years. Their being imbricated in local ethnic politics and claims of local ethnic parties made them drift apart and emphasize a more separate identity,[35] and conflict erupted. The federal government then organized a referendum in October 2004 to settle the emerging boundary dispute between the Oromia and Somali regional states. As a result, more than 35 Gerri-Jarso *kebeles* were transferred to the Oromia region,[36] others remained in Somali Region 5. Again the federal government was instrumental in negotiating a deal by confirming an ethnic "separation".[37]

So in most of the cases above solutions were found, be it often tardy and haphazard. Issues of population balance (no one group being overwhelmingly dominant), local leadership, as well as government promises may have been conducive here. But the point is that disputes keep (re)surfacing, and separation and containment seem to be pursued as solutions. This is evident, for instance, in the large number (13 at present) of "special *woredas*" – or districts – within a zone or between zones that have more autonomy than others.

## Ethio-democracy and ethnic-based federalism: inherent tensions?

So we have seen "revolutionary democracy" and territorialized ethno-linguistic federalism in the past two decades, and in view of the facts on the ground – the many reports in the Ethiopian press about clashes and land disputes – there are tensions. Why? Because Ethiopian ethno-federalism is a "container federalism", based on fixed ethnic entities. The federal structure

is precariously democratic and generates competition between the NNPs (or ethnic groups), specifically their aspiring elites, about “resources” – land, water, minerals, federal funds and about communal or religious identity. In other words, they have a political interest to take position against each other.[38]

The social facts of ethnic identity and local group relations show that ethnicity is fluid, ambivalent and negotiated. An ethno-federal system needs to be legally and institutionally capable of recognizing and pragmatically handling these dynamic aspects, which result in opportunistic behaviour, group-based claim making, and shifts in (ethnic) self-identity. There is – ambiguous – evidence that the Ethiopian federal state has furthered such pragmatic solutions in the field – as in theBenishangul-Gumuz region, in the South, or on the Amhara-Afar border. But the legal framework per se (the Constitution and the other laws) as well as the governance practices, e.g. of the strongly centre-dominated Ministry of Federal Affairs, may paradoxically hinder this pragmatism.

Furthermore, there is tension in the federal system due to: (a) strong administrative control from the centre, with capillary dual control structures into all regions; (b) economic and budgetary dependency of ethno-regions on the federal centre; (c) insufficient decentralization in administrative and economic practice; (d) a clever district voting system tied to the national ruling party and its allies where the “first past the post” system guarantees that a local ethnic majority represented by a party linked to the ruling party EPRDF always wins the vote and rules the region.[39]

Critics say that a recurrent problem of the federation is the unchanged one-party dominance based on the old Marxist “democratic-centralist” thinking: top-down policies by the vanguard party.[40] The latter indeed may often “know best” and they have a clear programme, but this works against political pluralism and grass roots initiatives, and does not allow us to gauge the extent of consent of ethnic elites towards the current political federation. There is a tendency to rule by coercion and by imposed “solutions”. At the same time there is a reluctance or fear to use local initiatives and customary mediation mechanisms in times of conflict. Perhaps the Ogaden situation is the best example of this. Here we see a major problem where the government and the population are not able to work out a solution.[41] The regional government in the Ogaden (Region 5) is not performing well and, supported by federal security, responds with

strong armed force to suppress the rebel movement ONLF as well as civilians suspected of assisting them. An emergency law situation is in place and the humanitarian and food situation remains dramatic.

A general basis for tension in the federation may also be that the current nine large ethno-regions make often little economic and geographic-ecological sense: widely disparate parts of various language communities, e.g., of Amhara and Oromo, were lumped together in a region. But the ethno-linguistic units were (and are) not economic or political units. Parts of these regions were or are economically more related to neighbouring regions outside the regional state and with those inside it. For instance, Wollega Oromo with Gumuz (in another state), Gojjam Amhara with Wollega Oromo, or Afar with Somali and Tigrayans. Even enmity between various parts of allegedly the "same people" has been regularly recorded on the basis of different beliefs, values and livelihoods (clashes between Guji vs. Boran, both Oromo-speaking). Also annexations of areas belonging historically to other ethnic-national groups were recorded, based not on ethno-linguistic but on profitable economic criteria, e.g. the large Humera sesame-producing areas to Tigray while it was historically part of Amhara (Gondar/Begemdir). Asymmetry is found in any kind of federation, but the territorial, economic and demographic imbalances in the Ethiopian one are created on presumed ethno-linguistic grounds and ideologically enforced unity, and have introduced a new hierarchy that will remain a bone of contention.

One of the underlying aims of a federation is to further *stability*, via the recognition of autonomy and self-determination claims, the application of rule-of-law principles in political practice, and the mediation of conflicts. I will not discuss the evidence about recent conflicts regarding politics proper, e.g., the national elections (2005, 2010), the government/party attitude towards opposition parties, the precarious existence of the independent press, of NGOs, of independent labourunions, of public dissent, and the ongoing rebellion and counter-insurgency in Somali Region 5. But I note that in the domain of ethnic relations many observers have doubted whether stability and consensus seeking were decisively enhanced by the current political model, which has politicized ethnicity. Although there are good examples of successful mediation and solution of certain problems via the House of the Federation or the Ministry of Federal Affairs, the fact that so-called ethnic conflicts are produced time and again on the

local level is a moot point. As noted, an inventory of “ethnic-based” incidents and conflicts mentioned in the press and in various human rights reports over the past years has revealed dozens of cases and with a disturbing number of fatalities.

## The new dynamics

New economic developments and the growing role of the federal Executive in recent years may mark a departure from the ethno-federal model as we know it. The recent emphasis on, if not obsession with, “development”, in the sense of grand infrastructure investments (hydropower schemes) and commercial agriculture ventures by foreign investors being given large tracts of land, has increased the grip of the federal government, bypassing the regional states and the local populations. Land is state property and can be easily expropriated and used for state or foreign investment.[42]

While the debates on the benefits and pitfalls of ethno-federalism will go on, there is therefore a possibility that they will become secondary of even fairly irrelevant in the face of the economic changes and the general development of Ethiopian society. The massive infrastructure works, new economic ventures, large resettlement projects in the South, hydro-power dam schemes, land investments, etc., may engender a new nation-wide dynamic that rekindles “assimilation” processes or socio-economic mobility across the (ethnic) regions. This is indeed to be expected, and indeed the Ethiopian federal government does everything to deflect attention from existing problems of group tensions, democratic deficit[43] and conflict. But these processes of “assimilation” and growing trans-group contracts will not occur without legal and political changes. The Ethiopian government/ruling party aims to keep full control of the process and, according to critics, appears to run the economy as a party-co-opted venture.

A brief analysis of the recently started Ghibe-3 dam venture and of the alienation of large tracts of land from pastoral and agrarian peoples in the south and west of the country makes these control structures clear.[44]

### *The Ghibe-3 dam in the Lower Omo River*

The federal project since 2006 to build a third large dam in the Omo River aims to generate a huge reservoir for electricity production, also for export.

The interruption of the flow of the Omo River will have a serious impact on the livelihoods of c.200,000 people downstream up to Kenya, impeding their flood bank cultivation systems, fishery, and availability of pasture. Most of these people happen to be smaller agro-pastoral ethnic groups. The local people were not seriously involved in consultations and their customary land rights not recognized, because this dam was defined as a matter of overriding national concern. The environmental and social impact assessment report was weak and late. Serious compensations were not onoffer except vague promises of schools, clinics, or roads. Sedentary cultivators may indeed receive some compensation and low-paid job offers, but the needs and rights of pastoral (mobile) groups are more difficult to meet. Local objections towards the building of this dam in the manner proposed have been quelled and can even land people in prison.[45] Here we see that ethnic minorities have little possibility to defend themselves against federal development plans and are left to their own devices; they simply must submit and share in the "development" to come. Here the federal structures could have performed much better but did not feel any need to do so. According to local people and observers this contradicts the letter and spirit of the federation.

### *Large-scale land investments by foreigners*

A new phenomenon since c.2006 is that of the federal and regional governments handing out huge tracts of land for commercial agrarian investment, mostly to foreigners, against lease fees and easy conditions. Most of the land is said to be unproductive and empty terrain, fit for cultivation. Partly this is true. But a large portion of these lands is also used in a low intensity manner by local groups as essential livelihood supplement (livestock pasture, forest product gathering, beekeeping, shifting cultivation, water supply). The figures are staggering,[46] and the land – being formally state property – is easily alienated from local people and then fenced off. In many cases, proper socio-ecological assessment studies have not been carried out, and the idea of serious dialogue about the plans is absent. Again ethnic minorities – although not the only ones affected[47] – are extra vulnerable because they cannot defend their rights (small numbers, lack of language knowledge and regional connections). The options for local people are to move out and migrate to other areas,[48] or to become

(low-paid) labourers on the newly established mega-farms, taken out of their social fabric and networks. Alternative areas or facilities are not prepared for them and many are lost and become destitute.[49]

This process is very recent and its full effects are not yet known. The social and ecological impacts may be different from what the federal government expects. The hope is that these large agro-firms will have a positive effect on food security in Ethiopia[50] as well as an economic and technological-managerial spill-over effect on Ethiopian agriculture, but this is not guaranteed unless the federal government imposes stricter conditions, demands training for Ethiopians and provides proper compensation for locals.

These massive processes of socio-economic engineering and change – which call to mind the state schemes described in James Scott's famous study *Seeing like a State*[51] – do radically impinge on local peoples and undermine their rights as local cultivators or as minority ethnic groups vis-a`-vis the central state and dominant groups, and thus seem to endanger their ethnic rights in their own homeland areas. The state projects mentioned represent (in Scott's terms) a "high-modernist" development ideology that is not interested in local knowledge and people: local people were only nominally consulted and are not in effect seen as stake-holders, and in no case of the proposed schemes has any serious alteration been made.[52] Here a seamless continuity can be found with the large "Socialist" schemes of resettlement, villagization and collective agriculture that were tried under the *Derg* regime,[53] although the ideological justification is now democratic-centralist developmentalism. As noted above, neither were commensurate compensations offered, and it is unclearif they will materialize. The problem is not that development on a large scale is started in Ethiopia – this can have benefits. The problem is that the regional states and lower authorities have no power or inclination to consider or to protect minority ethnic groups from adverse effects contained in certain federal policies. This, I think, reveals a weakness of the ethno-federal order and its democratic content.[54]

The ruling government, or party (the same), is adamant about these large development schemes and about its vanguard ideology of "revolutionary democracy", but the latter seems to subvert essential elements of the federal order and the rights to culture and livelihood of the various ethnic groups. It is to be asked whether in some respects the

revolutionary democracy ideology has perhaps not outlived the conditions of the early 1990s, when the new regime was faced with the task of "holding together" a diverse and complex country in a post-war situation. Even apart from the contentious electoral-political processes of recent years and its need of constant and costly monitoring (via omnipresent cadres), the ideology may contradict some of the demands of the formal ethno-federal order. In the case of the two big schemes mentioned above, it can be contended that local peoples simply have to adapt to the new national development schemes, but if that is enforced without involving them and by asking them to utterly change their livelihoods and ethno-cultural profile[55] – which they have the constitutional right to keep and preserve – it is unclear what the meaning of ethno-federalism is.

To come back to the general point of the possible impact of the overall economic changes and the general development of Ethiopian society, there is no doubt that social frameworks and ethnic relations will change in their wake. But this change will not materialize if some legal and institutional facilitation is not provided. E.g., rural land is not owned by people and cannot be sold (FDRE 2005), ethnicity is still the defining basis of territorial-administrative units, and so-called illegal migrants from poorer areas and with another ethnicity have a tenuous status are regularly chased out by local authorities (from another ethnic group) from the areas where they migrate to. The emergence of a more diffuse, dynamic category or middle class of trans-regional people is thus inhibited and the economic dynamics hindered. While even the aforementioned position of economic growth and development as most important national challenge may eventually carry the day, it cannot succeed when the political model and its legal constraints are not adapted to these processes. It remains to be seen if the current party in power is able or willing to make any adaptations, but one might hope so.

## Conclusion: a mixed picture

Ethiopia in the past 20 years has rhetorically liberated ethnic relations, accorded many ethnic rights, and enhanced local self-administration, as evident from the relevant legal texts and the regional-zonal division of the country. Ethnic groups – in their guises of "nations, nationalities and peoples", from the c.28 mln Oromo to the c.70 Ongota (Birale) – are

formally recognized and have been exercising rights of political representation and cultural and language development over the past 20 years. But how these are to be reconciled and what scope they can have still remains unclear, especially within the new economic dynamics. Economic upsurge is in full swing and has seen successes. But these do neither "compensate" for the sociopolitical problems nor guarantee stability. At present there still are constraints and dilemmas in the field of ethnicity and citizenship.

Ethnicity, in the form of ethnic self-determination claims, is well-developed in political rhetoric but seen as expendable when great national development ventures (dams, resettlement, foreign land acquisitions/plantations) are undertaken. Common citizenship is still underdeveloped, because it is not the basis of constitutional sovereignty and rights – as ethnicity is the prime basis of people's identity: for voting in elections, for party membership, and for identifying yourself when you come to a police station to report a stolen object. Ethnic federalism as an institutional set-up privileges ethnicity as *one* marker of identity over many others (economic, citizenship, occupation, religion, class, or gender) and, in a sense, freezes this one marker of identity, or rather encourages people to identify in ethnic terms. But in many contexts the other ways of identifying are as important, and sometimes more so. Inclusive national discourse, as a result, has suffered and is nowadays constructed primarily in terms of "development" in the classic economic sense (i.e., GDP growth), and not in those of well-being, or democratic performance, or human rights respect, or the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), or the Human Development Index measurement.[56] This despite the renewed rhetorical emphasis on "national unity" celebrated in numerous seminars and public statements. The EPRDF version of pan-Ethiopianist national discourse, developed notably after the Ethio-Eritrean war, and is also seen in occasional symbolic celebrations of "unity in diversity" such as *Flag Day* (since 2008)[57] and *Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Day* (since 2006, an annual celebration of the ethnic group traditions of Ethiopia). But it has not been able to redefine the basis and hierarchy of the ethno-federal system in place. Ethiopian citizenship is still overlaid by cultivated ethno-regional identity, put above democracy. In addition, in daily life ethnic identities are now "internalized" by people to a significant extent. This may enhance more mutual prejudice and stereotyping.

All in all, when considering Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism one can speak of a mixed picture, with achievements but also threats. A social science perspective on Ethiopia is not out to make normative judgements but describe and explain observable facts and societal trends. One can easily discern both momentous changes and remarkable continuities over the last 20 years in the patterns of governance and in ethnic tensions. The first – the changes – are a testimony to the things achieved and the tasks ahead; the second – the continuities – are indicative of the unresolved problems and the unfulfilled promises that the country has yet to deal with. It is here that the "benchmarks" to assess the ethno-federal model (see introduction) – contribution to (ethnic/regional) self-determination; ability to defuse/prevent ethnic-based conflict; democratic-consultative decision-making; exercise of ethno-cultural rights; an open, trans-ethnic economic arena and partnership; and non-discriminatory, issue-based politics for the federation as a whole – are probably not yet met. These problems would require additional political-legal engineering that could more engage Ethiopia's citizens, depoliticize ethnic identity, and reduce the politics of top-down rule, distrust and threat, indicative of a strongly authoritarian political culture lingering from the past. The French intellectual Alain Finkielkraut once said[58] that recognizing the fundamental unity and solidarity of all humans across ethnic and political lines requires imagination and active work. In analogy, one could say that recognizing the fundamental unity, rights and solidarity of all Ethiopians across such lines requires a similarly positive, constructive attitude. On this account the past 20 years of ethno-federalism have shown a neglect of opportunities,[59] and has yielded an unexpected hardening of political attitudes on the side of the EPRDF government, notably since 2005.[60] It is somewhat of amystery why a party and government that came to power in 1991 with a groundswell of support and even goodwill after the demise of the *Derg* regime has seen fit to taint its historical record by stifling dissent and blocking the emergence of a mature democracy.[61] The ideal of a more representative parliamentary democracy, with political and media freedoms and a reliable, independent justice system, is however a global cause that is unlikely to be abandoned. In Ethiopia, economic resurgence is indeed in progress, with new infrastructure works expanding, investments proceeding, production growing, and several Millennium Development Goals appearing within reach.[62] But perhaps the real work of building an inclusive, democratic and

more just society that puts ethnicity in its place and builds on addressing shared challenges and problems has only just begun. Constructive work on commonalities between population groups rather than using difference and division is needed – i.e., a new psychology of trust and cooperation – to maximize the potential and fulfil the ultimate aims of the federation. Thus the traditional might be harmonized with the new. Continued field research on Ethiopia's ethnic groups and peoples, both by government bodies and independent scholars, can contribute to the further understanding of the "experiment".

## Notes

1. Vaughan, *Addis Ababa Transitional Conference;* Abbink, "Breaking and Making the State"; Micheau, "The 1991 Transitional Charter."
2. This paper offers a tentative assessment of such "benchmarks". A first sketch of this text was presented at the symposium "Twenty Years since the Change of Government in Ethiopia – Twenty Years since Operation Solomon," at the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, May 17, 2011. I am grateful to various members of the audience, including Ethiopian Ambassador to Israel, H.E. *Ato* Helawe Yosef, for their questions and comments.
3. Asked in 1995 whether he thought the new federal system would work, he answered: "I don't know, but we have tried everything else, and that didn't work," cited in Clapham, "Nationalism, Nationality and Regionalism."
4. See Maimire, "Federalism, Ethnicity, and the Transition to Democracy"; Alem, "Ethnic Pluralism as an Organizing Principle"; Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism and Self-determination"; Aalen, "Institutionalising the Politics of Ethnicity"; Abbink, "Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia"; Asebe, "Ethnicity and Inter-Ethnic Relations"; Emebet, "Federalism and the Accommodation of Ethnic Diversity"; Hagmann and Mulugeta, "Pastoral Conflicts and State-Building"; ICG, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents*; Kalkidan, "Nonfederal Features"; Asnake, "Federal Restructuring in Ethiopia"; Tronvoll, "Interpreting Human Rights Violations," Tronvoll, "Briefing: The Ethiopian 2010 Federal and Regional Elections."
5. See PM Meles Zenawi's ideological party texts *Perspectives on Bonapartism* and *Again on Bonapartism*, and the EPRDF, *The Development Lines*. For the 2001 crisis, see Paulos, 'The Great Purge'.
6. In this phase, a notable increase of accusations of 'narrow nationalism' or 'tribalism' was seen in the government's public statements and in the official media.
7. MoFED, *Growth and Transformation*.
8. Cf. Messay, "From Marxism-Leninism to Ethnicity."
9. Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, Oromo Liberation Front, Tigray People's Liberation Front, Sidama Liiberation Front.
10. See Tronvoll, "Interpreting Human Rights Violations."
11. See *Negarit Gazeta* "A Proclamation," 7–8.
12. Aalen, "Institutionalising the Politics of Ethnicity"; ICG, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents;* Merera, "Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralization"; Teshome,"Conflict of Ethnic Identity and the Language of Education Policy"; Tronvoll, "Interpreting Human Rights Violations."

13. See Tronvoll, “Interpreting Human Rights Violations.”
14. The HoF and its role are described in the Ethiopian Constitution, articles 61–8.
15. In Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State, in Bench-Maji Zone, in South Omo Zone, in Somali-Oromo border areas, a.o.
16. FDRE, *Cultural Policy*.
17. There is even a semi-official list of 138 of such practices: see the curious book by the National Committee on Traditional Harmful Practices of Ethiopia, *Old beyond Imaginings*, 285–90, a work co-financed by Norway’s NORAD.
18. See Kalkidan, “Nonfederal Features,” 11.
19. See Bassi, “Ethnic federalism and minority rights”; Bach, “*Abyotawi* Democracy,” and Merera, “Elections and Democratization” in this issue.
20. For some important programmatic documents, see: Anon., “TPLF/EPRDF’s Strategies”; Anon., “EPRDF’s Organizational Structure,” 16–19; Anon., “EPRDF’s Organizational Structure and Operation,” 18–22; Anon., “EPRDF’s Organizational Structure and Operation: Lessons for the Opposition (III)” 18–21; Anon., “EPRDF’s Organizational Structure and Operation: Lessons for the Opposition (IV),” 22–7; Anon., “EPRDF’s Organizational Structure and Operation: Lessons for the Opposition (V),” 20–24. See also the more recent EPRDF, *The Development Lines*.
21. Emmenegger, Sibilo and Hagmann, “Decentralization to the Household” (this issue).
22. Cp. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power;* Abbink, “The Ethiopian Second Republic”; Bassi, “Ethnic Federalism and Minority Rights.”
23. Article 8.1 of the Constitution states that the sovereignty of the (Ethiopian) people lies not in the individuals/citizens (as in a liberal democracy) but in the “nations, nationalities and peoples,” i.e. in collectivities. (FDRE, “The Constitution,” 79).
24. EU, *Ethiopia Legislative Elections 2005*.
25. See Arriola, “Ethnicity, Economic Conditions, and Opposition Support.”
26. Previously instituted under the *Derg* regime.
27. This is reflected in the policies towards pastoralists, usually seen as backward, uncivilized and in need of change.
28. See Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *Serious Destructions Resulting from Ethnic Governance, 34th Special Report*, Addis Ababa, September 21, 2000.
29. Which is rarely the case, except when boundaries are made and territories are marked off or enclosed.
30. See Hagmann and Mulugeta, “Pastoral Conflicts and State-Building,” 29–30; Schlee and Shongolo, “Local War and its Impact,” 11–12.
31. Cf. Getachew Assefa, “Human and Group Rights Issues.” He wrote: “there is no way for ethnically- or racially-motivated violations to occur, especially for them to be perpetrated by the federal government. In all cases, the day-to-day administrations in the individual states are run by the institutions and personnel of the states themselves” (ibid., 251) – a puzzling and incorrect observation. See Tronvoll’s excellent reply, “Interpreting Human Rights Violations.”
32. Data, “Enduring Issues in State-Society Relations.”
33. Cf. Dereje, “The Experience of Gambella Regional State”; Dereje, “Conflict and Identity Politics.”
34. HRW, *Targeting the Anuak* – this report, however, should be read with caution because the casualty figures cited were not independently verified.
35. Asnake, “Federal Restructuring in Ethiopia,” 626.
36. Ibid., 617.
37. See also Fekadu, “Overlapping Nationalist Projects.”
38. Cf. Abbink, “Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia.”
39. People can only vote for ethnic parties that are allowed in their region, not for others present in other states or in urban areas; e.g., an “Oromo party” cannot campaign in Tigray or Afar

Region. A more nationally orientated party, the Coaliton for Unity and Democracy (CUD), contested the 2005 elections.

40. Cf. ICG, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents*, 15f.
41. See Hagmann, "Beyond Clannishness and Colonialism"; Hagmann and Korf, "Agamben in the Ogaden."
42. FDRE, "The Constitution"; Oakland Institute, *Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa*, 44; Lavers, *The Role of Foreign Investment*, 16.
43. Cf. Hunt, "Ethiopia's Endangered Democracy."
44. See also Bassi, "Ethnic Federalism and Minority Rights."
45. Cf. "Ethiopia's Controversial Dam Project," in *The Guardian*, March 7, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/mar/07/ethiopia-controversial-dam-criticism-communities (accessed May 2, 2011). See also Tohme, "Turkana under Threat Due to Damming of Omo River in Ethiopia."
46. In 2007–2010 some 2.9 million acres (=1.17 mln. ha.) of land was given out, mostly to foreign investors, and in 2013 the total lease area will be 7.4 million acres by 2013 (=31,000 $km^2$). McConnell and Overdorff, "New Scramble for Africa's Land." One of the largest concessions is that of Indian firm Karuturi, with 100,000 ha. and with an option of 200,000 ha. more (in Gambela).
47. Most large-scale land acquisitions have so far been in the Gambela, Southern Region, Oromiya and Amhara areas.
48. There are also forms of "contract farming" and "outsourcing," whereby local farmers cultivate part of their land for agrarian investor firms.
49. Some adverse effects of this process are shown in the documentary "Food Crisis and the Global Land Grab"; see especially after 30.00 m., on the farmers in the Bako area.
50. This is uncertain, as the firms can export their harvest to their countries of origin (Saudi Arabia, Korea, India, Malaysia, China, etc.) rather than bring it to the Ethiopian market.
51. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.
52. Cf. Bassi, "Ethnic Federalism and Minority Rights."
53. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 247–53.
54. For a fuller elaboration of the details of the Gibe III project, see Anderson and Turton, "After the Flood."
55. This change was promulgated by the EPRDF in a 2003 document (FDRE, *Rural Development Policies*, 58), and in a BBC news report of 15 December 2010, quoting Ethiopian government official Abera Deressa as saying that rural life in the areas [of land acquisition] must change, and that: "Pastoralists have enough land for their cattle, but at the end of the day we are not really appreciating pastoralist remaining as they are … Pastoralism, as it is, is not sustainable. We want to change the environment," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11991926 (accessed February 7, 2011). See also similar words in Ethiopian PM Meles Zenawi's speech in Jinka in December 2010, http://www.mursi.org/pdf/Meles%20Jinka%20speech.pdf (accessed April 21, 2011).
56. See Epstein, "Cruel Ethiopia." For the MPI, see Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Country Briefing: Ethiopia*.
57. See "Ethiopia to Mark Flag Day Colorfully," Walta news message, 28 August 2010.
58. Finkielkraut, *L'Humanité Perdue*.
59. Cf. Levine, "Ethiopia's Missed Chances, I"; "Ethiopia's Missed Chances, II."
60. Cf. Tronvoll, "Interpreting Human Rights Violations," and "Briefing: The Ethiopian 2010 Federal and Regional Elections."
61. It is unlikely that the Ethiopian public would welcome an "Orwellian" form of (revolutionary) democracy, as presented in the "Bonapartism" papers of 2001 (see cited works in note 5 above).

62. This does not imply that the economic record of the government is universally positive; there is still food insecurity, poor service delivery in some areas, high inflation, and ecological-environmental problems.

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# Revolutionary democratic state-building: party, state and people in the EPRDF's Ethiopia

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An ideology of "revolutionary democracy" has driven the project of state building in Ethiopia over the last 20 years. This paper explores the relationships that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government have sought to forge with the Ethiopian state and its people, by means of the various political organizations (parties, fronts, mass associations) that organize, represent or control them. It examines continuities and shifts across a series of iterations since the late 1970s: the Front's politico-administrative organization in 1980s Tigray; the party-led construction of the federation, civil service reform and political "gimgema" in the 1990s; the politicization of capacity building as the focus shifted to the developmental state following party splits and "renewal" from 2001; and the reconstruction of party structures distinct from those of the state in the wake of a strong electoral challenge in 2005, culminating in sweeping electoral wins in 2010.

Despite its imprecision, the notion of revolutionary democracy has anchored shifting constellations of party-state relations, and changing strategies of political mobilization and organization, in the all-encompassing and fundamentally non-liberal political aspiration characterized by the Prime Minister as forging a direct "coalition with the people". Whilst the ruling party has been widely criticized for failing to compromise or collaborate with alternative sources of authority, the paper suggests that this reflects a set of deliberate political choices that are both ideologically and sociologically reinforced. Processes of state building are at root about power, and as such their assessment calls for a nuanced understanding of context. The paper traces the role of ideological, historical, institutional and cultural influences and continuities in the Ethiopian case.

The ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ideology of "revolutionary democracy" has proved difficult for outsiders to capture, and there are a number of reasons for this. One is that little of what

has been written about it is available in English. A second is that a reconstruction suggests that the meaning and significance of the term have shifted over the period since the 1980s when it was first elaborated within the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the extent to which the ideological precepts of revolutionary democracy are shared and understood across party membership is less than clear. This paper seeks to shed light on the notion of revolutionary democracy by looking at central elements of the political strategy and activities it has inspired. It explores the relationships that the TPLF and the EPRDF government have sought to forge between the Ethiopian state and its people, and the various political organizations (parties, fronts, mass associations) that organize, represent or control them.

The paper discusses four periods of TPLF and EPRDF state building, looking at the party-state and state-society relations promoted in each. In a first phase in revolutionary Tigray, the TPLF attempted to forge a unity under vanguard leadership of proto-state structures, front, party and mass associations of the people. In a second phase from 1991 to 2001, whilst new party structures were created as the basis for re-establishing and strengthening the local state in other parts of the country, a dual system was maintained. Although insiders still saw the party as the motor powering state building within government, the ambiguity began to generate stresses at the top, especially in the period after the establishment of the first federal government in 1995. Whilst the institutional response to the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in 1998 confirmed the weak and formulaic differentiation of party and state structures, mobilization associated with the split of the TPLF central committee in 2001 demonstrated the potential competitive efficacy of the two parallel power structures. As a result, a third phase from 2001 to 2005 saw new emphasis on the developmental state as party structures were emasculated, and incorporated under those of the state, brought more clearly beneath a single apex of control. A politicized national capacity building bureaucracy of party members replaced the party *per se* as the engine of state building. The lapse of party centrality after local elections in 2001 arguably contributed to the space available to competitors in the 2005 elections, as the limitations of the Front's desired "coalition with the people" were abruptly exposed. A fourth phase from 2005 saw the aggressive rebuilding of the ruling party as an entity distinct from the state in the run-up to sweeping wins in the 2010 elections, and a

new assertiveness about the party's role in the drive to what is now described as "developmental capitalism".

## State building with non-liberal resources: history, culture and ideology

The literature on contemporary Ethiopia has focused less on state building *per se* than on nation-building, and specifically on the effect of institution building under its unusual ethnic federal system on the Ethiopian "nations" or ethnic groups.[1] Much of what has been written on state building, meanwhile, provides technical policy analysis of the succession of Ethiopian public sector reform programmes. With some notable exceptions,[2] it has tended to obscure or neglect the fact that state building is about power.

A driver of this depoliticization has been the degree of international support for state building in Ethiopia over this period, and the keen interest of funders such as, for instance, the World Bank, in preserving the distinction between developmental support and political controversy.[3] Building state capacity is less controversial if it is conceived purely in terms of the delivery of pro-poor services to meet millennium development goals. State building never is non-political in this way, but it is undoubtedly easier to preserve the fiction in a context of shared liberal commitments to a plural politics of choice and competition, and the separation of party, people and state. Ethiopia does not offer such a context, and this paper investigates aspectsof the interaction of political organization, institution, culture, and ideology in its recent history to explore how these relationships do operate.

Not only is state building always a matter of power: it is also always undertaken in a specific context, deploying and reinventing existing resources and norms. Thus a key heritance in this case is the evolution of the Ethiopian state as it has developed over the *longue durée*, as ancient bastion, empire state, "traditional polity" and military republic.[4] The initiatives described in this paper are, of course, not the first. Explicit attempts to reform, modernize, and centralize the Ethiopian polity can be traced back to the nineteenth century activities of Emperors Tewodros I, Yohannes IV and Menelik II, and arguably much further. Haile Selassie I made a substantive attempt to centralize and bureaucratize government over the middle decades of the twentieth century, wresting away the traditional authority of regional elites to a newly educated administrative class.[5]

Stagnation and frustration in the 1960s and 1970s culminated in the creeping coup of 1974: the military Marxist *Dergue* government then undertook extensive socialist state engineering under the Commission to establish the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE), and set up a network of *wereda* (or district) governments and so-called *kebele* associations of peasants and urban dwellers.[6] Successive Ethiopian governments' attachment to centralized programmes of state building generated learned behaviour,[7] and paid dividends.

The continuing redeployment of existing social resources encompasses these political institutions and experiences, as well as less tangible norms and shared beliefs. All form a part of the knowledge of the collective, and it is often difficult to disentangle them. It has become a truism (perhaps even a self-reinforcing one) that dominant Ethiopian political culture is hierarchical, stratified, competitive and polarized:[8] despite its status as a republic since 1974, Ethiopia does not have a "republican political culture".[9] Some have seen this as a function of the "central role of authority relations within highland Ethiopian society".[10] Others that it reflects the roots of the modern polity in Amhara culture,[11] of which:

> it is a fundamental postulate […] that social order, which is good, can be created and maintained only through hierarchical, legitimate control, deriving ultimately from God.[12]

The stereotype is a strong one, and in a nuanced account Teferi Abate offers what seems almost a caricature:

> […] all rural people in highland Ethiopia, seem to maintain a rather favourable attitude to the state (*mängist*) which they conceptualize as something that naturally resides above the people (*hizb*, "masses"). They also recognize the legitimacy of local officials who bridge the gap between state and people, albeit in the way they also recognize the roles of a hierarchy of supernatural beings in mediating relations with God.[13]

The trope is perhaps most resonantly and convincingly explored in Lefort's ethnographic work on peasant-state relations in North Shoa:[14]

> […] a democratic parliamentary election, as commonly understood, is an incomprehensible concept for the large majority of the inhabitants in these communities, because the absolute nature of power is in their eyes immanent and intangible.[15] […] Their culture includes belief in the omnipotence of God […] and the importance ofhierarchical order derived from him.[16] […] power cannot be contested, because it is divine by essence. […] the Derg and subsequently the EPRDF no longer claim [the late Emperor's] divine authority, but their mandate is still perceived as coming from heaven. Most of the interviewees state that 'God and the *mengist* are the same.' […] to submit to the absolutism of the *mengist* is simply to respect divine will. For

> the overwhelming majority, the absolutism is essential to accomplish the authority's prime mission: to assure civil peace and maintain law and order, which means above all to ensure the security of persons and the judicial settlement of land conflicts.[17]

Although many of the contemporary accounts of this kind of attitude come from Amhara areas,[18] there are also many reports from elsewhere.[19] Ethnography is patchy but anecdotes abound: for instance, a woman farmer participating at a mid-1990s seminar on political rights and the constitution in Western Oromia, asked about the structure of the state beyond *kebele*, *wereda* and zone replied "after the zone there is only God!"[20] Such recognizable and widespread attitudes coexist with multiple peasant strategies to avoid being governed, and myriad instances of rebellion and anti-state activity:[21] those discussed in the next section of this paper are one example. The profile of popular attitudes to government on the ground is undoubtedly changing fast, and Lefort's most recent work speculates on the "secularisation of political culture" in the context of urban influences, the 2005 election, and the views of elite farmers.[22]

A discussion of the evolving profile of community attitudes to government in different parts of the country lies beyond the scope of this paper. Also important, however, is the fact that the perspectives of elite politicians are as much a product (albeit often a different product) of shared beliefs and norms about hierarchy and "natural" or religious order as those of the rest of the population, a fact their international connections or education often do little to change.[23] Continuity is all the more likely where a political collective's perceived political interests and the other ideological influences to which it may be subject tend to reinforce the prominent political norms of the society of which it is a part, and vice versa.

Leninist "proletarian democracy" offers a second heritance that has fed the ideological perspectives and institutional strategies brought by the ruling EPRDF to Ethiopian state building. Aregawi Berhe asserts that the notion of "revolutionary democracy" was drawn from Lenin's *Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Proletarian Dictatorship*.[24] Here, in a critique of the notion of "pure democracy in the abstract", Lenin sets out a number of linked ideas that have resonated in Ethiopia over at least the last four decades. Central to his distinction between "bourgeois" and "proletarian democracy" (arguably the "liberal" and "revolutionary" democracy of contemporary Ethiopian rhetoric) is the establishment of mass associations as the basis for state power.

Thus under “bourgeois parliamentary democracy”, the “apparatus of bureaucracy and judiciary, under capitalism, even in the most democratic republic, [is] for the workers and the working masses the greatest obstacle to making democracy effective”. It is only “proletarian democracy” that can lead to its destruction, “by drawing the mass organizations of the working people into constant and unrestricted participation in State administration”; only thus that “true democracy, that is, equality and freedom, is attainable”.[25] The frame of reference echoes strongly in the Ethiopian Prime Minister’s observation that “in agricultural areas we do not make coalitions with elites: the only coalition we want to make is with the people”.[26] By contrast, it has recently been argued that Ethiopia is

> […] now too complex and diverse a society to be managed without the […] discussion bargaining, compromise, and simultaneous recognition of alternative sources of authority […] needed to create some kind of workable synthesis […][27]

The account given in this paper documents the radically contrary approach adopted by the Ethiopian ruling party: attempting to forge a political unity, under a managed transition from pre-capitalism, which (in the absence of a middle class presumed capable of ushering in a liberal form of democracy) the party itself leads. Significant twists and shifts in the organization of relations between party, state and people notwithstanding, continuity of this perspective continues to apply.

As explicit talk of Leninism has faded over the years, other ideas about the developmental state and its economic successes in Southeast Asia have come to the fore. The work of economists including Mushtaq Khan, Dani Rodrik, Howard Stein, and Joseph Stiglitz on the institutional basis for economic growth and the key role of the state, have combined with Chinese successes to feed new conceptions of *lematawi habt* (developmental capitalism), as revolutionary democracy has evolved.[28] The inherently non-liberal conception of a broadly encompassing role for the party, with mass membership of the population, and co-operatives and mass associations alongside a powerful developmental state, has persisted and been reinvented as the EPRDF’s terminology, and ultimate socialist aspiration, has changed.

There are a number of threads of commonality between the Ethiopian political heritage, Leninist tradition and the developmental state. The high social value accorded in the highlands to order and stability premised on

hierarchies of authority has translated into a statist approach and a degree of state-led ordering which distinguishes Ethiopia from the rest of the continent. The holistic approach to governmental authority embodied in the Ethiopian concept of *mengist*, has contributed to the blurring of institutional distinctions between state, regime, party, and government. Finally, hierarchical socio-political norms have privileged the supreme authority of the leadership or vanguard – often conceived, as in the various examples cited above, in religious terms. The ambitious, even comprehensive, scope of EPRDF's popular "coalition" is perhaps in some ways not so far from the absolutist rhetoric of divine imperial rule. From the point of view of its elite architects, there is plenty of reason to see a Leninist or statist approach as offering a good "fit" with important aspects of the rural Ethiopian context. The following discussion illuminates how, despite organizational tactics that have often been remarkably reactive to changing circumstances, fundamental continuities remain in play. Sociology as well as ideology seems to have reinforced them.

## Politico-administrative organization in Tigray, 1979–1991

> The TPLF's guiding motto, "Let the masses be conscious, organized and armed", dominated all socio-economic and political life in the liberated area of Tigray.[29]

Within a year of the TPLF's first organizational congress in 1979, formal state-like structures began to be established in TPLF-held areas, initially in Sheraro, Zana and Edaga Arbi, in west and central Tigray.[30] From its inception in 1975, the Front had paid careful attention to its relations with the rural population, establishing under its political committee a system of cadre liaison officers and *kwodere* (villagekeepers) to negotiate facilitation – food, drink, transport – for its fighters.[31] By 1979 the mass organizational department 08 (*bado shemunte*, the famous *kifle hezbi*) had established associations of farmers, women and youth, which were represented at the first organizational congress. By this time, the Front controlled much of rural Tigray,[32] which it had largely cleared of competitor insurgents: mass associations and the gradual establishment of a local administration now became the keys to peasant mobilization against the government.

### *(i) Security, land and development as drivers of "baito" administration*

In areas where they were active the TPLF organized the election of a *tabia baito* (*kebele* or village council),[33] and adoption of a set of laws (*serit*). The *firdi baito* (justice tribunal) formed the initial nucleus of the system, with the adjudication of disputes a key to winning popular support and legitimacy.[34] Security and access to land, meanwhile, were the central issues around which the *baito* system began to coalesce. Early in its history, the Front had seen the mobilization potential of protecting communities from the predations of *shifta* (criminals, bandits) then common in western Tigray. The TPLF's campaign against the *shifta* established a shared popular interest in mutual defence that was subsequently extended to target the conservative Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU)/*Teranafit*, and government collaborators. Eventually, local militia (*weyenti*) were organized under the *baito* structures, "to protect the achievements of the revolution".[35]

Land reform, meanwhile, seems to have been "opportunistic and varied", even occasionally a competitive response to the activities of the leftist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP).[36] Nevertheless the TPLF's control of a broad-based distribution of land, and its guarantee that plots would be looked after during a farmer's absence, massively boosted mobilization and recruitment amongst the peasants.[37] Those who proved themselves particularly active were regularly sent to cadre schools for further political training, returning to agitate the mass associations within their local communities, where they were known as *shigweyenti* (literally "beacon militia").

As the system was consolidated, it was established at a number of different levels: *kushet* (hamlet, then reportedly 40–50 households, although often significantly larger than that now), *tabia* (kebele or village), *wereda* (district) and *zoba* (zone). By 1985/6, the TPLF reported that it had established a *wereda baito* in 33 districts and three towns.[38] Under three main *baito* "committees" (for administration and security, economic, and social affairs) a whole series of security, logistics and developmental initiatives were implemented. The overall system was coordinated by the TPLF's network of *kifle hezbi*, mobilizers selected by the central committee, who eventually numbered up to around 50, with one or more in each of the *weredas*.

### *(ii) The kifle hezbi and the mass associations*

The role of the *kifle hezbi* was to identify potential members, and establish cells from amongst the population. At a public meeting called by him, these cell members would then help the *kifle hezbi* convince the local population to establish mass associations, which would in turn send publicly elected representatives to form a *baito*.[39] The *kifle hezbi* co-ordinated the relationship between the *baito* and thevarious TPLF departments under its political, military and socio-economic committees, which operated like technical ministries: as the system developed they were supported in some *weredas* by staff from the socio-economic department (*mahabere ekonomi*).[40] Gebreab and Zwi describe developments in the area of health, noting that the system expanded and professionalized after *baito* establishment in 1980 (1997). Conscious, as Marxists, that ethno-nationalist sentiment was insufficient to retain active peasant support, the Front's leadership sought to secure it by means of the delivery, and control, of socio-economic advantage: health, education, and agricultural services, and relief and rehabilitation support.

Anyone over the age of 16 and a member of a TPLF mass association was eligible to stand for election to the *baito*.[41] Less clear is how extensive this membership was, with a well-placed source commenting that "all adult peasants […] were obliged to enlist", whilst those suspected of collaboration with the EDU or with government forces were allegedly excluded or expelled in their hundreds.[42] As one source put it "membership was voluntary but practically you would have to be a member so as not to be considered an enemy".[43] Whilst the mass associations were designed to deliver a united and committed "Tigray people" in support of the Front, the security demands of the campaigns against *shifta*, EDU, EPRP, and the government always served also to delimit this unity, encouraging the identification, isolation and defeat of a range of political and social "enemies".[44]

### *(iii) 1980s expansion: "democratic centraliosm" and the MLLT*

As the TPLF's fortunes waxed in the mid to late 1980s, and increasing amounts of international aid found its way into the areas it administered, much through the Relief Society of Tigray (REST or *Maret),* debate focused on the degree of mutual independence enjoyed by the various bodies in

Tigray: the *baito* system of local government, its mass associations and militia, REST, the TPLF with its fighters, cadres and cell structures, and the communist party established, within the Front, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT or *Malelit*). The MLLT was established at a conference in 1984 of 200 of the TPLF's more senior and educated members held in Wer'i in Western Tigray. Whilst TPLF membership was open to all, MLLT membership required commitments to Leninism and socialism:[45] whilst the TPLF pursued a "minimum programme" of defeating the *Dergue*, the MLLT was committed to a "maximum programme" of the transition to socialism. MLLT membership grew to include up to around 1,000 of the most senior members of the TPLF, which at that time had a core of around 15,000 fighters, and a total fighting force perhaps between 20,000 and 30,000.[46]

REST was presented as an independent non-governmental organization, despite being led and run by senior members of the socio-economic committee of the TPLF; the *baito* system, and the mass associations on which it was based were similarly determinedly presented at the time as independent of the Front,[47] whilst the role of the MLLT was downplayed as merely enhancing organizational discipline.[48] International concern at the time focused less on the extent of real autonomy and separation between these different institutions, which few saw as credible, than on the fungibility of their systems for the administration and allocation of humanitarian resources.[49] For those who supported its activities, all of the institutions the Front established formed simply "our organization".

Debates about the nature of local government decision-making processes in TPLF-controlled Tigray have flourished since the 1980s, when claims about its bottom-up, grassroots and participatory nature were first voiced by the movement. Mass meetings of village inhabitants (the word *baito* was used to refer both to a full assembly and to the elected council) were frequently convened to achieve and to demonstrate "consensus" on TPLF decisions. Discussions could be lengthy, but outcomes were little in doubt, as "democratic centralism" took root in the 1980s.[50] Where it encountered strong resistance, as for instance against the modification of Orthodox prohibitions against working on saints' days, or against the extension of armed activities beyond the borders of Tigray, the Front adopted a pragmatic but assertive approach,[51] seeking to change popular

attitudes by convening exhaustive conferences amongst relevant groups of rural opinion-leaders.

In the early period the political, social and organizational distance between mass association peasant members and the TPLF leadership seems to have been short enough to ensure that awareness of popular opinion informed the decisions of the vanguard. As the organization grew, so the interaction patterns underpinning these processes attenuated. Peasants' perspectives on the local government systems established in Tigray during this period are visible in none of the available sources, be they outsiders,[52] insiders,[53] or former insiders who have broken ranks.[54] It is perhaps a function of the success of the totalizing modernist rhetoric of revolution in this period that its micro-sociology has yet to emerge.

This first period, then, was one in which the activities of the party, state and people were subsumed within the single impetus of liberation, and the various different institutional structures were inextricably interlinked. Local government systems were staffed by mass association peasant members and led by cadres under the control of the TPLF leadership, itself increasingly driven by the MLLT vanguard and an exceptionally small group of decision-makers.[55]

## PDOs, civil service reform and *gimgema* in the 1990s

In the context of the commitments to multi-party democracy adopted by the Transitional Charter conference of July 1991, a number of these inter-linkages needed to be reworked, at least at the formal level. In a process of high emotion and heart-searching in Tigray, the fighting force of the TPLF was separated from the Front, now registered as a political party. The goal of socialism went into abeyance, and the MLLT was neither "disbanded or convened for years: we haven't had time to think about it".[56] Mass associations were also formally disassociated from the TPLF, and whilst its chairman went on to run the state Relief and Rehabilitation Commission for some years, REST became an NGO. Whilst some elements of the TPLF civil and military departments were integrated with national and regional government offices, a number of developmental and commercial assets and activities were privatized under endowment-owned companies and regional development associations governed *de facto* by party leaders.[57]

### *(i) Building and mobilizing the federation*

Meanwhile, with a range of other ethnic leaders installed in the Transitional Government, and asserting the need to establish national "peace and security", EPRDF fighters and cadres set about a process of political organization and mobilization throughout those parts of the country where it had not previously operated. A uniform strategy of dispatching local speakers who had undergone EPRDF political training (as prisoners of war or Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) fighters in the north) to introduce communities to their cadres, offered a platform for the organization of local Peace and Stability Committees. These in turn formed the nucleus both of the reconstituted local state, and of the ruling party's expanding political structure: security considerations were once again key to the conflation of the two.

Promising members were trained in several rounds in the *Tatek* cadre schools run by the EPRDF political committee, and new ethnic People's Democratic Organizations (PDOs) multiplied across the highland and agricultural areas of the country (mainly Oromia and the Southern Region) to compete in elections a year later. EPRDF's use of ethnic mobilization was both instrumental and ideological. The organization believed, not unreasonably, that people responded better to recruitment "in their own language by their own people".[58] They also believed that the ethnic group – the Leninist "nation, nationality or people" – was the largest unit across which the solidarity necessary for the mass mobilization they desired was possible.

The language of liberation from enemies continued to be used throughout the country: now the movement spoke of a "war on the *birokrasi"* – a slogan that was understood in different ways at different levels. The international community welcomed and supported what it saw as a determined national attempt by the new government to reform the overblown centralized socialist bureaucracy of the previous regime,[59] and enthusiastically funded a programme of Civil Service Reform (CSR) run from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). In rural areas *birokrasi* identified that stratum of the population that had worked closely with the *Dergue*, and Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) members were excluded from government employment and demonized along with "feudal remnants" (*kirit fiwdal*), in rhetoric continuing that used in 1980s Tigray against the then-government and the conservative EDU. Defense of the Transitional

Charter was the rationale on which these enemies were identified, and when the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), and later the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) returned to strategies of armed struggle, they were similarly categorized.

Support to the third social group, labelled "*chikun*" or "oppressed", shaped the rhetoric of the Front, and a recruitment strategy which focused on those with some education and authority but at the lower end of the social scale – junior teachers or government employees, memorably labelled "lumpen intelligentsia" by an observer at the time.[60] In many rural areas a class division emerged between the EPRDF and other political parties: those who joined or led opposition ethnic parties of the transitional period (in Hadiya, Gurage, and Sidama for instance) tended to have recourse to alternative educational, social and economic resources, as members of prominent families often more senior in their professions. In many cases they represented a much closer social equivalent of the TPLF leadership in 1980s Tigray.[61] Nevertheless EPRDF's more aggressive approach to mass mobilization soon left them at a disadvantage. The organization's determination to forge what they called a direct and unmediated relationship with "the people", unencumbered by political competitors, now emerged clearly.

### *(ii) Evaluating the civil service*

It took some time before the effects of the energy the EPRDF invested in establishing political along with state structures at the local level became visible nationally. At the national level, meanwhile, the political struggles inherent in state building were more quickly visible, with the relocation of civil service jobs from Addis Ababa to the newly established regional governments often seen as an attack on educated urban opponents. The tools and processes employed to reform the civil service did little to reassure. A system of appraisal (*gimgema*), drawing on Maoist notions of "criticism and self-criticism" had been developed by the TPLF during the war, for use amongst fighters and peasants, as well as party members. The influx of professionals who now took up new positions in Tigray found it hard to swallow. When *gimgema* was also applied to assess the work of middle-class civil servants in Addis Ababa, it drew loud protests, and was descried as a political tool.[62]

The reaction was hardly surprising. *Gimgema* had emerged in the context of the Front's determination to "eliminate ideas that don't benefit the revolution":[63] it was a part of the dialectic associated with class struggle. Whilst some outsiders have seen *gimgema* as potentially embodying the best of modern management practice,[64] in effect it also offered a basis on which to attack, often even humiliate, those who promoted alternative viewpoints, and has long been controversial. The hierarchical social context in which it takes place has again been central, tending to boost "central authority over local autonomy" in a "political culture where 'whistle blowing' is virtually unknown".[65] In addition to political contestation, a number of authors gave a pessimistic technical assessment of ambitious state strengthening and CSR in the 1990s,[66] with even the World Bank concluding it had proved "cumbersome" and less successful than hoped.[67] In a number of instances technical and socio-political processes seem to have been at loggerheads.

### *(iii) Party–state tension at the top, and the Ethio-Eritrean war*

At the national and the local levels, the party continued to be seen by insiders as the "engine that drives development" – within the state, and building it.[68] In an explicit division of responsibility the process of building regional governments to form the new federation had been left to party bosses, whilst EPRDF leaders within the state structure focused on CSR, economic and international policy. *Wereda*, zone, and regional executives met in successive session for governmental and then for party business. The powerful officials who led the day-to-day business of the party became advisors with the rank of Minister in the PMO, but stayed out of the Cabinet, to which appointments were increasingly made on a technocratic basis. Whilst sectoral federal ministries provided technical facilitation of their nominally "self-determining" regional counterparts, party liaison officers from the TPLF kept tabs on the regional state governments, including those not administered by EPRDF, as well as the development of member and affiliated parties.

This situation shifted with the establishment of the first Federal Government in 1995. With CSR, strengthening systems of upward accountability and reporting in the state system gradually incorporated greater responsibility for the functioning of the federated regional states,

and the role of the party *as a distinct structure* was reduced.[69] Whilst a number of erstwhile party liaison officers joined the PMO Regional Affairs Office, where they continued to work with the more peripheralregional states, several of the most senior party personnel were reportedly left "underemployed" and disgruntled in the period 1995 1998.[70] Meanwhile a series of Deputy Prime Ministers continued the process of "knocking heads together" in the four non-EPRDF regions,[71] until in 1997 they were finally sent additional "support" in the form of advisers from the federal centre and PMO.

The outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war operated as a powerful jolt on the carefully constructed architecture that regulated and maintained the apparent distinction between party and state. The war at once illuminated the role of the party, still to a great extent providing the inner-architecture of the state, whilst simultaneously undermining the institutionalized interaction of the individuals leading the two structures. As the militia and mass associations mobilized abruptly in the north, the leadership of the EPRDF, and particularly the TPLF, returned to familiar roles: military, security, organizational, and propagandist. Similarly the logistics of the war established in Tigray a second centre of decision-making away from Addis Ababa. The "supreme command" that ran the war (rather than the Federal cabinet) included three members of the TPLF leadership who had no formal state positions; key decisions and interactions increasingly took place in the north.

These changes to patterns of social interaction within the leadership were at least as influential as any issues of principle related to Eritrea or to ideology, in precipitating the split in the TPLF central committee that became public in early March 2001.[72] The division ranged a group of "dissidents"[73] with high profiles in the party and the Tigray regional government against those leading the federal government: it ignited an abrupt power struggle with pronounced party-state overtones. In quashing the dissidents, the Prime Minister and his allies faced resistance both from veteran fighters of the TPLF, notably in Tigray and in the military, and from those individual leaders of the new EPRDF parties in Oromia and the South, still closely influenced by their erstwhile party bosses. This experience soon prompted a new configuration of party-state relations, and accelerated a whole new lease of state building initiatives.

## State building after *tehadso*, 2001–2005

The victorious TPLF wing led by the Prime Minister launched a highly publicized campaign of party "renewal" (*tehadso*), designed to clear the party of dissident influences, and to integrate the functions of the party leadership more clearly within the purview of the state.[74] An erstwhile double-headed power structure was now fused at the top, with the capacity for autonomous action within and by the party dramatically curtailed.[75] New "superministries" for rural development, federal affairs,[76] and capacity building saw the institutionalization and bureaucratization of roles and activities previously undertaken by the informal political advisers from the party, as the centre of gravity shifted more firmly from party to state. The EPRDF offices at *arat kilo* were stripped of political leadership as the Federal Cabinet moved centre stage. The centrally driven process of bureaucratic decentralization was reminiscent of what Allen has identified as periods of "centralized-bureaucratic politics" in other parts of Africa.[77] The new national Capacity Building structure (Federal Ministry, Regional State Bureaux, and Departments at the level of each *wereda* or district council), effectively replaced the party cadre system as the effective national motor for government initiatives.

### *(i) Capacity building*

The capacity building of state structures was a strongly political enterprise and accorded the highest government priority. By early 2004 at *wereda* level in many parts of the four EPRDF-administered regions, the Capacity Building bureau head emerged as the senior and most experienced party figure in the local administration, his political status regularly eclipsing that of the *wereda* Chairman, and widely deferred to. As had become common also in the 1990s, senior personnel were often delegated from zonal or regional State level, reinforcing cultural patterns of upward rather than downward accountability. Civil service complaints about political interference and control that had, through the 1990s, been regularly directed at the *gimgema* system, began in 2003 and 2004 to be directed at the Ministry of Capacity Building (MCB). The MCB was increasingly widely seen as a political lens through which the activities (and budgets) of other branches of the civil service were to be filtered and controlled.[78] Its relationship with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

(MOFED) also became complex, as the two ministries vied for the role of final central arbiter of state resource allocation in a new constellation of political-technocratic competition, now encompassed within the state.

Dissemination of the new capacity building strategy was carried out by means of a series of meetings and trainings in the characteristic and familiar style of EPRDF political cadre training: lengthy expositions of the new approach continued until a unanimous "consensus" was achieved as to the superiority of the revolutionary democratic policy. Whilst this process was now presented in the new and apparently depoliticized language of capacity building (the Amharic phrase *akim gembata* was largely unknown outside government circles in 2003 and 2004, but was quickly thereafter established as "government vocabulary"[79]), it represented a strong continuity with previous attempts to establish a party-cell structure for sociopolitical mobilization, and with existing norms of the "politically induced strategic planning process".[80] The period of the *keremt* summer rains was used – as so often in the *Tatek* political education of the past – to convince and train local government officials and schoolteachers.

In 2003, the government reached an agreement with international funders[81] to support an ambitious Public Sector Capacity Building Programme (PSCAP). The programme was a complex amalgam of six equally complex sub-programmes, dealing respectively with civil service reform, urban management, strengthening *wereda* decentralization, reforming the judicial sector and tax system, and entrenching IT in the overall operation of government. PSCAP was seen as the means by which the state systems channelling international Direct Budget Support (DBS) to service delivery would be rendered more effective, efficient, and accountable.[82] But its transformative ambition went far beyond this: it sought to change attitudes and behaviours and institutionalize new ones amongst civil servants, politicians and the public, and transform three aspects of state-society relations: inclusion, accountability and cohesion.[83]

The extent to which the government and its bilateral and multilateral funders shared analysis of what these transformation processes involved is moot.[84] Nevertheless, the sense of optimism amongst donors in the wake of the party split and renewal was palpable, and extended to some observers of the situation locally.[85]

In Tigray the fresh start was painful, as a large group of former fighters and experienced *wereda* administrators was sent for education at a school in

Mekelleestablished for the purpose.[86] Protracted local discussions were held with "the people", and these evaluation discussions – criticism and self-criticism – were interpreted by party spokesmen as bearing out the analysis of the Prime Minister, revealing the existence a "bonapartist" class of "rent-seeking" cadres, who had failed in their developmental responsibilities to the population. The solution was the party "renewal" process, although a number of surprisingly senior TPLF interlocutors went as far as saying that they saw little point in being a party member, since "everyone now found out about party policy from the media".[87]

### *(ii) New directions in rural and economic development*

The new emphasis was clearly on the state – and on its lowest levels, as the drive to decentralize responsibility for budgets and spending reached the *weredas*.[88] In addition to *wereda* and *kebele* structures, very local structures were established at this point, with *mengistawi budin* (government groups/teams – the "lowest level of the state") established at every 50 rural households, and *lema't budin* (development groups/teams) bringing together 10–15 households.[89] For EPRDF, this marked a new stage in bringing government closer to the people. Some farmers meanwhile clearly saw their autonomy threatened by the intensification of local developments and demands.[90] Other changes were made, reportedly with the intention of responding to farmers' anxieties: notable amongst these was a rolling back of state focus on collectivized labour on local catchments in favour of attention to individual farmers' activities and training.

In 2002, the federal government issued a new document setting out its "Strategies and Policies for Rural Development", which is perhaps the first full expression of its later "accelerated development" thinking, and an important precursor of the 2010 Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). Drawing parallels with East Asian development, and characterizing Ethiopia's resource profile in terms of high availability of labour and land (at least in the periphery), but low capital, the policy marked a significant departure from the past: in particular it stressed the importance of releasing the potential of more successful farmers in "working towards market-led agricultural development" (FDRE Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2002). In parts of the north some of the more collectivized agricultural approaches promoted in the past were abandoned in favour of a

new emphasis on individual (and often richer) “model” farmers, now seen as the lynchpin of economic transformation under the MDG-focused 2005 Plan for an Accelerated and Sustained End to Poverty (PASDEP). Lefort[91] is undoubtedly right to see the shift of the ruling party’s politico-economic focus from collective development by and for poorer peasants, to attempts to harness the potential of wealthier individual farmers as a seminal change; but it had begun several years before the 2005 elections.[92] After a long period of silence and ambiguity as to the fate of the MLLT and its sister parties, EPRDF post-split now finally confirmed that the transition to socialism had been abandoned in favour of a “managed transition” to “developmental capitalism”.

### *(iii) The 2005 elections*

The May 2005 elections and their disastrous fallout have been examined in a significant literature,[93] and a range of reasons has been advanced for the strength of the opposition vote. The period of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war (1998–2000) had been marked by a significant upsurge in pan-Ethiopian nationalist rhetoric,[94] andthis brought a return of official legitimacy to concomitant (opposition) sentiments, which had not been considered “politically correct” since the demise of the *Dergue*. The split in the TPLF that had resulted in senior expulsions across the EPRDF and the airing of internal grievances “reduced the impression of authority and permanence central to maintaining power in Ethiopia”.[95] Rural Amhara and Gurage communities in particular may have responded with recognition to pan-Ethiopian nationalist suggestions that ethnic federalism threatened their interests in mobility and urban linkages. These anxieties were undoubtedly shared by educated elites, and an explicit EPRDF change of policy in 2002 to reverse its previous disregard of urban professionals came too late to address their grievances and merely gave them oxygen. After a decade of neglect, an intensive campaign of urban re-engineering had torn down a series of neighbourhoods in the capital by the time of the poll, contributing physical markers of urban grievance. The opposition benefited from a strong protest vote against the incumbent government’s record.

For opponents of the government, and some commentators, the strength of the opposition vote was, in itself, a confirmation of the fact that these elections were uniquely democratic. But this masks other dynamics. There

is little evidence that the EPRDF leadership regarded the 2005 poll as anything other than the usual plebiscite: losing power in 2005, even in one or two parts of the federation, does not seem to have been an option that the ruling party contemplated. Whilst the unpopularity of the government and the appeal of an alternative resonated in the towns, rural concern to "vote for the winner" was also important in a context which had sown unaccustomed uncertainty as to the identity of the next *mengist*, subverting an absolutist order in profound ways which arguably have little to do with liberal democratic choice.[96] In urban and rural contexts, the EPRDF's approach to building its "coalition with the people" was clearly in need of a rethink. Deliberations soon concluded that a missing element over the period from 2001 to 2005 had been political investment in the structures, membership, local presence and leadership of the political party: it was to this that high-level attention rapidly turned, postelection. The project was given urgency by the ruling party's perception of the threat presented by the opposition, to EPRDF and to its federation, as an existential one.

## Party and local government rebuilding after 2005

In view of its significance, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to the process of reconstruction of the EPRDF as a political party in the wake of the 2005 elections.[97] A new drive to reinvigorate the organization and membership of the party began within weeks of May 2005 elections, gaining further substance and momentum after the Congress in mid-2006. The *de facto* reassignment of senior personnel to party and PMO advisory positions that left them scope for a more political role was confirmed in the October 2005 government reshuffle. Advisers for national security, communications, social and organizational affairs were relieved of bureaucratic responsibilities, and put at the head of party rebuilding, and government oversight. Whilst the late-1990s mistake of allowing powerful individuals to float outside the state structure was avoided, senior human resources were reinvested in the political organization.

During late 2005 and 2006, a series of meetings were held at local level across the country, in which the party sought (in its own terms) to "ask forgiveness" for its mistakes and win back the population. In Amhara region new emphasis wasplaced on the interests and role of community opinion leaders, including elders and the previously unfavoured members of

the *birokrasi*, who were now courted by the party.[98] Programmes of land certification in Amhara region sought to build confidence. Meanwhile, further south, party discussions reiterated the advantages of federalism and ERPDF's commitments to "self determination" for local "indigenous" ethnic groups.[99] Oromia was given a stronger stake in Addis Ababa, as the region's administrative capital returned to the city. Throughout the Southern Region and Oromia, plots of urban land were distributed to rural people, in a bid to increase "indigenous" populations in towns dominated by "incomers".[100] In a politically charged atmosphere, tensions occasionally erupted between rural and urban populations, as for instance in Dilla town in April 2006, when groups from the surrounding rural Gedeo population briefly clashed with townspeople thought to have "voted against federalism".[101] Meanwhile, a high priority was given to issues with the potential to affect federal stability, with the Prime Minister himself intervening to negotiate mutually acceptable candidates in Somali region elections in August 2005, and to seek to quell Sidama demands for a separate federated state in early 2006.[102]

Whilst much attention focused on the treatment of the political opposition in the wake of the elections, the contrasting velvet glove approach in many (not all) rural areas, and the rhetoric about new norms of "good governance" resulted in what was seen in some rural areas as a period of "liberalization".[103] Local opinion leaders who had been pushed to join discussion meetings found themselves new members of the ruling party, as membership numbers across the country escalated from 760,000 in 2005 to more than four million in 2008,[104] and more than five million by 2010. "Intellectuals" and higher education students were also specifically targeted for recruitment, with intensive discussion meetings held across the country's public universities. Party membership seemed initially to carry little responsibility with it: a laissez-faire understanding of "democracy" became widespread, as rural populations began to feel that "democracy means we can do anything". In an unforeseen correlation, primary school-student enrolment growth rates, exceptionally high in 2003/4 and 2004/5, flattened off slightly in 2006/7 in several parts of the country.[105]

### *(i) Expanding the scope of the local state*

In mid-2007 a number of pressures and demands began once again to be placed on the dramatically expanded party membership. In the run-up to local elections members of the basic party cell structure, *meseretawi dirigit*, now established at the level of every five households, were pushed to read the EPRDF manifesto. A series of new documents guiding the mobilization of new members, and through them of the electorate, was published.[106] Meanwhile a number of changes in the structures of local government and the *kebele* and *wereda* councils were introduced which cemented the connections between expanded party, state, and people at the local level.

On the one hand, international funding for the protection of basic services (PBS) paid for a new tier of "*kebele* managers" (*yesira halafi*, literally "the head in charge of work"), appointed, assigned and paid from *wereda* level to enhance the capacity of service delivery. Civil servants with natural upward accountability thus replaced elected representatives of their peers as the first point of contact with the state for most of the population. International assumptions about shared norms of downward "social accountability" began to be more systematically questioned.[107] *Kebele* managers joined a dramatically expanded *salariat* at local levels: data from the Ministries of Health andEducation suggest that *wereda-based* teacher, development agent and health education worker numbers grew from 126,300 in 2004/5 to more than a quarter of a million in 2009/10. According to MOFED figures, *wereda* budgets in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia grew at an average of more than 10% *per annum* in real terms over the period from 2002/3 to 2009/10.[108]

Meanwhile, the number of members of the *kebele* and *wereda* councils (local parliaments, from whom the executives are elected) was also dramatically increased from several tens to several hundred at each level. Commentary has focused on the electoral impact of this change, which had the effect of placing control of local councils beyond the reach of any but the largest political parties, capable of fielding a sufficiently large number of candidates. Whilst this was certainly what happened in local polls in 2008,[109] the ongoing political significance of the establishment of this mechanism is much more far reaching.[110] In parallel with the re-emergence of mass associations, now legally constituted as "civil society organizations", and of cooperatives of youth favoured in a range of economic initiatives, the period of the last five years has seen a dramatic expansion of the numbers of Ethiopians who are now involved in one or

another governmental, political, economic or developmental association, structure or bureaucracy which can in some sense be regarded as a part of EPRDF's "coalition with the people".

### *(ii) State building in the periphery*

In the last few years, significant local state building has extended also to the so-called developing regional states, where the administration and political mobilization of non-sedentary populations of pastoralists and shifting hoe agriculturalists have presented different challenges and obstacles to EPRDF political activities. In these areas, throughout the period from 1991 the ruling party has worked through local political proxies, albeit under the definitive influence either of political liaison officers, or of an increasingly assertive federal state presence. In the period since 2008, the transformative ambition of the centre in relation to the periphery has increased. Highland *wereda* advisers have been assigned throughout these lowland areas under a federal programme since 2008 designed to "capacitate the local state".[111] Ruling political parties in the periphery, now led by politicians who have been educated in the highlands, have come under increasing political pressure to expand their mass mobilization and membership along the lines of their central ally. Finally, a series of ambitious programmes to resettle large populations has recently begun. The intensification of state-building initiatives in the periphery seeks to reshape state, party and people, and the relationships between them, in encompassing terms. The "coalition with proxies" under which the periphery has been governed since 1991 may also now be under revision in favour of the preferred model of a direct "coalition with the people".

## Conclusion

The account presented here is intended to give a sense of the changes that have taken place in the relations between party, state and people under EPRDF, and of the central continuities that shape them. During its war against the *Dergue*, the TPLF had sought to forge a unity of party/front, government and people under a Leninist vanguard. After it came to power in 1991, a delicate formal architecture distinguishing party and state saw the maintenance of a degree of duality of roles inthe construction of the

federation, but generated tensions that split the leadership in 2001. From 2002, a centrally driven process of bureaucratic decentralization saw emphasis on the state at the expense of party autonomy and energy. This situation abruptly shifted again in the wake of the 2005 poll, when a period of mass political recruitment saw a dramatic expansion of the number of people implicated in party membership, as well as in state, and associated, structures. Not only did the numbers increase – so did their relative wealth, as the ruling party sought to move towards what it has called "developmental capitalism". In its own terms, EPRDF is probably closer now to having built what it considers to be a "coalition with the people" than at any time in its history. Far from recognizing alternative centres of authority, it has sought consistently and universally either to co-opt or to marginalize them.

This has all taken place in the context of a political history and culture which, albeit increasingly challenged by educational and demographic change, remains hierarchical, even absolutist. The Leninist or statist approach adopted and repeatedly adapted by EPRDF has served the organization's purposes well in this context. This paper began by commenting on the lack of clarity associated with the concept of "revolutionary democracy". At the level of the elite, conceptual opacity has disguised a series of rather profound ideological and organizational changes of direction as seamless progress. Ongoing mystery about revolutionary democracy at the popular level, meanwhile, has no doubt done little to contribute to the secularization of political processes in Ethiopia. Seen from the apex of a managed political process premised on order, stability and authority, this in itself is not without political utility.

## Notes

1. Kidane, "New Approaches to State Building"; Kidane, "Idenity, Politics, Democratisation"; Mohammed, "Ethiopia: Missed Opportunities," 233; Alemseged, "Diversity and State Building"; Merera, *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms*.
2. Paulos, "The Challenges of the Civil Service Reform"; Paulos, "Clientelism."
3. Ohashi, "Cruel Ethiopia: Letter in Response."
4. Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*.
5. Bahru, *History of Modern Ethiopia*.
6. Clapham, *Continuity and Change*.
7. Levy and Fukuyama, *Development Strategies*.
8. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*.
9. Abbink, "The Ethiopian Second Republic."

10. Clapham, *Continuity and Change*, 241.
11. Levine, *Wax and Gold*.
12. Hoben, "Social Stratification."
13. Teferi, "Decentralised here, Centralised here," 626–7.
14. Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants… the May 2005 Elections"; Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the post-2005 Interlude."
15. Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the May 2005 Elections," 253.
16. Ibid., 256.
17. Ibid., 258.
18. Poluha, "Learning Political Behaviour," 101–36; Poluha, "Prevailing over the Power of Continuity?," 147–64.
19. Historical evidence of an "authoritarian political culture" extends beyond old "Abyssinia" – today's Amhara and Tigray (*cf*. Abbink, "The Ethiopia Second Republic," 6, 9).
20. Personal communication, 1994.
21. Gebru, *Ethiopia Power and Protest*.
22. Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the May 2005 Elections," 261; Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the post-2005 Interlude." See also an interestinginternet discussion on this controversial issue at http://addisnegeronline.com/2010/07/all-eyes-on-leviathan-a-rejoinder-to-rene-lefort's-piece/
23. *Cf*. Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude," 439.
24. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 190.
25. Lenin, *Theses on Bourgeois Democracy*.
26. Meles, interview, June 1994.
27. Clapham, "Post-war Ethiopia," 191.
28. Together with the Ethiopian Prime Minister and his Economic Adviser, these economists were members of Columbia University's Initiative for Policy Dialogue Africa Task Force, which met from 2006 to 2009. See http://policydialogue.org/programs/taskforces/africa/
29. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 249.
30. Interview, 1998: whilst these replaced government structures in some of the "liberated" larger towns, at the more local rural level there seems to have been little existing administration to replace.
31. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 97, 248.
32. Gebreab and Zwi, "Health Policy Development During Wartime."
33. These councils (and the term *baito)* were first established by the *Dergue*.
34. Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*.
35. Ibid., 173.
36. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 235.
37. Ibid., 236, 251.
38. Ibid., 250.
39. Bennett, "Tigray: Famine and National Resistance," 101.
40. Interviews, 1998, 2010.
41. Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*.
42. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 230.
43. Interview 2010.
44. This is a long-standing Ethiopian strategy: Poluha, "Prevailing over the Power of Continuity," gives an interesting account from Gojjam of peasant perceptions of the way in which successive governments delimited an initially united "we" with a series of inimical "they."
45. These commitments were, at least nominally, widely shared amongst intellectuals in Ethiopia at the time, and reportedly provoked little debate or dissidence amongst members in Tigray: their reception in the TPLF's mass associations in Europe and North America was more ambivalent.

46. Interviews, 2008, 2010.
47. For instance, Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes*.
48. Interview 1989. This is an important and often overlooked point: whilst the content of Marxist ideology was undoubtedly influential at the time, the organizational sociology inspired by Leninist discipline was both highly effective in transforming the organization's fortunes, and if anything, of more lasting influence.
49. Despite recent controversy and much investigation (*cf*. Plaut, "Ethiopia Famine Aid"), evidence has extended little beyond the claims and counter-claims of TPLF politicians.
50. The Leninist prescription for party decision-making notionally combines "democracy" (the freedom of members to discuss issues), with "centralism" (the requirement to abide by party decisions once made) in order to achieve "freedom of discussion, unity of action" (Lenin, *Report on the Unity Congress*).
51. Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*.
52. Ibid.; Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes*.
53. Gebreab and Zwi, "Health Policy Development During Wartime."
54. Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF;* Kahsay, *The National Movement in Tigray*.
55. Gidey, "Has the EPRDF Really Changed?"
56. Interview, 1998. Although no formal decision was taken until 2001, it is not clear that the MLLT was at all active much after 1993 (*cf*. Abbink, "The Ethiopia Second Republic," 10). This section draws on interviews and personal observation between 1992–1994 and 1997–2000.
57. The structures of the TPLF's partner in the EPRDF, the EPDM, were similarly reorganized in Amhara region.
58. Interview 1998.
59. Hicks, *Tigray and North Wollo*, 3, also cited by Young, "Development and Change," 82.
60. Personal communication, 1997: the phrase has recently been used to discuss underemployed Egyptian graduates of higher education, Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*. Here the reference is to a less well-educated or wealthy socio-economic group, who nevertheless distinguished themselves from the majority subsistence farming population.
61. Vaughan, "Responses to Ethnic Federalism."
62. Larbi, "Assessing Infrastructures for Managing Ethics"; Young, "Ethnicity and Power."
63. Interview 2010.
64. The virtues and potential of the system vis-à-vis the Japanese corporate management norms then in vogue were much discussed during the UK Open University's MBA programme for Ethiopian decision-makers, which ran through the period of the Transitional Government: personal communications, 1993, 1994.
65. Meheret, "Decentralisation in Ethiopia."
66. Paulos, "The Challenges of the Civil Service Reform."
67. World Bank, *An Independent Review of the World Bank*, 6.
68. Interview, 1998.
69. Federal and regional decision-makers in the four EPRDF-led states were still, of course, party members.
70. Interviews, 2009, 2010.
71. On Somali region see Markakis, "The Somali in Ethiopia"; on Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella see Young, "Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier"; Afar has seen a slightly different trajectory as several of its key ruling politicians are themeslves former fighters of the TPLF.
72. Medhane and Young, "TPLF: Reform or Die?"; Paulos, "Ethiopia, the TPLF, and the Roots."
73. The speed with which the group was thus labelled is a function of the efficiency with which they were marginalized.
74. This section draws on research conducted in different parts of the country in 2002, 2003 and 2004 including interviews with civil servants and politicians conducted at *wereda*, regional and

federal levels.

75. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*.
76. With an idiosyncratic mandate to pay attention to the developmental needs of two previously neglected constituencies: urban and pastoral communities.
77. Allen, “Understanding African Politics.”
78. Interviews, 2004.
79. Interviews, 2004.
80. Kassa, Storey, and Salaman, “Senior Managers’ Business Knowledge,” 16.
81. Led by the World Bank, but also including a number of European bilaterals.
82. In the wake of contested elections in May 2005, DBS was replaced by PBS “protection of basic services” grants direct to federated States, designed to reduce central government discretion over the use of funds and promote transparency, in a context of concerns about the curtailment of human and political rights. *Cf.* Jones and Bladon, “Lessons Learned.”
83. See World Bank. *Project Appraisal Document*.
84. For a discussion of donor and government ideologies of development see Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopia’s Rural Communities.” On the Ethiopian government’s approach to donor engagement with policy see Furtado and Smith, “Ethiopia: Retaining Sovereignty.” On the limited efficacy of donor conditionality in Ethiopia see Borchgrevink, “Limits to Donor Influence.”
85. As researcher Teferi noted “I was struck by the sense of a fresh start in state-society relations that these changes brought locally,” “Decentralised there, Centralized here,” 621.
86. Interview, Mekelle, 2003.
87. Interviews, Tigray, 2003.
88. Peterson, *Reforming Public Financial Management*.
89. Whilst these structures were in place in Amhara and Tigray in 2003, they were established more slowly in Oromia (2004) and the Southern Region (2005). *Cf.* Aalen and Tronvoll, “The End of Democracy?,” 198.
90. Teferi, “Decentralised there, Centralised here,” 626.
91. Lefort, “Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude.”
92. What Lefort describes as the period of “liberalization” experienced by elite farmers in North Shoa from late 2005 to 2009 reflects a post-electoral decision to remove some of the more onerous obligations initially placed on “model” farmers. It is also worth noting that, as far back as the mid-1980s, TPLF/REST agricultural rehabilitation programmes controversially targeted not the poorest of the poor, but those with the resources “to make best use of the inputs” (interview 1988).
93. See in particular Abbink, “Discomfiture of Democracy?”; Tronvoll, “Ambiguous Elections”; Lefort, “Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the May 2005 Elections.”
94. Tronvoll, *War and the Politics of Identity*.
95. Clapham, “Post-war Ethiopia,” 184.
96. Lefort, “Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the May 2005 Elections.”
97. This section draws on personal observations and interviews, 2004–2008 and 2010.
98. *Cf.* Lefort, “Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude.”
99. Interview, 2006.
100. Interviews, 2006, 2007.
101. Interviews, Dilla, Awassa, 2006.
102. It is perhaps a function of the disarray of the ruling party in 2005 that in Sidama zone it reportedly promised a referendum on a Sidama *kilil* separate from the Southern Region as part of its electoral mobilization strategy, apparently believing itself to have the endorsement of the EPRDF leadership at the centre; their support was not forthcoming. Interviews, Awassa and Addis Ababa, 2006.

103. Lefort, “Powers, *Mengist* – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude.”
104. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The End of Democracy?,” 203.
105. Dom and Lister, *An Analysis of Decentralisation in Ethiopia*, 47.
106. Lefort, “Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude.”
107. Brennan, “The Fallacy of Social Accountability”; Pankhurst, *Social Accountability;* Jones and Bladon, “Lessons Learnt.”
108. Figures for the Southern Region show a different evolution, because of zone level expenditure.
109. *Cf.* Aalen and Tronvoll, “The End of Democracy?.” A veteran TPLF member commented wryly in 2008: “we have elected more democratic representatives than the entire population of Eritrea.”
110. *Cf.* Lefort, “Powers – Mengist – and Peasants … the Post-2005 Interlude.”
111. Interview 2010.

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# *Abyotawi* democracy: neither revolutionary nor democratic, a critical review of EPRDF's conception of revolutionary democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia

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Since 1991 and the arrival of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) into power, the Ethiopian ideologists have maintained revolutionary democracy (*abyotawi* democracy in Amharic) as their core doctrine. The notion inherited from the struggle (1970s-1980s) aims at legitimizing a political and economic structure which de facto implies the resilience of authoritarianism. *Abyotawi* democracy has been presented by EPRDF as the exact opposite of liberalism and neoliberalism. As no article dedicated to a review and engagement with EPRDF's *abyotawi* democracy has been written so far, this article aims at analysing this Ethiopian version of revolutionary democracy. The evolution and uses of the notion since 1991 reveal a "bricolage" that *abyotawi* democracy has been operating out of Leninism, Marxism, Maoism, and also liberalism. While a review of party pamphlets and official party/state discourses reveals the degree to which revolutionary democracy has become an ambiguous doctrine *vis-a-vis* "liberalism", the doctrine remains powerful as a fighting tool to exclude internal and external "enemies".

The democratic project through revolutionary means partly emerged from a Leninist interpretation of Marx's Proletariat Dictatorship thesis.[1] The notion of revolutionary democracy came from an opposition to capitalist liberal ideology, and Lenin's revolutionary project.[2] Quite demarcating himself from his Marxian heritage and inspired by the writings of the utopian socialist Tchernychevski, Lenin stressed the necessity for the "enlighten" élites to lead the unconscious masses to the revolution.[3] Lenin's revolutionary strategy and goals were mainly presented in his famous *What Is To Be Done?* and at the occasion of the First Communist International in March 1919.[4] "Proletariat dictatorship" was considered the antithesis of

“parliamentary bourgeois democracy” and the social revolution was expected to be led by a vanguard party in a “democratic centralism” that would not allow any internal factionalism.[5] Thus, revolutionary democracy has been interpreted as a bridge between pre-capitalist and socialist societies.

These theories have had a great impact in what was called the “Third World” during the Cold War. The notion of revolutionary democracy was then used by the USSR to designate one tendency of not-capitalist countries or movements which hadnevertheless not achieved their revolution yet. This quite unclear step en route to socialism was conceptualized in the notion of National Democratic Revolution (NDR), or National Popular Democratic Revolution in its Stalin-Maoist version (N(P)DR).[6] Many “liberation” movements in Africa adopted this ideology and even defined themselves as revolutionary democrats, showing that they were “more revolutionary” than this N(P)DR appellation defined from Moscow.[7] This appellation was abandoned by most of the “liberation movements” or “socialist regimes” after the fall of the Eastern bloc. In fact, the world capitalist offensive that followed let no choice for most of the former Marxist-Leninist or Maoist movements but to adopt political and economic liberal principles and abandon revolutionary democracy in a context where “There is No Alternative” to capitalism.[8]

The Ethiopian case is very interesting in this regard for it reveals an original ideological adaptation. In 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – a coalition led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) – seized power by force and ousted the authoritarian *Derg* regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam.[9] The TPLF had grown out of the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s-1970s in Addis Ababa University.[10] A Tigray University Student Association was established in 1971 and influenced the foundation of the Tigray National Organization in 1974, which one year later led to the formation of the TPLF.[11] In its 1976 Manifesto, the movement initially called for the independence of Tigray, thus defending Tigrayan nationalism on the basis of the national oppression thesis.[12] In the course of the 1970s, the TPLF progressively adopted a broader Ethiopian agenda in which Tigray would gain autonomy. Under the influence of the Tigrayan intellectuals and their Marxist-Leninist inclination, one can consider TPLF was as an NDR movement in the 1970s, i.e. at the time of the Manifesto. However, during

the struggle, facing the necessity to adapt its strategy in a rural Tigray environment and following the USSR friendship with the *Derg* regime, the TPLF adopted the Maoist model, thus entering the RPDR (or New Democratic Revolution) at the end of the 1970. In the 1980s, the tactical alliance between Maoism and bourgeoisie was rejected by TPLF thinkers who eventually shifted to the Albanian model which appeared less "revisionist" to them.[13]

An ideological turning point is to be found in the middle of the 1980s. Since the creation of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) on 25 July 1985 under the influence of Abbay Tsehaye and Meles Zenawi, the TPLF has been progressively led by its ideological leadership.[14] In fact, the MLLT became the ideological organ of the movement and eventually controlled the latter by becoming a "party within the party".[15] The Ethiopian version of revolutionary democracy will emerge and be elaborated out of this ideological innovation.

A second ideological sequence is to be found between 1991 and 2001. After the fall of the *Derg*, the TPLF-EPRDF announced liberal policies during the transitional period (1991–1995). The discursive shift was necessitated by the end of the Cold War, and the necessity to attract international funds as the country was in a state of bankruptcy. The Albanian model was abandoned and replaced by the free market economy.[16] An Ethiopian Privatization Agency was created and the investment code revised in order to promote the development of the private sector.[17] The Federal Democratic Republic was proclaimed through the 1995 Constitution and the multiparty system had from then on to be backed by periodic national elections. But interestingly, these "liberal" reforms – as compared with Marxist-Leninist revolutionary democracy – did not mean the abandonment of *abyotawi* democracyideology by the new Ethiopian leaders. On the contrary, the TPLF-EPRDF have since stuck to the ideological line, whereas other African states have in the meantime tried to reshape it.[18] The EPRDF Program published in 1991 (1983 EC) was entitled *Abyotawi Democracy* (*YeEhadig Abyotawi Democracy Program*) and in 1994, Meles Zenawi confirmed the ideological resilience on the occasion of a TPLF cadre conference in Meqele (Tigray), describing revolutionary democracy as an appropriate doctrine that "had to be firmly grasped if Ethiopia was to embark on sustainable economic development".[19] Despite the adoption of a multi-party system and liberal economic policies, Meles

paradoxically reaffirmed the ideological line rejecting parliamentary democracy and defending democratic centralism based on a vanguard party.

Twenty years after 1991, *abyotawi* democracy is to be considered in a third ideological sequence which began in 2001. The 2001 split inside the ruling party in the aftermath of the war with Eritrea (1998–2000) challenged Meles Zenawi as the leader of the TPLF-EPRDF.[20] Meles reactivated the ideological tool which had to support his "renewal strategy" (*Tehadso* in Amharic) and his survival at the top of the party.[21] The 2005 general elections further accentuated the reactivation. Tronvoll has recently described the period following the crisis as one of "re-ideologization" based on a series of booklets written by the central party ideologist who since the 2001 purges seem to be concentrated in the person of Meles Zenawi himself, confirming his ideological dominance within the party.[22] This has been recently confirmed at the 2010 general elections, when the electoral programme published by the EPRDF stated:

> The EPRDF owes its successes over the past decade in guiding the Ethiopian people under its leadership to two key instruments that define its nature; these are its partisanship to the people and revolutionary democracy its advocates.[23]

In this paper, I propose an original explanation of the apparent contradiction between "liberal" reforms adopted since 1991 and the resilience of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist inspired *abyotawi* democracy. Many observers have been explaining TPLF-EPRDF's authoritarian policies by underscoring the specificity of this ideology as an antithesis to liberal democracy, thus adopting more or less the definition given by TPLF-EPRDF's leaders.[24] From this view, as Jon Abbink rightly reminds: "The party in power (…) – a fact often forgotten – is one advocating 'revolutionary democracy,' not liberal democracy. (…) It derives from a combination of Marxist and ethno-regional ideology and has no negotiated, evolutionary basis in Ethiopia."[25] Although I partially agree with this interpretation of Ethiopian politics emphasizing the ideological inheritance of *abyotawi* democracy, I will argue that *abyotawi* democracy should not be considered just as a static discourse inherited from the struggle period, but rather as a flexible and adaptable discursive tool in evolving international liberal and national contexts. In order to do so, the opposition between "liberal" democracy and *abyotawi* democracy has to be put into question. More than an exclusive ideological opposition, these notions "feed" each other. Ironically, *abyotawi*

democracy has been anchored in Ethiopia since 1991 thanks to liberal reforms. This hybridation is to explain the nature of Ethiopian rethought authoritarianism today. Thus, the demarcation line between liberalism and *abyotawi* democracy is far from being clear and cannot only be interpreted in terms of so-called "liberal institutions" (Constitution, political parties, elections, etc.) on the onehand and authoritarian practices or "culture" on the other, as is generally the case in the literature.[26] Rather, the paper argues that post-1991 institutions, practices *and* ideology are both liberal and revolutionary democratic. Thus the Ethiopian authoritarian "culture" is not static but readapted in a context offering ideological opportunities and constraints. This is denaturing the essence of revolutionary ideology. Today, although *abyotawi* democracy has lost its original substance, it remains an important discursive tool of legitimation as well as fighting tool for EPRDF against internal and external opponents or critics. This mainly explains the resilience of the ideology.

This article is not confronting Marxist theories with the Ethiopian version of revolutionary democracy. Nor will I systematically confront practices and the ideology. Rather, I will focus on the latter's inherent ambiguities, evolutions and uses by EPRDF. It is the first paper to seriously examine the political programme and political philosophy of EPRDF based on a review of its major policy and party documents. It focuses on the notion *of abyotawi* democracy in order to highlight its contradictions, its evolution and its use by Ethiopian leadership depending on contexts.

The ambiguities and paradoxes of *abyotawi* democracy *vis-à-vis* "liberal" political principles will first be examined. Then, a second part will focus on economic ideological paradoxes. Finally, a third development offers a review of the discursive exclusionary uses of the revolutionary democracy concept, and offers an original explanation of the resilience of the notion in today's Ethiopia.

The following developments review primarily empirical material collected in Ethiopia mainly between February and April 2010. Interviews, discourses, booklets, or electoral political debates published in Ethiopian governmental, affiliated or nongovernmental newspapers and magazines since 1991 constitute the corpus of this paper.[27] In the research process, it clearly appeared that party and government statements where produced by the same people, i.e. a small group of party ideologists around Meles, and a few agencies (for instance the Ethiopian News or Press Agencies and the

Office of Government Communication Affairs – former Ministry of Information, led by Bereket Simon).

## *Abyotawi* democracy: A political revolution in Ethiopia?

Since the struggle period, *abyotawi* democracy has always been defined negatively, i.e. in opposition to "liberalism", and more recently "neoliberalism".[28] There would be two main differences between "liberal democracy" and "*abyotawi* democracy" as explained by EPRDF leadership and foreign observers. First, the former aims at securing individual rights while the latter defends collective rights through the notion of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (Art. 39 of the 1995 Constitution). Second, *abyotawi* democracy is not considered representative, but one in which the people is governing.[29]

However, the main symbols of the post-1991 regime, as relentlessly exposed by the government, are, among others, the constitution, multi-party democracy and the electoral process, presented as founding myths of the country democratization. Elections are considered by the Ethiopian government as both essence and evidence of democratization in the country. This view has been confirmed numerous times by leading ERPDF officials on the occasion, for instance, of political debates orpersonal interviews that I conducted. Thus, one can read in the report of the 7th Congress of EPRDF:

> As we all know, the constitutional democratic system we are in the process of building requires the ballot box to be the only way of assuming state power in our country.[30]

The same idea has been expressed by Ato Hailemariam Desalegn, currently foreign minister and former president of southern region (and EPRDF central committee member) during the first electoral "six-party-debate", in 2010 while exposing EPRDF's revolutionary democracy:[31]

> It is impossible to introduce democracy without democratic institutions (…). One of the democratic institutions is parliament (…) and multi-party system. Our parliamentary system has been made to meet the international standards of multi-party system and democracy especially for the last five years (…). The house of federation is another democratic institution (…).[32]

Quite surprisingly, a parliamentary system and representation through elections appear cornerstones of Ethiopian revolutionary democracy, while

radical refusal of this system represents one basis of Lenin's revolutionary democracy evocated by Meles Zenawi from 1994 on. The internationally imposed model of parliamentary system has been adopted. And elections are presented by the EPRDF as the basis of democracy. Then, more than a revolutionary democracy, the EPRDF system is to be considered an electoral representative system in which citizens express their own single vote. The public notice, pictured in Figure 1, was photographed by the author in February 2010 in Addis Ababa, next to the EPRDF office. By calling upon citizens to participate in the May 2010 federal and regional elections, it illustrates the definition of democracy as a system based on voting and Parliament.




Figure 1. "Elect our leaders. Ensure Democracy and Human Rights Through Voting", public notice exposed on the occasion of the 2010 general election. Credit: Jean-Nicolas Bach, Addis Ababa, February 2010.

In the Ethiopian context revolutionary democracy, quite surprisingly, is institutionalized by dint of a federal constitution guaranteeing the establishment of a multi-party and parliamentary system in which elections and parties are presented as keystones. Bearing in mind the attempts by

EPRDF to establish a revolutionary democracy via elections in Ethiopia in the past two decades, *abyotawi* democracy has appropriated these liberal tools to legitimate the survival of the EPRDF leadership (still in power). Thus, both structures and practices have become revolutionary and liberal. As Ethiopian elections have been the subject of many studies since the beginning of the 1990s, I will not address this contested issue in this article.[33] Rather, I would like go beyond the question of democratic fairness of elections to study the relationship between the electoral principle and democracy itself. As the Ethiopian government has equated its electoral system to one of Western democracies, it has to be subjected to the same kind of criticism.

### *A liberal representative democracy?*

Different laws voted for by the Ethiopian parliament (HPR) since the 2005 general elections challenge liberal understanding of civic and political rights. The anti-terrorist law,[34] the narrowing of freedom of the press,[35] the difficulties encountered by many NGOs since the proclamation on NGOs,[36] the repartition of speaking time during the TV debates,[37] the imprisonment of Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ or *Andinet*) leader Bertukan Mideksa (from 28 December 2008 to 6 October 2010) and the direct threats expressed by the Prime Minister against opposition parties at the eve of the May 2010 general elections are some illustrations of the current narrowing political space in the country.

While opposed to "(neo)liberalism," EPRDF uses elections within their revolutionary democracy as liberal Western democracies do.[38] EPRDF's ideology considers elections as a fundamentally legitimizing process, thus replicating the democratic illusion or founding fictions of liberal democracies.[39] Hence, it is not surprising that the European Union and other donors support multi-party elections in Ethiopia, reducing democracy to its procedural components as the public notice (Figure 1) aptly illustrates. Between election cycles, Ethiopian citizens are denied any meaningful participation in political life and have no possibility to have their voice heard.[40] Elections represent only one element in the creation of a democratic environment and by themselves are insufficient to ensure popular participation.[41] Ethiopia's democratization after 1991 has therefore been based on similar practices of representative democracy through general

elections that were developed in the West at the end of the nineteenth century.[42] Undoubtedly, multi-party elections have been appropriated by the Ethiopian government after 1991 because they fit with international standards.[43] Thus, liberal institutions are being appropriated by EPRDF to paradoxically support its *abyotawi* democracy.

What Vincent Foucher has noted recently on the African states is perfectly relevant in the Ethiopian case: “The regimes have learnt how to play the game of democratisation by distorting it in thousands of ways.”[44]

In this Ethiopian context one cannot talk about a transition from *Derg* “totalitarianism” or “authoritarianism” to post-1991 democratization, as argued by some authors.[45] The first reason would be that the remaining ideology is by essencetotalitarian. One other reason for rejecting the idea of transition is theoretical. The idea of democratic transition has its roots in the transitology literature which appeared with the so-called third democratization wave of the 1980s in Latin America and the early 1990s in Africa.[46] These models have since been thoroughly studied and criticized notably for leading to complex classifications in which too many unidentifiable “grey zones” appeared between the authoritarian and the democratic ideal types.[47] A more convincing approach has been to focus on the resilience of authoritarianism in other forms, in order to study how the latter has been evolving rather than disappearing.[48] The Ethiopian case confirms that modernization can go hand in hand with authoritarian rule. As Aalen and Tronvoll argue: “Ethiopia is not an incomplete democracy; it is rather an authoritarian state draped in democratic window-dressing in which manipulated multiparty elections are a means to sustain power.”[49] Ethiopian particularism can be explained by the coexistence of these “liberal” institutions with those authoritarian inherited from the struggle.

### *The resumption of the undemocratic project: the shaping of society from above*

For instance, this resilience is to be seen in mass organizations (Youth or Women’s Associations etc.) inherited from the struggle of the 1970s and 1980s. As one basis of EPRDF’s ideological notion of *abyotawi* democracy, they illustrate the remaining of authoritarian practices.[50] These are to be related with a “democratic centralism” doctrine which is at the cornerstone of the system as the 2010 party statute of the EPRDF states:

> All organizations that come under EPRDF umbrella are those which are led by democratic principles and those which respect democratic centralism.[51]

Democratic centralism reveals above all the rigid and hierarchical structure of the EPRDF coalition and is, among others, illustrated by the *gem gema*. These "polico-administrative evaluations (…) allow the appointment and discharge of civil servants and government officials to be manipulated and subverted".[52] "Criticism" and "self-criticism" procedure is thus presented as "an instrument used to reprimand defects and mistakes in members".[53] This practice inherited from the TPLF internal organization during the struggle is now at the centre of the administrative system in which the ruling party finds a powerful way of controlling the affiliated party members.[54]

The recruitment strategy decided during the 6th EPRDF Congress (September 2006) and presented during the 7th EPRDF Congress report (September 2008) also illustrates the ideological heritage of TPLF's armed struggle period and the effort to include democratic jargon in an undemocratic party-state structure. In fact, in the aftermath of the 2005 general elections, the EPRDF pursued the objective of becoming a mass party, estimated at five million in 2010.[55] For that purpose, the party has focused in the past five years on creating "vanguard" or "model" peasants on the one hand, and "middle level effective leadership" on the other hand.[56] At the same time, mass organizations like the Youth League and the Women's League are instructed to play a great role in recruiting new members, confirming the close link remaining between the ruling party and these organizations. According to the party programme, these "middle level vanguards" have to occupy and control the *kebele* and the *woreda* offices.[57] Every level of Ethiopiansociety is now organized or reached by party members in a far reaching party-state run by EPRDF:

> Increasing membership, priority was given to leadership at *kebele* and *woreda* level leadership and to strengthening study sells and primary organizations in order to build the capacity of members; creation and strengthening of various mass organizations, particularly women's and youth leagues (…).[58]

This strategy derives from two important lines defined by the EPRDF: the first one is related to the Leninist-Maoist definition of revolutionary democracy and the role it assigned to party cadres during the struggle, i.e. the mobilization of Tigrayan peasantry which is now enlarged to both urban and rural areas. The second is an aggressive policy of recruiting party

members since 2005 that aims at broadening its political and electoral basis. This tendency is perceptible in the self-conception of EPRDF party members and the way they see themselves within Ethiopian society:

> The next point of focus is the capacity of the intelligentsia, which can, and should, play the role of creating efficient citizens, and disseminate and create revolutionary democratic concepts. Mobilizing this force under our aim and recruiting the highest capacity for our party means exerting influence and shape way of thinking of the society at large (…).[59]

This is a central point of EPRDF's *abyotawi* democracy strategy: recruiting "vanguard members", shaping their minds, and disseminating their views at every level of the society in order to impose EPRDF's view. This role ascribed to the "enlightened elites" reminds us of Lenin's cadre army as inspired by the writings of the utopian socialist Tchernychevski.[60] The policy of mobilization and recruitment mechanisms by first TPLF and then EPRDF explains the resilience of democratic centralism, because of the necessary "centralized" and "external" structure (the party-state) which aims at educating the masses.[61]

The EPRDF has clearly chosen and maintained a democratization from above. The state, not distinguished from the ruling party (EPRDF) nor from the government, creates organizations, leaders, and vanguard elites who all spread and impose the party's ideology. EPRDF's top-down policy is presented to both domestic and international audiences as democratic and revolutionary. In order to publicize its democratic credentials and achievements, the EPRDF has to educate people through the intermediary of its own elites who are at the same time party members. In this configuration the public administration has little independence, nor have the civil servants. The latter are regularly required to attend lengthy meetings in the federated regions, in which the party "educates" them about issues such as "globalization" or "development", which have a touch of indoctrination.[62]

If revolutionary democracy represents the negation of any alternative political projects and the instauration of a rigid Bolshevik-like cadres society, then *abyotawi* democracy is revolutionary. Here appears the violent and coercive aspect of EPRDF's revolutionary democracy as it would have been defined one hundred years ago, which exists in strong contradiction with liberal democratic ideas. Thus, the EPRDF Statute of 2010 begins as follows:

> In order to enable people to rally behind the objectives of revolutionary democracy and to struggle for their accomplishment, EPRDF is expected to play the role of a vanguard by bracing up its organizational capacity to lead the people in their efforts to raise their consciousness and organize themselves.[63]

TPLF-EPRDF's conception of *abyotawi* democracy is thus an articulation between an *ideological strategy* inherited from the armed struggle of the 1970s and 1980s and a codified *discursive strategy* that has to coexist with the liberal dominant model.[64] The ambiguity of this ideology is a result of the bricolage that refers to two conflicting models. The TPLF-EPRDF's economic policy inspired by the concept of *abyotawi* democracy also illustrates these ambiguities. In fact, the economy is often considered by the EPRDF as the main revolutionary democratic achievement.

## A revolutionary economy?

### *Democratization: not a* sine qua non *for economic development*

When the EPRDF seized power in 1991, the priority was, not surprisingly, to pacify the country. This priority was broadcast on a daily basis in the early 1990s via the columns of *The Ethiopian Herald*, the official newspaper, now in charge of spreading EPRDF's ideas. Next to peace came the establishment of a democratic regime. State-led media portrayed this couple of peace and democracy as the indispensable precondition for the country's economic development. This view suited EPRDF's programmes written during the armed struggle which presented the previous authoritarian regime as the root cause of economic failure. The EPRDF programme in 1991 (1983 EC) stated:

> In short, the call of national democracy, the issue of political rights and the economy were not fulfilled after the revolution of February [1974]. (…) As a result, the country has been exposed to the non-stop war. (…) The core of the struggle is Revolutionary democracy (…).[65]

The causes of war and economic troubles being considered political, the only solution to resolve them was considered political by EPRDF. This goal had to be achieved through the instauration of a revolutionary democracy, as was stated in the third point of the same programme:

> The principal problems of the present Ethiopia can be solved by the sole solution of national democracy. (…)Besides giving rise to the democratic and political changes, the economy

> should be led in democratic manner in order to abolish poverty and backwardness in the country (…).[66]

This line of reasoning has never been completely abandoned, so that one could still read in the 2006 report of the 6th EPRDF Congress:

> Democracy is a key instrument in promoting the struggle of putting in place the developmental political economy, and removing the rent collection political economy. Democracy is a key for development.[67]

However, an analysis of EPRDF's discourse reveals that the causal relation between democracy and economic development has gradually become ambiguous in thecourse of the 1990s. Recently, the causal link seems to have been reversed as the regime increasingly claims an economic rather than democratic legitimacy. In 2008 Prime Minister Meles Zenawi expressed the new economic priority, relegating the democratization process at a simple way in attaining it:

> The effort to promote democratization in Africa without the transformation of political economy from one pervasive and rent-seeking to one value creation has simply provided democratic to pre-reform zero sum politics all over the continent. It hasn't so far succeeded in establishing stable democracy.[68]

A view echoed by official EPRDF programmes in the run-up to the May 2010 federal and regional elections which explicitly states:

> Revolutionary democratic objectives will be fulfilled only if they trigger on a successful economic development. Thus, economic development, the major objective of our organization is the foundation and pillar of all our goals.[69]

Senior EPRDF officials such as Hailemariam Desalegn and Tefera Daribew expressed the same opinion when, during the 2010 pre-electoral debates, asserting on Ethiopian TV that their "Main agenda is development."[70]

### *The ambiguous struggle against liberalism*

Defined after the war against Eritrea (1998–2000) and the 2001 TPLF split, the "renewal" strategy largely explains this evolution. The strategy confirmed liberalism – with which the regime had been flirting in the first half of the 1990s – as the cause of economic and political troubles.[71] The liberal target became clearer from 2006 onward, when EPRDF thinkers

identified capitalist rent-seeking systems and rent collectors as antidemocratic and antidevelopment forces against which the Ethiopian government had to "struggle".[72] The rent seekers have been assimilated to external "capitalist" agents and Ethiopian dissents expelled after the 2001 split who put Ethiopia in "danger" and who subsequently have to be "fought". Rent seekers have to be replaced by "constructive investors" in order to create favourable conditions for development and good governance.[73]

Rather than following a liberal market approach, EPRDF aims at implementing a new "developmental state" or "constructive developmental economy", in which the state has to play a growing role.[74] Accordingly, the task of the Ethiopian government consists of defining economic priorities both in the public as well as in the private sectors. As market economy is labelled negatively as "rent-seeking" or antidemocratic, EPRDF envisions the "developmental state" as only way of achieving revolutionary democracy and economic development. According to EPRDF the indispensable precondition to attain this development is a metamorphosis of the Ethiopian economy. In the process democracy becomes a secondary objective, even though it is presented as a tool to reach development, rather than an objective in itself, as is stated in the 2006 EPRDF's Congress Report:

> Democracy is a key *instrument* in promoting the struggle of putting in place the developmental political economy, and removing the rent collection political economy, (emphasis added by author)[75]

Therefore,

> In a country where constructive developmental economy is established, everyone will be beneficiary according to the efforts and influence one is exerting, which do have greater impact and opportunity on the realization of democracy and narrowing the gaps as well.[76]

Since the beginning of the 2000s EPRDF cites East Asian countries as models to follow in order to fight rent-seeking systems.[77] EPRDF's strategy to follow their experiences also reveals why it gradually compromised its initial goal of democratizing the country, and at the same time its partial shift towards globalized capitalism. EPRDF considers South Korea and Taiwan as particularly efficient models in abolishing what they determine a "rent-seeking" economy:

> There was no other alternative they [Korea and Taiwan] could see except strengthening the private investors. Hence they were supposed to monitor and supervise the private investors in order to detach them from the rent collection.[78]

Rather surprisingly given its preference for revolutionary democracy, EPRDF does not hide its admiration for these "anti-communist" and private-sector oriented policies, and admits their antidemocratic nature. The 2006 EPRDF's Congress Report states:

> Since most constructive governments [synonymous with "developmental state"] were anti-democratic, it was possible to learn from their experiences in terms of establishing economic systems, unlike in the establishment of democratic system.[79]

Nonetheless, considering democratization only as an instrument, Meles and EPRDF leaders firmly argue that democratization is not incompatible with the goal of economic development.[80] Yet when it comes to justifying state intervention in the economy, EPRDF willingly follows the example of China and other East Asian countries.

Here again one can observe a fusion between the political and economic leaderships, which leads to a quite ambiguous conception of the private-capitalist system EPRDF aims at implementing. Opposed to liberal principles of free enterprise, EPRDF's strategy necessitates a very interventionist state which has to be active in every sector of the economy. As it is explained in the party programme, *abyotawi* democracy has to create opportunities for private as well as public investors and define economic priorities through a rigid top-down approach: the party-state remains the principal investor and decision-maker in economic matters; the private sector shall be sponsored only if it follows the principles defined by the party-state; finally, the firms are to play an intermediary role between these two sectors.[81] The state is in fact the only actor who is in a position to define economic policies, because it is considered the only one able to maintain a real autonomy in a globalized world.[82] It is noteworthy that the economic structure of control lays on the political structure described above, showing the confusion of the two spheres. In fact, economic "vanguard forces" are to be trained by the party so as to play a crucial role at the levels of *kebele* and *woreda*. Youth and Women's Leagues have to play such a role and it is not by coincidence that Aseb Mesfin, Meles Zenawi's wife, is the head of EPRDF's Womens' League.

Revolutionary democracy as defined by EPRDF after the 2005 elections thus provides an intellectual justification and/or programme for the merger of the party with the state, government and the entrepreneurial class. The latter are asked by the party-state to fulfil all the Schumpeterian criteria, except that they have to follow the party defined revolutionary democratic principles and priorities, which again seems fundamentally contradictory.[83] Thus, the structure and policies of the Ethiopian economy de facto imply an authoritarian policy. If the state has to control and distribute economic resources, it is needless to say that it represents the main source of political *and* economic power. This double role is also related to the connection often denounced by independent observers between the leading party and its affiliated enterprises, conglomerates and party-affiliated economic elites. S. Vaughan and K. Tronvoll have presented the limits of such privatization policies by noting the "two powerful blocs" de facto controlling the Ethiopian economy, i.e. the "party-associated enterprises" and the "Midroc business empire".[84]

Far removed from Marxist-Leninist ideals, *abyotawi* democracy as defined by EPRDF claims that the "developmental state" will allow for the creation of a "free market" and "capitalist" economy. The compromise between state voluntarism and capitalism is supposed to create the necessary conditions for development. Thus EPRDF's party programme does not explicitly reject liberalism. This can be observed in several fields in which the EPRDF admits, more or less explicitly, the necessity to integrate liberal principles. "Globalization" and the correlative "international domination of liberalism" are the first reasons given by the party for its partial endorsement of liberalism. This context leaves no choice to the EPRDF but to adopt a free market economy. In EPRDF's view, if they do not improve their economy by following these rules, they would be condemned to remain an outsider in the international system.

> Ethiopia had no choice except employing free market economy in the time of Globalization.[85] The option provided here is to be good actor and competitor or to be an observer of such drama. There is no place to hide in this time of globalization, since the world is becoming a clear and plain field.[86]

Hence, a free market economy cannot be avoided as "there is no midway".[87] That choice, or resilience, illustrates the concomitant rejection and endorsement of liberalism by the party as stated in the same report:

> Though EPRDF strictly opposes liberalism, it believes in taking lessons from other countries constructive experience in which the free market economy is a good strategy on helping the democratic system, and encouraging creativity as well.[88]

An additional source of confusion between *abyotawi* democracy and liberalism appears when we consider the implicitly developmentalist vision defined by the EPRDF in its economic and democratization strategy.[89] In fact, this plan in terms of stages of development is reminiscent of modernization theorists of the 1960s-1970s.[90] The parallel is particularly evident as these liberal, universalist and Western-centred models considered economic development as an indispensable condition for democratization both in the West and in the South.[91] Thus, Ethiopian developmentalism seems more influenced by a liberal conception of society and its evolutions than from the Marxist conception of historic materialism. It is then notsurprising if the 2006 report repeatedly mentions the United States as a development model to follow. And whereas Meles himself admits that the Asian models were antidemocratic, he does not hesitate to refer to the American model to show that the "developmental state" can be efficient economically but also lead to democracy.[92]

Ethiopia has adopted an original way for which it uses some selected and controlled liberal tools appropriated from Western and Asian countries. Democratization has been sacrificed as part of this strategy. As social and political utopias were sacrificed at the end of the nineteenth century in the name of the positivist technician utopia by European governments, EPRDF has denatured the revolutionary democracy ideology by following its own "schism".[93] *Abyotawi* democracy, deprived of its original utopia, is nevertheless kept alive as it still represents a powerful discursive weapon in current Ethiopian politics.

## *Abyotawi* democracy as continuous struggle

### *A malleable ideology*

The ambiguities inherent in EPRDF's political philosophy, which informs its policies, are entirely unexpected. Young noted the shift from Leninist to Maoist ideologies adopted by the Ethiopian student movement. The Marxist students of the 1960–1970s who fled Addis Ababa and later participated in the creation of the TPLF (1975) had to adapt their ideology to the rural

conditions in order to obtain the support of the peasants.[94] They later had to readapt their policies to the state structures once they seized power. The structure of the centralized state they inherited from the *Derg* regime, added to the centralized and top-down policy of the TPLF during the struggle, explain the level of political and economic control exerted by the TPLF-led EPRDF. These ideological and pragmatic developments offer explanations of the superposition and "bricolage" that *abyotawi* democracy has been operating out of Leninism, Marxism, Maoism, and liberalism.

*Abyotawi* democracy seems neither revolutionary nor democratic. EPRDF's revolutionary discourses have to accommodate pragmatic policies. Then we have to consider *abyotawi* democracy as a symbol, a powerful discursive and political tool, rather than a genuinely revolutionary programme. This symbolism has been emphasizing the creation of a federal democratic constitution and a multiparty system – representing the core of EPRDF's legitimatizing strategy. For who has the power to define and use the ideology (*i.e.* currently a very restrictive circle around Meles Zenawi) *abyotawi* democracy has become a useful resource inextricable from the party and the regime themselves.

### Abyotawi *democracy as a powerful fighting tool*

This can be understood by the name that the ruling party gave itself and which has remained unchanged since the end of the 1980s: the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (*Ehadig*). The name is both evidence of the TPLF's historic as well as the ongoing and future liberation struggle, which still constitutes a fundamental justification of EPRDF's leadership.[95] The incessant reminders of the armed struggle against the *Derg* carried out by TPLF soldiers as broadcasted on Ethiopian Television before the 2010 general elections illustrate this point. Today, politics and economics in Ethiopia as defined by EPRDF are to be understood as the continuity of that struggle. Hence, it is not surprising to read in EPRDF reports and programmes recurrent terms like "fight", "enemies", "struggle", etc.[96] This struggle ideology simultaneously reveals and justifies the fusion between the state and the party. The *Ginbot* 20 (28 May) commemoration that celebrates the fall of the *Derg* in 1991 illustrates this merger. *Ginbot* 20 has become a real symbol of TPLF-EPRDF invincibility and continuous struggle since 1991. For example, it was broadly used during the electoral

campaigns in 2000 or 2005, and shows how the democratic discourse based on elections has become connected with the TPLF-EPRDF *Ginbot* 20 founding myth. Figure 2, published in *The Ethiopian Herald* on the occasion of the 2005 elections, illustrates this discursive sedimentation and assimilation.

The symbolism of *abyotawi* democracy has also concrete impacts on Ethiopian politics. Indeed, the EPRDF is not about to abandon a discursive tool that allows it to exclude and marginalize domestic opponents. This exclusionary logic is first to be seen within the TPLF-EPRDF itself. The foundation of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray in 1985 represented an ideological means through which Meles could replace for good the remnants of ethno-nationalist ideology of the TPLF's Manifesto. It also marked the beginning of ideology as a means for Meles and his close entourage to impose at the top of the party. Since then, ideology has become a powerful weapon which has proved an efficient way to exclude TPLF opponents accused of "pragmatism", "empiricism" or "revisionism".[97] Another key moment was the transitional period following the fall of the *Derg* (1991–1995). It is noteworthy that Meles Zenawi began to stress on *abyotawi* democracy at the 1994 TPLF conference in Meqele, at the end of the transition.[98] A third activation of the "democratic" ideological tool occurred in the 2001 split within the TPLF. At the beginning of the internal struggle Meles was losing the majority within the TPLF Central Committee.[99] His reaction echoed the 1985 accusations of "revisionism" and "pragmatism", as he resorted once again to ideology in order to impose his view and domination. To that purpose, he accused the party dissidents of "bonapartism", which meant not following the original revolutionary democratic line.[100] The ideological tool once again revealed itself very efficient as it led to the "purge" of the party and the re-imposition of Meles in its centre. Thus, the MLLT and then the more specific notion of *abyotawi* democracy provide an "interesting case (…) of instrumental use of mobilizing ideology."[101]

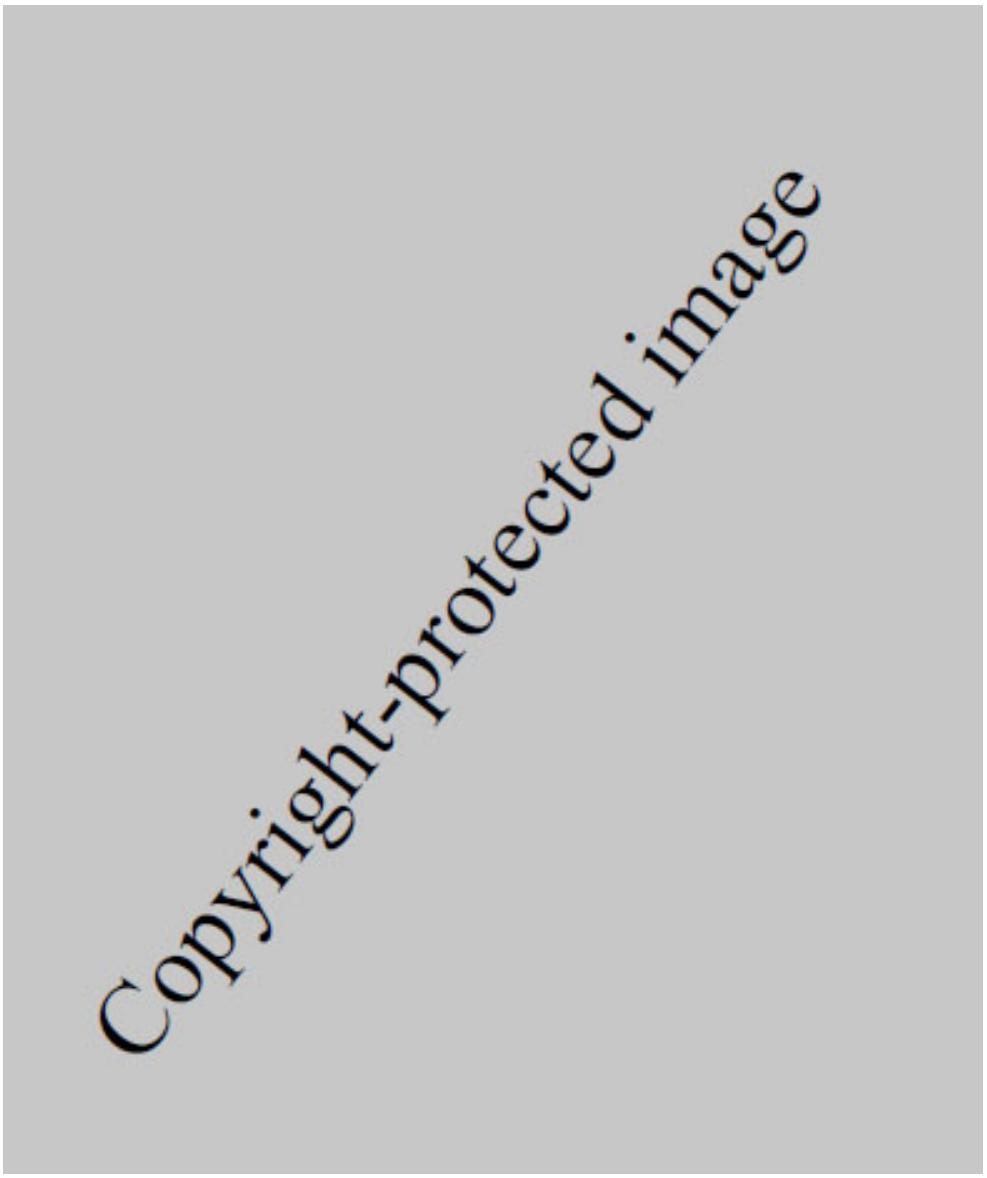


Figure 2. *The Ethiopian Herald*, vol. LXI, no. 223, Saturday, 28 May 2005 (*Ginbot* 20, 1997, EC). Credit: Jean-Nicolas Bach, Addis Ababa, February 2010.

> *Abyotawi* democracy as a discursive exclusionary strategy has also appeared useful as targeting opposition parties. In fact the idea of constant struggle implies a radical opposition between the EPRDF and the opposition parties which leads to a radical dualistic logic. A "you are with us or against us" logic dominates the political arena. Opposition parties are then defined as antidemocratic forces because of their adoption of "liberal principles". This defensive line was already used by the EPRDF against the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party or the All Amhara People Organization at the beginning of the 1990s.[102]

Quite similarly as internal TPLF crisis revealed (1985, 2001) *abyotawi* democracy as an exclusionary weapon directed against opposition

movements is also activated on the occasion of particular tense events. This was the case after the contested 2005 elections to which the TPLF-EPRDF reacted through the "re-ideologization campaign".[103] This campaign, based on the notion *of abyotawi* democracy, aimed at preparing the 2010 general elections by "polarizing the political landscape" and threatened opponents, accused of being "antidemocratic forces".[104] This was still obvious during the 2010 electoral debates when opposition parties with a broadly liberal mindset such as UDJ, Forum etc. were considered antidemocratic and as imperialist agents.[105] As (neo)liberalism is EPRDF's enemy to "fight", the opposition parties to which it is assimilated become a part of the struggle.[106] *Abyotawi* democracy would "fight" against every "enemy" critical against the Ethiopian government.

Among these "enemies" figure not only internal dissidents or domestic opposition parties, but also international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Here again, *Abyotawi* democracy holds up the struggle against these newly defined enemies, which are accused of being antidemocratic, neo-colonialist or neo-imperialist. In recent years this discursive confrontation has been manifest in the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' *A Week in the Horn*, in the newly established Office of Government Communication Affairs (OGCA) led by Bereket Simon, and affiliated government media.[107] For instance, the responses broadcast by the OGCA to several Human Rights Watch reports critical of EPRDF reveal how foreign critics are assimilated to the enemies of revolutionary democracy:

> The FDRE government realizes that there are numerous proponents of the neoliberal ideology that organizations like HRW promote (…).[108]

And according to the same report, many NGOs are depicted as follows:

> Trojan horses for rigid neoliberal interest groups that seek detect African politics. (…) Diehard neoliberals underwrite these organizations through which they try to leverage Africa's leaders and run the gauntlet against any governments that dares resist their ideological preference.[109]

In these pamphlets, Human Rights Watch, as well as Amnesty International, International Crisis Group, the European Union, the BBC or the US State Department are equally presented as "flaming" or "fanatical neoliberals", "extreme neoliberals", and condemned for "their neo-colonialist type ambitions".[110]

## Conclusion

*Abyotawi* democracy is a highly ambiguous concept in its relation to liberalism, which it both rejects and endorses. It provides justification for fusing political and economic power in the party-state run by EPRDF. Whereas it may remain partly revolutionary for the identity-based federalism it implemented in 1995 or the remaining state-owned lands, the absence of democratic practices and the liberal principles it has pragmatically adopted (representative electoral system, parliamentary system, free market economy and capitalism, focus on the private sector, etc.) have progressively emptied it from its revolutionary substance. Tensions have been arising from this paradox until they reached their peak during the 2005 elections. EPRDF has been playing with liberalism and it nearly lost power in the liberal game where political changeover is possible. The cartoon published in the *Reporter Magazine* in 2001 (Figure 3) illustrates very well the potential instability represented by such an articulation. Meles Zenawi is represented with one foot on the left chair – "liberal democracy" – and the other on the right chair – "*abyotawi* democracy". This uncomfortable position seems to be heightened as he doesn't grasp anymore the ropes previously holding him. On the top left-hand corner, which is supposed to represent liberal principles, one can read: "Supremacy of the law, The law of the riches, The rights of individuals"; as opposed to *abyotawi* democracy doctrine which is represented on the top right-hand corner: "Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin …" This is very illustrative of Meles' ideological paradoxes, especially since 2001.



Figure 3. *The Reporter Magazine*, May 2001 (*Ginbot*, 1993, EC). Credit: Jean-Nicolas Bach, Addis Ababa, January 2008.

More than a "culture" of authoritarianism or a "restoration" of authoritarianism, the study of *abyotawi* democracy discourses has shown a rethinking of Ethiopian authoritarianism in a new context, *i.e*. the end of the Cold War and the policy of survival of Ethiopian leaders.[111] The resilience of authoritarianism is partly explained by the inheritance of the Ethiopian state structure which is itself a hybridation of the previous regime on the one hand, and the political practices and ideologies of TPLF on the other. The combination of post-1991 adjustments and the resilience of revolutionary discourse offer explanations of the superposition and "bricolage" the doctrine has been operating out of Leninism, Marxism, Maoism, and liberalism. Thus, revolutionary democracy is a malleable concept, which TPLF thinkers constantly adapt to new realities, almost from the first days of the armed struggle up to today.

*Abyotawi* democracy shall only survive as long as it remains an efficient discursive weapon. In fact, the resilience of *abyotawi* democracy is mainly explained by its exclusionary power. It may have lost its utopian dimension,

but it remains powerful as a fighting tool against internal and external "enemies".

At the beginning of the twentieth century Rosa Luxemburg expressed some mistrust about Lenin's centralist thesis in which she saw a great risk of authoritarian drift. She then recalled what she considered fundamental principle of revolutionary democracy:

> Freedom for government members only, for party-members only – numerous as they may be – is not freedom. (…) Without general elections, without unlimited freedom of the press, without a free struggle of opinion, life withers in all the public institutions, vegetates, and bureaucracy remains the only active element.[112]

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Jon Abbink and Tobias Hagmann for their insightful comments. I particularly thank Tobias Hagmann for funding of archival research in Addis Ababa in February, March and April 2010, for his constant constructive feedback and support, and linguistic help with this paper.
2. Lenin was critical of the Russian social democratic party which considered economic action (strikes) as the best way to fight the Tsars. See Löwy, "Rosa Luxemburg et le communisme," 25. For a complete study of the notion of revolutionary democracy in Marxist theories, see Marik, *Reinterrogating*.
3. Lallement, "Relations industrielles," 376.
4. Le´nine, *Que faire?*
5. Neculau, "La Corruption de la relation," 140–1; Aregawi, *A Political History*, 190.
6. Cahen, "Lutte d'émancipation anticoloniale."
7. Ibid.
8. Marik, *Reinterrogating*, 8.
9. The EPRDF is a coalition formed under the auspices of the still dominant TPLF at the end of the 1980 and the beginning of the 1990s. It comprises four political parties: the TPLF, the Amhara National Democratic Movement, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front. *Derg* is the Amharic word for Committee.
10. On the origin and formation of the TPLF, see Young, *Peasant Revolution;* Aregawi, *A Political History*.
11. Ibid. See also Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 113–14; Paulos, "Ethiopia, the TPLF."
12. Merera, *Ethiopia, Competing Ethnic Nationalisms*.
13. Young, *Peasant Revolution;* Aregawi, *A Political History*.
14. On the foundation of MLLT, see Aregawi, *A Political History*, 169–92.
15. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 114.
16. Medhane and Young, "TPLF: Reform or Decline?"
17. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 73–4.
18. For an illustration of the ANC in South Africa, see Darracq, "Entre libération nationale."
19. Aregawi, *A Political History*, 190.
20. Medhane and Young, "TPLF: Reform or Decline?"

21. Ibid. See also Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 121–2; Paulos, "Ethiopia, the TPLF."
22. Tronvoll, "Briefing"; Lefort, "Power-Mengist-and Peasants …: Post-2005 Interlude."
23. EPRDF, *Program*, 3.
24. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 116; Lefort, "Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants: Post-2005 Interlude", 442; Tronvoll, "Briefing," 4.
25. Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy?," 195.
26. On the Ethiopian "culture of authoritarianism," see Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy?"; Hagmann, "Ethiopian Political Culture Strikes Back"; Aalen and Tronvoll, "The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections"; Merera, *Ethiopia Competing Ethnic Nationalisms*, 144. On the distinction between institutions and practices, see Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State*, for an illustration of federal institutions vs. authoritarian practices, see Abbink, "The Ethiopian Second Republic," who distinguishes republican institutions and authoritarian practices; Tronvoll, "Ambiguous Elections," who opposes formal elections to "non electoral politics."
27. Some sources were translated (non-officially) from Amharic to English, like interviews from the governmental newspaper *Addis Zemen* (the Amharic version of *The Ethiopian Herald*), the 1983 EC *EPRDF Revolutionary Democracy Program*, or pre-electoral debates broadcasted by Ethiopian TV before the 2010 general elections. These translations were financed by Tobias Hagmann and the University of Zürich.
28. See Yosyas, "Bashing Liberalism"; Yosyas, "To be (a Neoliberal) or not to be (a Liberal)"; Adal's answer, "Revolutionary Democracy vs. Liberal Democracy."
29. Lefort, "Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants …: Post-2005 Interlude," 442–3.
30. EPRDF, *Report to 7th Congress*, 27.
31. Hailemariam Desalegn has been nominated Deputy Chairperson of EPRDF and Minister of Foreign Affairs in September 2010, replacing two loyal senior EPRDF officials to Meles, i.e. Addisu Legesse and Seyoum Mesfin.
32. First six-party debate, on democracy, February 12, 2010, Ethiopian Television (ETV).
33. Kassahun, "Party Politics and Political Culture in Ethiopia"; Aalen, Pausewang, and Tronvoll, *Ethiopia since the Derg;* Lefort, "Powers – *Mengist* – and Peasants: May 2005 Elections"; Aalen and Tronvoll, "The End of Democracy?"; Tronvoll, "Briefing."
34. Cf. Federal Negarit Gazeta, "A Proclamation on Anti-Terrorism"
35. Cf. Federal Negarit Gazeta, "A Proclamation to Provide for Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information"; numbers of daily and weekly newspapers have been closed since the 2005 general elections. The Prime Minister Meles Zenawi himself announced the end of Voice of America and Deutsche Welle broadcasting in Ethiopia during the 2010 election period, comparing these stations to the Rwandan Radio Mille Collines.
36. Cf. Federal Negarit Gazeta, "Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies."
37. For instance, during the first six-party debate on democracy, the EPRDF was allotted 3/8 of airtime, and the other five parties had to share the remaining 5/8.
38. Meles, "Dead End Neo-Liberal Paradigm."
39. Rosanvallon, *La Légitimité démocratique*.
40. For a good summary of the recent developments on democracy and participation see Blondiaux, *Le Nouvel Esprit de la démocratie*; Sintomer, *Le Pouvoir au peuple*.
41. Rosanvallon, *La Contre-Démocratie;* Blondiaux, *Le Nouvel Esprit de la démocratie*.
42. Macpherson, *Principes et limites de la démocratie libérale*.
43. Darbon, *La Politique des modéles en Afrique*.
44. Foucher, "Difficiles successions en Afrique subsaharienne," 136 (translation from the author). For an opposite view considering the regular holding of multi-party elections in Africa as improving democracy, see Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*.

45. Alemseged, “Diversity and Democracy in Ethiopia,” 176.
46. See Schmitter, “Transitology.”
47. Quantin, “La Difficile Consolidation des transitions démocratiques”; Buijtenhuis and Thiriot, *Démocratisation en Afrique au Sud du Sahara*.
48. See Camau and Geisser, *Le Syndrome autoritaire;* Levitsky and Lucan, *Competitve Authoritarianism;* Geisser et al., *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires*.
49. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The End of Democracy?,” 203.
50. Although the mass organizations were officially separated from the ruling party in 1997, their relationships remain very close. See Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 115.
51. EPRDF, *Statute*, 5–8.
52. Hagmann, “Beyond Clannishness,” 524. *Gem gema* is a process of “evaluation” and “self-criticism” inherited from the TPLF’s internal organization. It was implemented country-wide after 1991.
53. EPRDF, *The Development Lines of Revolutionary Democracy*, 121.
54. On *gem gema*, see Paulos, “Ethiopia, the TPLF”; Medhane and Young, “TPLF: Reform or Decline?”; Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State;* Young, *Peasant Revolution*.
55. The party membership was estimated at 760,000 in 2005. See Tronvoll, “Briefing,” 12.
56. EPRDF, *Report to 7th Congress*, 4–5. See also Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants: Post-2005 Interlude”.
57. *Woreda* and *kebele* are administrative divisions. The latter are inherited from the previous regime.
58. EPRDF, *Report to 7th Congress*, 4–7.
59. Ibid., 97.
60. Neculau, “La Corruption de la relation d’aide.”
61. Ibid.
62. See Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants: Post-2005 Interlude.”
63. EPRDF, *Statute*, 1.
64. EPRDF, *Program*, 1991 (1983 EC); see also Fontrier, *La Chute de la junte militaire éthiopienne*.
65. EPRDF, *Program*, 1991 (1983 EC).
66. Ibid.
67. Cf. EPRDF, *Development, Democracy and Revolutionary Democracy*.
68. Meles Zenawi, “Dead End Neo-Liberal Paradigm.”
69. EPRDF, *Program*, published at the occasion of the 2010 general elections.
70. Hailemariam Desalegn, six-party debate on federalism.
71. In the summer of 2000, Meles Zenawi presents a Report to the TPLF Central Committee (CC) about “Bonapartism.” The Report is debated in January 2001 within the CC, and adopted in Februray by the latter. It leads to the TPLF CC Split in March, the exclusion of dissidents and the reinforcement of Meles at the top of the TPLF-EPRDF and the state. Some extracts were published in *The Reporter* magazine in Amharic and commented by Paulos; see Paulos, “Ethiopia, the TPLF.” The “renewal strategy” or “*Tehadso”* inAmharic, was elaborated in the aftermath of the crisis. See Medhane and Young, “TPLF: Reform or Decline?”; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 43, 120–35.
72. Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants. …: Post-2005 Interlude.”
73. EPRDF, *Report to 7th Congress*, 12–13.
74. EPRDF, *Strategy of Revolutionary Democracy*, I thank Lefort who provided me with this EPRDF internal discussion paper.
75. EPRDF, *Development, Democracy and Revolutionary Democracy*, 66.
76. Ibid. 49.
77. EPRDF, *Development, Democracy and Revolutionary Democracy*, 31–2.

78. Ibid., 43–4.
79. Ibid. 69.
80. Meles, “Dead End Neo-Liberal Paradigm.”
81. See ERPDF, *Development, Democracy, and Revolutionary Democracy; EPRDF Program*.
82. EPRDF, *Program*.
83. EPRDF, *Report to 7th Congress*, 39–40.
84. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 75–6; Abbink, “The Ethiopian Second Republic”; Paulos, “Ethiopia, the TPLF”; Merera, *Ethiopia, Competing Ethnic Nationalisms*.
85. EPRDF, *Development, Democracy, and Revolutionary Democracy*, 54.
86. Ibid., 6.
87. Ibid., 9.
88. Ibid., 55
89. Cf. the “three phases” in the EPRDF internal document, *Development, Democracy, and Revolutionary Democracy*, 26–7 and 57–8.
90. Rostow, “The Stages of Economic Development”; Zolberg, “The Structure of Political Conflict”; Dahl, *On Democracy*.
91. For a critical study of these theories, see Badie, *Le Développement politique*.
92. Meles, “Dead End Neo-Liberal Paradigm.”
93. Musso, “De la socio-utopie à la techno-utopie.”
94. Young, *Peasant Revolution*.
95. Gebru, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 311–42; Tronvoll, *War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia*.
96. For an illustration, see EPRDF, *The Development Lines of Revolutionary Democracy*, 66.
97. See Aregawi, *A Political History*, particularly chapter 8.
98. Ibid.
99. See Medhane and Young, “TPLF: Reform or Decline?”
100. In the summer of 2000, Meles Zenawi presented a Report to the TPLF Central Committee (CC) about “Bonapartism.” The Report was debated in January 2001 within the CC, and adopted in February by the latter. It led to the TPLF CC split in March, the exclusion of dissidents and the reinforcement of Meles at the top of the TPLF-EPRDF and the state. Some extracts were published in *The Reporter* magazine in Amharic and commented by Paulos Milkias; see Paulos, “Ethiopia, the TPLF.”
101. Aregawi is here referring to the 1985 exclusions, during which he was himself expelled from the Central Committee and the TPLF. Aregawi, *A Political History*, 181.
102. The EPRP was one of the most important Marxist movements within the 1960–1970s Ethiopian Student movement. The TPLF and EPRP fought against each other during the struggle until the TPLF took the advantage. The EPRP did not manage/was not allowed to come back on the Ethiopian political scene after the fall of the *Derg*. See Young, *Peasants Revolution;* Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*. The AAPO, though ethnically based, defended a “pan-Ethiopian” and unitary agenda after 1991, against the EPRDF federalism. The AAPO neither managed to enter the political scene. See Kassahun, “Party Politics and Political Culture in Ethiopia.”
103. Tronvoll, “Briefing.”
104. Ibid.
105. Adal, “Revolutionary Democracy vs. Liberal Democracy.”
106. EPRDF, *Development, Democracy, and Revolutionary Democracy*, 85.
107. The same articles, pamphlets and news supporting the Ethiopian government and opposing international critics are to be found indifferently on different official oraffiliated websites such as, among others, Aigaforum (http://www.aigaforum.com/), Walta Information Center (http://www.waltainfo.com/), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its daily publication *A Week in*

*the* Horn (http://www.mfa.gov.et/), the Ethiopian News Agency (http://www.ena.gov.et/), or the Ethiopian Press Agency (http://www.ethpress.gov.et/).

108. Office for Government Communication Affairs (OGCA), "No Amount of External Pressure Can Force Ethiopia."
109. Ibid.
110. See, for instance, OGCA, "Neo-liberal behind US State Department, HRW Reports."
111. On authoritarian restoration, see Aalen and Tronvoll, "The End of Democracy?"
112. Luxemburg, *La Révolution russe*, cited in Lo¨wy, "Rosa Luxemburg et le communisme," 26.

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# The (un)making of opposition coalitions and the challenge of democratization in Ethiopia, 1991–2011

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A key challenge in the consolidation of a democratic system in transitional countries is the lack of effective opposition political parties to counter the dominance of incumbent regimes. In the case of Ethiopia, to be described in this article, opposition parties are weak, fragmented, and mutually antagonistic. Hence, in order to counter the dominance of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), coalitions and alliances have been used by the opposition parties. But opposition coalitions remain unstable and prone to fragmentation due to both internal and external factors. This study analyses the factors responsible to the often repeated fragmentation of opposition coalitions in Ethiopia.

Parties are usually conceived as organizational vehicles that political interest groups use to assume power. According to Sartori a party is "any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office".[1] This definition indicates that political parties are institutions primarily established to assume power. Conceptualizing political parties in developing countries like Ethiopia from this vantage point is, however, problematic. In the Ethiopian context, the party landscape is complicated. There are first the registered parties that operate within the country, the majority of whom until 2000 chose not to participate in the electoral process. In addition to the nationally registered parties, there are exiled or "illegal" organizations that oppose the government from outside of the country, but try to gain influence in the country. Some of these organizations advocate the use of force.

Political parties play crucial roles in democratic systems. They are particularly important for the holding of regular competitive elections. Moreover, it is through the party machinery that individuals are nominated for public offices. The other equally important function of political parties is their role in aggregating public demands. Parties also serve as instruments that integrate individuals into the political process. They also form and sustain governments.[2]

There is therefore a strong relationship between well-functioning parties and democracy. For instance, Stokes underlined that parties are "endemic to democracy,an unavoidable part of democracy".[3] Van Biezen on her part argues that "[i]n contemporary democracies, parties … are *sine qua non* for the organization of the modern democratic polity as well as for the expression and manifestation of political pluralism".[4] Indeed, one of the fundamental features of democracy is free and fair competition among parties.[5] In order to smoothly carry out their functions in a democratic system parties require a fair or level playing field. This is essentially about the presence of mutually accepted rules of the game and their transparent implementation for both ruling and opposition parties. As long ago as the mid-1960s, Dahl underscored the "right of organized opposition" as one of the three key institutions to modern democracy along with the "right to vote" and the "right to be elected".[6]

But in much of Africa, the position of the opposition remains problematic. As observed by Olukoshi, the "promise which the opposition once represented as the bearer of the hopes and aspirations of the generality of the people has substantially faded away"[7] due to internal and external problems. The situation in Ethiopia is a case in point. There is no still an enabling political space for opposition parties in the country. The ruling party uses state resources, such as the government media and public institutions to consolidate its power.

Opposition parties in Ethiopia remain deeply fragmented. The formation of coalitions or alliances has been used as a way of consolidating opposition parties so that they could have a meaningful role in national politics. The creation of coalitions by African opposition parties has been implicitly and explicitly encouraged in many countries by sectors of the population who advocate political changes, and by those who view democratic consolidation as requiring inter-party transitions of power through competitive elections. In Huntington's terms, democratic consolidation only

happens when “a government looses an election to the opposition and the successor government also subsequently looses”.[8] In much of Africa it has proven necessary to form coalitions in order to achieve this.[9] Lindberg has argued that “generally, only when the opposition is able to unite in electoral or post-electoral coalitions can they manage to assume power”.[10] The Kenyan experience, where the opposition only managed to break the dominance of Moi’s authoritarian rule through a broader alliance known as the National Rainbow Coalition (NaRC) in 2002 is presented as an archetypical example of the key role of coalitions in democratic consolidation.[11] In the Ethiopian context, too, it has been through coalitions that the opposition has managed to leverage a greater role in the politics of the country – primarily to be seen in the 2005 elections, in which two major opposition coalitions participated.

The formation and sustenance of opposition coalitions in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular are challenging tasks. Many of the opposition coalitions are unstable and tend to fragment because of pressures that come from external forces, particularly ruling parties, and also from problems emanating within the coalitions themselves. This article examines the politics of making and unmaking of opposition coalitions in Ethiopia by looking at both the external and internal dimensions of the problem.

## The politics of opposition in Ethiopia: history and current trends

The concept of “opposition” (Amharic: *teqawami)* historically has negative connotations in the Ethiopian context – connotations of fault-finding, detracting, creatingobstacles and even rebellion. More ominously, there is still a lack of distinction between “political opposition” and “enmity”. Since coming to power in 1991, the ruling party EPRDF has done nothing to mitigate this view.[12]

Until the 1990s, there was no legal framework for the formation of parties. For much of the twentieth century, the country was ruled by an absolutist monarchy which never allowed freedom of association and of speech. As there was no political mechanism within the confines of the system that accommodated opposition, opposition to the imperial regime was violent in its character.[13] In the 1960s opposition to imperial rule consolidated in the “Ethiopian Student Movement”, which was inspired by the Marxist-Leninist ideology.[14]

The imperial system was overthrown by the 1974 revolution. The military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam – known as the *Derg* – ruled the country from 1974 to 1991. The revolution was accompanied by the proliferation opposition political movements,[15] almost all of which were Marxist-Leninist in ideological orientation and entertained the organizational idea of "vanguardism". Moreover, they followed Marxist-Leninist dictums of "irreconcilable differences" and "scientific socialism" that helped exacerbate their mutual antagonisms. This included multiethnic movements such as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, which was more known under its Amharic acronym (MEISONE). Others, such as the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), were ethno-nationalist. Almost all of these political movements showed a desire to establish themselves as vanguard parties at different levels.

The struggle for ideological leadership was a major cause of the intense rivalries and violent conflicts that marked this period. For instance, there was a bitter conflict between the EPRP and the MEISONE in the 1970s. Such conflicts helped the military regime to consolidate its power, the *Derg* moving to violently neutralize the EPRP and other opposition parties through the infamous "red terror" campaign. The "red terror" still remains one of the darkest episodes of the country's incipient history of parties.

In May 1991, the *Derg* was militarily brought down by the EPRDF, established by TPLF's leadership in 1989. Immediately, after its takeover of Addis Ababa, the EPRDF convened the July 1991 Peace and Democracy Conference, where a transitional charter was adopted which served as an interim constitution. This charter recognized civil and political rights and allowed the formation of parties. Moreover, a broadly representative interim legislative assembly known as the Council of Representatives (CoR) was established. The Council was composed of 87 members, who represented 32 political organizations invited by the EPRDF leadership. The lion's share in the CoR was, however, taken by the EPRDF. In spite of the inclusiveness of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), exiled parties such as the EPRP and MEISONE were excluded from the transitional process.

In spite of the legalization of political opposition in post-1991 Ethiopia, the political landscape was singularly dominated by the EPRDF and its affiliates at the federal, regional and local government levels. The federal government during the last four elections of 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010

was constituted by the EPRDF. Likewise, the four constituent members of the EPRDF continue to administer the four larger and populous regions of the country. Additionally, five regional parties closely affiliated to the EPRDF – namely Afar People Democratic Organization (APDO), Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Party (BGPDP), Gambela People's UnityDemocratic Movement (GPUDM), Harari National League (HNL) and Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) administer the five lowland regions of the country where there is low population density.

The EPRDF's continued incumbency directly and indirectly helped the consolidation of its power. Increasingly, the distinction between the party and the state has evaporated. As a result, state institutions and resources have been used to further the dominant electoral position of the EPRDF. The chief complaint of opposition parties about the lack of a level playing field therefore has some credence.

Opposition to EPRDF's rule takes several forms. There are opposition parties which are registered with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and operate within the country. Since 1991, more than a hundred political parties have been established. There is a remarkable diversity among the opposition parties in their organizational setup and ideological orientation, some being established on the basis of ethnicity while others are multiethnic. Second, in terms of ideology, many of the multiethnic parties such as the All-Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP) and the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) present themselves as followers of "liberalism" and hence focused on individual rights.[16] In contrast, many of the ethnic parties advocate group rights. The parties also differ on such crucial issues as the land policy and the federal structure of the country. Some of opposition parties like the EDP and AEUP advocate private ownership of land, while others like the Oromo National Congress (ONC) support the continuity of state ownership of land.[17] Regarding federalism, there is a clear division between ethnic and multiethnic parties. Ethnic parties such as the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), ONC and some others generally support the ethnic federal structure of the country, while many of the multiethnic parties (AEUP and EDP) oppose the emphasis given to ethnicity in Ethiopia's federal system.[18]

There are still Ethiopian political forces that operate outside of the country. Like their domestic counterparts, these groups show remarkable diversity. Some, like the OLF and the Ogaden National Liberation Front

(ONLF), are ethnic-based and claim that their objective is to ensure the self-determination (and even secession) of "their" people, which they pursue with the force of arms.[19] In contrast, the EPRP and the MEISONE in exile are "multiethnic" in character and oppose among others the ethno-federal state structure that was instituted in the country after EPRDF's assent to state power.[20]

The role of the majority of the opposition parties in the political life of the country since 1991 passed through two important phases. First, from the onset of the transitional arrangement in 1991 until 2000, the majority of the opposition parties chose not to participate in elections – boycotting the 1992 local elections, the 1994 elections to the constituent assembly and the 1995 regional and federal elections. The main contention of the opposition parties for their boycott was the lack of a level playing field for both the opposition and the ruling party. Even if this claim could have some truth, the opposition parties' main objective in boycotting the elections was to deny legitimacy to the entire political process.[21] In short, the opposition parties were reluctant to accept the legitimacy of the 1995 constitution and EPRDF's rule.

The second phase in the role of Ethiopian opposition parties covers the period since 2000. Many of the opposition parties decided to take part in the 2000 national and regional elections. The decision was largely motivated by their desire to avoid the cancellation of their status by the regime-controlled NEBE. In accordance withthe electoral law, a political party which failed to take part into two consecutive elections loses its legal status. Hence many of the parties participated in the 2000 elections just to retain registration, most fielding only a handful of candidates. In contrast, Professor Beyene Petros's SEPDC fielded a larger number of candidates and seriously contested the elections.

In the May 2005 ballot the fragmented opposition created two major electoral alliances – the Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Coalition of Unity and Democracy (CUD). Reforms to electoral law allowed greater access to the opposition parties to campaign. Election Day (15 May 2005) passed peacefully, with a record number of voters turning out. However, the opposition judged the elections to have been rigged by the ruling party, the result ending "in sharp disagreement, controversy, and massive repression of popular protest in the postelection phase". Opposition

demands for new elections in contested constituencies, and for concessions from the EPRDF in terms of a power sharing arrangement, were refused.[22]

In late October, the CUD, which emerged the larger opposition party in the federal parliament and the majority in the Addis Ababa city council, decided to boycott parliament as a way of denying legitimacy to EPRDF's controversial victory. The opposition, moreover, called for protests. There were street protests in Addis Ababa and many other urban areas in the country. The government used force to clamp down on these protests, and arrested leaders of the CUD, some civil society activists and journalists, charging them with genocide and sedition. The EPRDF also responded to these challenges by adopting new repressive laws that put significant constraints on political parties, the press and civil society organizations. The opposition considered these laws as instruments strengthening EPRDF's hold onto power, while the EPRDF argued that the legislation strengthened the democratic system. In this post-electoral crisis many of the opposition parties and their coalitions, such as the ONC, the CUD and the UEDF, faced internal division and fragmentation.[23]

The opposition parties which accused the EPRDF of "authoritarianism" have since 2005 significantly reduced their participation in subsequent electoral processes. They, by and large, boycotted the March 2008 local elections, when the massive expansion in the size of local councils just before these elections reduced the chances of opposition parties competing effectively. Of the close to 3.6 million seats that were up for grabs at the local level, the EPRDF managed to seize almost all.[24] This near-total victory was repeated in the May 2010 parliamentary and regional elections.[25] The opposition parties went into these elections without having healed their divisions. The major opposition coalition that took part was the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (EFDUF, or *Medrek*), which brought together eight parties. At present (2011), the opposition has only a single seat at the federal parliament. (See Appendix, Table 3.) Similarly, regional councils are totally dominated by the EPRDF and its affiliates.

## The formation and fragmentation of opposition coalitions: a brief survey

Since 1991, hundreds of political parties have been set up in Ethiopia. Many were small and based on ethno-linguistic identity, and most have

disappeared (see Appendix, Table 1). Starting from the very beginning of the transitional process in 1991, there was the realization that if the opposition parties were to have ameaningful role in elections, they needed to cooperate. Indeed, opposition parties began to establish coalitions at the eve of EPRDF's ascent to state power. But the formation of opposition coalitions has been marked by divisions, discord and fragmentation. Hence, many of those coalitions that emerged in the post-Derg period vanished without bringing noticeable changes to the political landscape. In what follows I offer a brief survey of the major opposition coalitions that emerged since 1991.

### *(i) Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF)*

The Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF) was established in April 1991 in Washington DC, during the final days of the *Derg*. The main protagonists of the COEDF were the EPRP and MEISONE, each hoping to help strengthen their position in the post-Derg political landscape. Other members of this coalition included the pro-monarchist Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the little-known Tigray Democratic People's Movement (TPDM), and over 30 foreign-based Ethiopian community organizations and civic associations.[26] The COEDF did not participate in the transitional process, the EPRDF refusing to accommodate its membership.[27]

As the first opposition coalition, the COEDF bore three key features that marked many of the opposition alliances that would emerge: its establishment outside of the country allowed the EPRDF to ban it within Ethiopia; the parties who joined the coalition did so without reconciling their differences; and no clear and cohesive policy emerged from the coalition. The platform for the COEDF comprised three elements: opposition to the EPRDF; opposition to the separation of Eritrea; and opposition to ethnic federalism. The COEDF was instrumental in the organization of the 1993 Paris conferences which brought together exiled and newly established opposition parties operating within the country, with the objective of putting pressure on the EPRDF. The COEDF became inactive after the formation of the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE) in December 1993 (see below).

### *(ii) Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC)*

The SEPDC was formed on 11 March 1992 as a coalition of 10 newly established ethnic-based organizations in southern Ethiopia. Almost all of the parties involved had been established immediately after the collapse of the Derg and in response to the prominence of that was given to ethnicity as the main instrument of political representation and mobilization. Many of these parties were established by educated southern individuals who had important positions within the civil service and higher educational institutions. For instance, SEPDC's founding chairman, Beyene Petros, is still a professor at the Addis Ababa University.

The membership in this coalition later increased to 15. During the transitional period, nine members of the SEPDC were represented in the transitional Council of Representatives (CoR). The SEPDC aimed to provide a united voice for the peoples of the South in a national politics polarized by divisions.[28] In terms of political programme, the SEPDC accepted the federal structure but argued about its implementation. Regarding land, it advocated private ownership.[29]

The SEPDC faced major challenges. First, its aspiration to have an important role in the governance of the southern region failed due to the formation of affiliate parallel southern parties which the EPRDF established under its control, uniting them into a front – the Southern Ethiopian People Democratic Front (SEPDF) – in 1994.[30] The SEPDF became not only a member of the EPRDF coalition but also a regional ruling party. Secondly, the SEPDC split after the March 1993 Paris conference. This conference was organized by the COEDF (see above) and for the first time brought together exiled political forces and registered political parties operating in the country. The Southern Coalition was the only registered party that took part in the conference. The conference called for the formation of a new "all-inclusive" transitional government. The EPRDF not only rebuffed the demand but also asked the SEPDC to retract their position or face expulsion from the transitional CoR. This triggered a two-way split in the ranks of the SEPDC. Four members of the SEPDC, including Professor Beyene Petros's Hadiya National Democratic Organization (HNDO), left the TGE, while the leaders of five parties decided to remain within the transitional council.[31]

Following this split, the SEPDC was registered in 1994 with the NEBE as a regional party consisting of individual members. This meant the SEPDC was no longer an alliance of more than two parties. As a single

party, the SEPDC participated in the 1988 local elections and the May 2000 federal and regional elections. It made a strong showing in the 2000 election in the southern region.[32]

### *(iii) The Joint Political Forum (JPF)*

The Joint Political Forum (JPF) was established in 1992 by the coming together of the Ethiopian Democratic Action Group (EDAG), the Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP) and the SEPDC. The objective was to provide a platform for the cooperation of opposition parties. The individual units maintained their organizational independence. Professor Beyene Petros served as chairman of the JPF. His deputy was Mr Kifle Tigneh, who was head of the EDAG.

The JPF was the first coalition that brought together ethnic and multiethnic political parties. It played a key role in the convening of the 1993 Ghion Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Addis Ababa that led to the establishment of the CAFPDE. The JPF never took part in elections due to the unwillingness of the EPRDF to negotiate with the opposition during the process of crafting the 1995 constitution. The organization was undermined by divisions among its constituent members regarding appointments to leadership positions. According to sources close to EDAG, the SEPDC pulled itself out of the JPF in 1994 when the leadership position of Professor Beyene was challenged.[33]

### *(iv) The Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE)*

The CAFPDE was established in December 1994 after the Ghion Conference of Peace and Reconciliation. The Ghion conference was called by the 1993 Paris conference of opposition forces. The EPRDF allowed the conference to take place, but prevented the participation of some exiled political parties, such as the COEDF and the OLF, by detaining their delegates at the airport.

The CAFPDE demanded “national reconciliation” and the putting in place of an “all-inclusive” transitional process.[34] Some 42 opposition groups were members of the CAFPDE, including exiled parties such as the COEDF. But as only parties operating within the country were allowed to

officially register in alliances or coalitions, CAFPDE was registered with the NEBE as an alliance of five registered key parties – the Joint Political Forum, the Ethiopian Democratic Union Party (EDUP), the Agew Peoples' Democratic Movement (APDM), National Democratic Union (NDU), and the SEPDC. The veteran opposition leader, Professor Beyene Petros served CAFPDE as chairman throughout its existence.

The CAFPDE was something of a hybrid, including exiled organizations and some civic groups. This created organizational difficulties and severely hampered the activities of CAFPDE.[35] According to sources from the former Joint Political Forum, the refusal of the SEPDC to allow the restructuring of CAFPDE and its voting procedures in accordance with the wishes of the other members contributed to the split that emerged within its ranks.[36] In fact, as reported in a press article in 2000, the four member parties of CAFPDE agreed to work on the basis of equal vote. But this was opposed by the SEPDC which wanted to have more votes for itself.[37]

The final straw for the CAFPDE, however, came when its four members decided to remove Professor Beyene from his chairmanship position and elected his deputy, Mr Kifle Tigneh of EDAG as Chairman in November 2000.[38] The SEPDC did not accept the decision of the other parties and took the case to the NEBE. The NEBE ruled in favour of Professor Beyene.[39] Following this, the four members left the organization leaving the SEPDC alone within CAFPDE. In spite of this, for about four years, the name CAFPDE was used by the SEPDC for purposes of convenience.[40] In 2004, the CAFPDE was officially dissolved.

### *(v) Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Organizations (CEOPO)*

This coalition was established in September 1998 by three political organizations, namely CAFPDE, SEPDC and ONC that were operating within Ethiopia, and five parties including the COEDF, Tigray Alliance for National Democracy (TAND), Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF), the Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party of former Foreign Minister Colonel Goshu Wolde (known as MEDHIN/Salvation) and the Tigray-Tigrayan Ethiopians for Social Democracy (TTESD), that were based outside of the country. The chief factor that triggered the formation of this coalition was the decline in opposition activism. In addition, the opposition forces wanted to appear to be united while the country was in a

war with Eritrea, and to strengthen their position for the 2000 parliamentary and regional elections.[41] Like many other coalitions, the initiative for the formation of CEOPO came from the diaspora politicians. The chairmanship of this coalition was also given to Professor Beyene Petros.[42]

According to Tronvoll, the overall objective of the CEOPO was "creating a dialogue for broad-based national reconciliation in Ethiopia".[43] To this effect, it sent an invitation to the EPRDF for talks on the issue of establishing a process that ensures "free and fair" elections, but received no response.[44] According to Professor Beyene, the CEOPO was undermined by other political initiatives mounted by diaspora groups.[45]

### *(vi) Joint Action for Democracy in Ethiopia (JADE)*

In the run-up for the 2005 federal and regional elections, a group of three influential individuals – Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, Dr Berhanu Nega and Dr Befekadu Degefe – began to mediate among the four major opposition parties for the formation of a coalition.[46] The result of this "mediation" was the formation of a loose opposition coalition called Joint Action for Democracy in Ethiopia (JADE), comprising of the ONC, the EDP, the All-Amhara People Organization (AAPO) and the SEPDC.

Serious differences emerged among the member organizations from the beginning. Chronic distrust between AAPO – which was later renamed as the AEUP – and the EDP was a major destabilizing factor. This was not surprising, given that the EDP was established by disgruntled youth members of AAPO/AEUP. The parties also fell out over decision-making procedures – the EDP advocating the making of decisions on the basis of unanimity, while the other parties opted for majority votes.[47] JADE was fatally undermined when its key members were drawn into negotiations with members of the exiled community who wanted to establish a broader-based collation, which in the end failed to materialize.

### *(vii) Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF)*

The UEDF was established following the decision of the "all-inclusive" party conference held in the summer of 2003 in Washington, DC. Initially, 15 political organizations became members of the coalition. Those based within Ethiopia included the SEPDC, ONC, Oromo Federalist Democratic

Movement (OFDM), AEUP and EDUP-MEDHIN.[48] The EPRP and MEISONE were the principal participants among the diaspora organisations.

The main objective of the UEDF was to win the May 2005 elections. The coalition planned to establish a "broad-based" transitional government which would decide on constitutional issues and pave the way for "free" and "fair" elections. In order to strengthen its presence within the country, the UEDF placed its central leadership in Addis Ababa. The chairmanship would rotate between those parties that operated within the country. The executive committee was composed of the representatives of all the member organizations of the coalition.

The UEDF tried to avoid the rancour and divisions of previous coalitions, but it was affected by deep controversies around its organizational regulations and its appointment of leadership positions. Decision-making rules and the rotation of the chairmanship became especially difficult issues. The AEUP and the EDUP-MEDHIN opposed the making of decisions by majority votes and called for unanimity,[49] and questioned the proposal that the chairmanship rotate between Professor Beyene Petros of SEPDC and Dr Merera Gudina of ONC. These two parties also highlighted alleged bureaucratic irregularities in the administration of the coalition.[50] Ideological orientation and mobilization strategies were also matters of contention. The UEDF brought together parties that had many contradictory features, particularly around the vexed question of ethnic mobilization. A bitter disagreement also emerged on how to field candidates, the AUEP reiterating that it would be unrealistic for candidates to run for the elections on a common platform.[51]

Disagreements also affected the diaspora commitment to UEDF. Diaspora Support Committees were a major source of income for many opposition parties within the UEDF, and both the EDUP-MEDHIN and the AEUP were reluctant to sacrifice their own funders to the greater benefit of the coalition. EDUP-MEDHIN's Lidetu Ayalew bitterly complained that the leaders of the UEDF had begun to raise funds from the diaspora in the name of the organization without the agreement of the parties.[52] The AEUP and EDUP-MEDHIN finally left the UEDF in 2004.[53]

The remaining members of the UEDF concentrated on preparations for the elections, entering negotiations with the EPRDF about reforming the electoral laws. The EPRDF allowed the opposition parties more space for

campaigning than in the previous elections, and did indeed make significant changes to the electoral law following its discussions with the UEDF. Taking advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere, the UEDF actively campaigned and put up a large number of candidates for both the federal and regional legislatures.

The UEDF made a strong showing in the 2005 elections, but they were hit hard in the post-election crisis (see Appendix, Table 2). Divisions weakened their position. The foreign-based members of the UEDF decided that the coalition should not join the parliament, while those operating within the country permitted their elected members to take up their seats. Pressures from the EPRDF also undermined the UEDF after the elections. A split in the ONC, for example, appeared to have been encouraged by government forces, ousting the founding chairman, Dr Merera Gudina, and naming a new chairman and executive committee.

The experience of the UEDF illustrates the difficulties of holding together a coalition of external and internal parties, but their success in negotiating improvements to the electoral laws indicated the leverage that a strong coalition might gain. The high-handed approach in which the EPRDF dealt with protests over outcomes of the elections also indicated that coalition politics had the capacity to challenge the incumbent leadership.

### *(viii) The Coalition of Unity and Democracy (CUD)*

The CUD was established few months before the May 2005 elections. It was composed of the AEUP, the EDUP-MEDHIN, the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), and the Rainbow Ethiopia Movement for Social Justice and Democracy (*Kestedammena*). Key architects of the CUD were the “mediators” who had previously helped establish JADE. According to Mesfin Woldemariam, CUD’s aim was to facilitate cooperation among “multinational” political parties that operated within the country.[54]

Forging a coalition among these four parties proved a tortuous process. Once again there were divisions regarding rules and procedures of decision-making, with EDUP-MEDHIN again advocating consensus.[55] Rivalry between AEUP and EDUP-MEDHIN was a major destabilizing factor.[56] Despite the strong opposition of the EDUP-MEDHIN, Hailu Shawel was finally appointed as CUD chairman with the support of the *Kestedammena*

group. *Kestedammena* emerged as the mediator between the two older parties, but was then accused of conspiratorial politics against AEUP.[57] Key appointments in the unified party then became deeply contentious. When Lidetu failed to be appointed to one of the key offices, he and his associates within the EDUP-MEDHIN began to work to undo the coalition.[58]

In spite of this simmering rancour within its ranks, the CUD campaigned effectively using the government controlled electronic media, and by organizing public rallies and discussions. It made a strong showing in the May 2005 elections, winning control of the city council of Addis Ababa and gaining 109 seats in the federal parliament (see Appendix, Table 2). But when the results were announced, the CUD rejected the poll, accusing the NEBE of engineering the EPRDF's victory. This dispute precipitated a major political crisis in the country.

In this post-electoral crisis some leaders of the CUD began to advocate the boycotting of parliament, and the coalition chairman, Hailu Shawel, publicly pronounced that the CUD would not join parliament before the party debated the issue. When the leadership failed to find a coherent position within its ranks, it took the question of joining or boycotting parliament to the public. In the heightened atmosphere of post-electoral crisis, the urban youth who attended the consultative forums appeared to have supported the option of a boycott.

After further negotiations with the EPRDF on political reforms stalled, in October 2005 the CUD decided not to join parliament and called for protests. Subsequently, Addis Ababa and major other cities in the country were rocked by violence. The government used force to clamp down the protests. As documented by the official government inquiry into the violence, about 250 protestors were killed by security forces. The entire leadership of the CUD were jailed and charged with the serious offences of attempted genocide and sedition. In addition, several journalists and some civil society activists who were critical of the government were also jailed.

Following this crackdown, the CUD fragmented. Lidetu Ayalew and his associates resuscitated the EUDP-MEDHIN and joined parliament. Some members of the CUD who joined parliament after the crackdown managed to register the CUD under the leadership of Temesgen Zewde. But soon after CUD's registration, splits emerged in its ranks. A group led by the vice-chairman Ayyele Chamiso, who was elected to the Addis Ababa city council on CUD's ticket, claimed leadership of the party. Ayyele's group

appeared to have been working with government support. Indeed, its takeover of the leadership of CUD was recognized by the NEBE, a decision affirmed by the courts.

The CUD leaders were pardoned and released from prison in July 2007. But they were not able to resuscitate their organization. Temesgen Zewde's wing of the CUD, in association with other released members of the CUD, including Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and Ms Birtukan Mideqsa who was elected as deputy chairman of the CUD in 2005 established a new party called Unity for Justice and Democracy (UDJ) – *Andinnet* in Amharic.

### *(ix) Ethiopia Federal Democratic Unity Forum – Medrek*

In the run-up to the May 2010 elections, the *Medrek* coalition of parties was established. Initially composed of six political parties – namely Professor Beyene's Ethiopian Social Democratic Party (ESDP), Oromo People's Congress (OPC), OFDM, SEPDC, and the newly formed opposition party Union of Tigrians for Democracy & Sovereignty (*Arena*) – *Medrek* was led by two prominent individuals, the former President of Ethiopia, Dr. Negasso Gidada, and the former Defence Minister and ex-member of the TPLF Central Committee, Siye Abraha. Two other parties, the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Movement (EDUM) and the UDJ under the chairmanship of Gizachew Shiferaw, joined *Medrek* later.

*Medrek* prepared what it termed a "minimum program" and registered with the electoral board in September 2009. Problems began when Birtukan Mideksa, chairperson of *Medrek*, was arrested by the government after making a controversial speech in Sweden about an earlier period of imprisonment. UDJ's participation in *Medrek* also intensified its internal problems at this time. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, one of the architects of the UDJ, was opposed to the collaboration with *Medrek*, being suspicious of the former EPRDF affiliations of Negasso Gidada and Siye Abraha. This dispute became deeply acrimonious, and court cases are still pending between the protagonists.

The May 2010 elections in which *Medrek* participated brought a landslide victory to the EPRDF.[59] *Medrek* had projected itself as the major opposition coalition for this poll, but failed to consolidate the gains made by the opposition in 2005, winning only a single seat in the federal parliament.

There are presently (early 2011) talks among the members of *Medrek* to transform the coalition into a unified party.

### *(x) Alliance for Democracy (AFD)*

Amid the post-electoral crisis of 2005, a new initiative for a coalition of opposition parties was made at Utrecht in the Netherlands. The Alliance for Democracy (AFD) was alleged to have been orchestrated by the Eritrean government, fronted by a faction of the OLF based in Asmara. The AFD brought together the CUD's North American Support Committee, the OLF, the ONLF, and the Sidama Liberation Front (SLF).

The announcement of this coalition understandably generated intense controversies. The involvement of the CUD's diaspora faction was especially puzzling, but the rivalries between the OLF and the ONLF also made any common purpose and harmony difficult to achieve. As a consequence, the AFD coalition fell apart in 2006, only a few months after its creation.

## Discussion: factors generating opposition divisions

The brief survey shows that coalition making – in the sense of alliance formation – has been a salient feature of Ethiopian opposition politics since 1991. For the most part these coalitions were neither stable nor effective, yet in 2005 it was coalition politics that successfully bargained reform to the electoral laws and won significantly representation at local and national level. The success of 2005 was not consolidated, however, and since then coalitions have once again proved ineffective in challenging the ruling EPRDF. In this section we will summarize the seven principal factors that explain the fragmentation of coalitions in Ethiopia.

### *The inhibitive political atmosphere and adverse government influences*

The adverse impacts that come from the government to the opposition parties are clear. The EPRDF has mobilized against opposition groups, often using the legal apparatus of the state to restrict and hamper their activities. There is little distinction between the state and the ruling party in Ethiopia. Government institutions and state resources, such as the media,

are used by the ruling party to advance its own political objectives. The ruling party uses state resources as a form of patronage, while the opposition has difficulties in raising funds to support their activities. Moreover, when legal challenges are mounted against the opposition the impartiality of state institutions such as the courts and the electoral board, must be doubted. The government has on many occasions taken punitive measures against political opponents. For example, the jailing of the leaders of the CUD and their subsequent trial on controversial charges after the 2005 election contributed directly to the collapse of that coalition.

### *Coalitions are based on opposition to the ruling government*

Opposition coalitions are united not by their shared policy objectives but by their desire to bring down the EPRDF government. Hence, political parties of different ideological originations form coalitions with only the singular objective of winning in elections. This may be common enough in many countries, but in the Ethiopian context alliances which are created by parties which have contradictory objectives on such central issues as state structure (federalism) and government ownership of land, cannot be expected to be stable.

### *Adverse implications of diaspora political groupings*

Political activists in the diaspora have played a highly visible role in forming and managing Ethiopia's many coalitions since 1991, and many of the opposition parties operating in the country raise substantial funds from the Ethiopian diaspora communities in North America and Europe. Diaspora activists clearly understand the advantages that opposition coalition can bring, yet their political perspectives are often at odds with those operating within Ethiopia. In general, activists in the diaspora tend to be more hard-line, an example being the decision by the foreign wing of the UEDF to boycott parliament after the 2005 elections. Divisions of this kind have been a substantive cause of coalition fragmentation.

### *Lack of internal democracy and a culture of consensus building*

Many of Ethiopia's parties lack a strong culture of internal democracy. They do not hold regular and transparent elections for leadership positions, tending to be dominated by key individuals. In many cases internal divisions emerge over decisions to enter into opposition coalitions. For instance, the divisions that emerged within the EDUP-MEDHIN regarding the unification of the CUD doomed the project of unifying the four parties. Factionalism and party indiscipline have frequently undermined coalitions.

### "Tebaberu woiym tesebaberu": *either cooperate or disintegrate*

A leading slogan in the private media about the opposition is *Tebaberu woiym tesebaberu*, "Either cooperate or disintegrate". This indicates the pressure on the opposition to forge coalitions. But many opposition parties join coalitions without clearly sorting out the balance between "organizational independence" and the obligations that emanate from being a member of a coalition. Some of the larger parties, notably the AEUP and EDUP-MEDHIN, have experienced particular difficulties in this regard. The continued independence of coalition members therefore emerges as a key factor in the failure to sustain coalitions.

### *Intense power competition within opposition coalitions*

In almost all of the opposition coalitions, there has competition for power and leadership roles. Even in the CUD, a major problem which brought the coalition to its knees was the manner in which key offices within the unified party were allocated. Similarly, UEDF's decision to rotate the chairmanship between Professor Beyene Petros and Dr Merera Gudina ultimately caused its fragmentation. Personality and leadership struggles are persistent features of Ethiopian politics, serving to hamper the formation of strong and enduring coalitions.

### *Lack of trust among opposition coalitions*

Distrust has been a profoundly important feature of coalition failure, exemplified perhaps more clearly in the feuds between the leaderships of the EDUP-MEDHIN and the AEUP, but running through the experience of virtually every coalition to be formed since 1991.

## Conclusion

Twenty years after the adoption of a multiparty system in Ethiopia, there is little progress towards the building of an open and democratic space where parties with contradictory agendas can freely compete. Of course, this experience is not peculiar to Ethiopia. Despite the enthusiasm at the beginning of the 1990s for the democratization of state-society relations in Africa, the record of the continent remains unsatisfactory. Throughout Africa, opposition parties remain weak and divided. As Olukoshi has illustrated, incumbents work to inhibit the emergence of vibrant opposition parties by hindering their funding and using state resources against them.[60] In Ethiopia this has resulted in an unhealthy dependence of the opposition parties on diaspora communities for funding and support.

Olukoshi further reminds us that in many African countries "ruling parties infiltrate *agents provocateurs* into the main opposition parties to cause disruptions for them from within".[61] In Ethiopia, the government provides implicit and explicit support to those individuals or factions who disrupt opposition solidarity and those who appear less critical of EPRDF policies. Adjustments to electoral constituencies is a further device by which the incumbent can consolidate control,[62] and in Ethiopia this was evident before the 2008 local elections, when the EPRDF massively expanded the number of seats available at local councils making it very difficult for the opposition parties to field a sufficient number of candidates to be competitive.

The incumbent can hamper opposition politics, then, but opposition parties also suffer from problems of their own making. Opposition parties in much of Africa lack internal democracy, are not fully institutionalized and remain largely personalized.[63] These features are evident in Ethiopia. Here political leaders feel that they are "nothing unless they lead their own parties", intra-party leadership contestations undermining party unity but also leading to party fragmentation.[64]

It has been pointed out that opposition parties throughout Africa were "hurried by incumbents into elections without first insisting on the implementation of the far reaching constitutional changes that were necessary for governing post-electoral political activity".[65] This has been profoundly important in Ethiopia, where thegains of 2005 were rapidly

squandered in the post-election crisis. Few African countries have yet experienced consecutive inter-party transition of power through competitive election, and in the case of Ethiopia this still seems far from achievable. Indeed, the trend in Ethiopia is troubling: the presence of the opposition in the federal parliament has dramatically declined from about a third of the seats in 2005, to just one in the sitting parliament inaugurated in October 2010.

The 2005 and 2010 parliamentary and regional elections were contrasting in many respects. In the 2005 elections, two major opposition coalitions emerged and campaigned vigorously. Moreover, the EPRDF for the first time significantly relaxed the political atmosphere and allowed the opposition to freely campaign and use the publicly owned media. Unsurprisingly the opposition performed better than earlier elections. In contrast, in the May 2010 elections the opposition went to the pools divided, while the ruling party was not willing to open the political space for competition. Thus, to the possible dislike of the EPRDF, the present parliament in which it and its affiliates control 99% of the seats does not give the impression that the country follows a multiparty system. This unhealthy dominance of a single party could only be changed if there are concerted actions on the part of the EPRDF itself, and significant changes to the behaviour of the opposition parties.

## Notes

1. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, 63.
2. Diamond and Günther, "Introduction," xiv.
3. Stokes, "Political Parties and Democracy," 245.
4. Van Biezen, *Political Parties*, 1.
5. Doorenspleet, "Political Parties, Party Systems," 169.
6. Dahl, *Political Oppositions*, xi.
7. Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis," 29.
8. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 267.
9. Mwakikagile, *Nyerere and Africa*.
10. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections*, 80.
11. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections*.
12. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is a coalition of four ethnic-based organizations – the dominant Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM).
13. See Gebru, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest;* Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*.
14. Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students;* Fantahun, *The Ethiopian Students*.
15. Kassahun, "Party Politics."

16. Aklilu, Kefale, and Olika, “An Inventory of Ethiopian Opposition.”
17. Hussein, “The Debate over Rural Land.”
18. See Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism*, 42–5.
19. Merera, *Ethiopia*, 248.
20. Young, “Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia,” 537.
21. Joireman, “Opposition Politics.”
22. Abbink, “Discomfiture of Democracy?,” 176.
23. Anon, “Behibret wist yetekestew wouzigib” [Controversy in the UEDF], Tir 17, 1998, *Reporter*, 2006; Anon, “EDEAPA-MEDIN beKinijit yewuhidet sened lay mehitem alasarifem ale” [EDUP-MEDIN refused to put its seal on Kinijit’s unification document], Tikimt 13, 1998. *Reporter* 2006.
24. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections.”
25. Tronvoll, “The Ethiopian 2010 Federal and Regional Elections.”
26. See “List of all Registered Political Parties” (1997), http://www.angelfire.com/ak/sellassie/politics/parties.html (accessed October 3, 2011).
27. Merera, *Ethiopia*, 110.
28. Beyene, “Yepolitika dirijitoch hibret tiyaqe be Itiopia,” 8.
29. Aklilu, Kefale, and Olika, “An Inventory of Ethiopian Opposition,” 30.
30. Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism*.
31. See ‘List of all Registered Political Parties’ (1997), http://www.angelfire.com/ak/sellassie/politics/parties.html (accessed October 3, 2011).
32. Tronvoll, “Political Repression.”
33. Aklilu, Kefale, and Olika, “An Inventory of Ethiopian Opposition.”
34. Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen, *Ethiopia Since the Derg*, 35.
35. “Ye-Amarach Hailoch Yesiltan Wezigb,” Hidar 1992, *Reporter*, 2000.
36. Aklilu, Kefale, and Olika, “An Inventory of Ethiopian Opposition.”
37. “Ye-Amarach Hailoch Yesiltan Wezigb,” Hidar 1992, *Reporter*, 2000.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power*, 127.
41. Vestal, *Ethiopia: A Post-Cold War African State*, 202.
42. Ibid.
43. Tronvoll, “Political Repression,” 159.
44. Ibid.
45. Beyene, “Yepolitika dirijitoch,” 4.
46. Professor Mesfin was a leading critic of the EPRDF government and was founding chairman of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO). Dr Berhanu Nega was then chairman of the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA). The EEA during his tenure organized a series of dialogues about Ethiopia’s political and economic features. Dr Befekadu Degefe was also a member of the EEA.
47. *T’obbia*, “Yepolitica partiwoch eyetewezagebu nachew.”
48. The EDP joined with the EDU in 2003 to create EUDP (Ethiopian Unity Democratic Party) and it merged with MEDHIN – Salvation party of Colonel Goshu Wolde in 2005, changing its name into EDUP-MEDHIN. The EDUP-MEDHIN was again renamed as Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) in 2009.
49. Hassen, “Altebaberum yisebaberu yihon?,” 12.
50. Admassu, “Beagerachin yewodefit,” 21; Hailu, “Teqwamiwochm honu Ihadeg”; Lidetu, *YeArem Ersha*, 55.
51. Gebretsadik, “Yehibretu Tirmisna yesponser politikegnoch,” 8.
52. Lidetu, *YeArem Ersha*, 56.

53. Ibid.
54. Mesfin, *Agetuni: Temeren Wettan*, 27.
55. Lidetu, *YeArem Ersha*, 72.
56. Mesfin, *Agetuni: Temeren Wettan*, 28.
57. Lidetu, *YeArem Ersha*, 76.
58. Ibid., 110.
59. cf. Tronvoll, "The Ethiopian 2010 Federal and Regional Elections."
60. Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis," 29.
61. Ibid., 30.
62. Ibid.
63. Hyden, *African Politics*, 42.
64. Ibid.
65. Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis," 31.

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# Appendix

Table 1. List of parties that were active by the May 2010 elections

| | Full name of the party | Abbreviation | National party | Regional party |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Oromo National Congress | ONC | | * |
| 2 | All Ethiopian unity Organization | AEUO | | |
| 3 | Western Somali Democratic Party | WSDP | | * |
| 4 | Oromo Liberation Unity Front | OLUF | | * |
| 5 | Gamo Democratic Union | GDU | | * |
| 6 | Harari National League | HNL | | * |
| 7 | Zai people’s Democratic Organization | ZPDO | | * |
| 8 | Ethiopian Peace and Democratic Party | EPDP | * | |
| 9 | Benishangul Gumuz People’s Democratic Party | BGPDP | | * |
| 10 | Ethiopian National Democratic Party | ENDP | * | |
| 11 | Somali People’s Democratic Party | SPDP | | * |
| 12 | Ethiopian Democratic Party | EDP | * | |
| 13 | Tigri Worji Nationality Democratic Unity Party | TWNDUP | | * |
| 14 | All-Amhara People’s Organization | AAPO | * | |
| 15 | Ethiopia Social Democratic Party | ESDP | * | |
| 16 | Harari People’s Democratic Party | HPDP | | * |
| 17 | Ethiopian’s Unity Democratic Organization | EUDO | | * |
| 18 | Denta Dubamo Kinchichila People’s Democratic Organization | DDKPDO | | * |
| 19 | Southern Ethiopia People’s Democratic Union | SEPDU | | * |
| 20 | Hadiya Nation Democratic Organization | HNDO | | * |
| 21 | Kembata People’s Congress | KPC | | * |
| 22 | Southern Ethiopia People’s Democratic Movement | SEPDM | | * |

| | Full name of the party | Abbreviation | National party | Regional party |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 | Gedeo People Democratic Organization | GPDO | | * |
| 24 | Somali Democratic Alliance Forces | SDAF | | * |
| 25 | Oromo Abo Liberation Front | OALF | | * |
| 26 | Yem Nationality Democratic Movement | YNDM | | * |
| 27 | Afar National Democratic Party | ANDP | | * |
| 28 | Oromo People's Democratic Organization | OPDO | | * |
| 29 | Amhara National Democratic Movement | ANDM | | * |
| 30 | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front | EPRDF | * | |
| 31 | Tigrayan People's Liberation Front | TPLF | | * |
| 32 | Tembaro People's Democratic Union | TPDU | | * |
| 33 | Bahir Work Mesmes People's Democratic Organization | BWMPDO | | * |
| 34 | Gurage People Democratic Front | GPDF | | * |
| 35 | Sodo Gordona Democratic Organization | SGDO | | * |
| 36 | Oromia Liberation National Party | OLNP | | * |
| 37 | Endegagn People Democratic Movement | EPDM | | * |
| 38 | Konso People's Democratic Union | KPDU | | * |
| 39 | Omo People's Democratic Union | OPDU | | * |
| 40 | Sidama Liberation Movement | SLM | | * |
| 41 | Donga People Democratic Organization | DPDO | | * |
| 42 | Wolayta People Democratic Front | WPDF | | * |
| 43 | Geda System Advancement Party | GSAP | * | |
| 44 | Wolayta Derya Yemiya | WDY | | * |
| 45 | Dube and Degeni Nationality Democratic Party | DDNDP | | * |
| 46 | Ethiopia Democratic Union | EDU | * | |
| 47 | Dilwabi Peoples Democratic Movement | DPDM | | * |
| 48 | Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front | ARDUF | | * |
| 49 | All Ethiopian Democratic Party | AEDP | * | |
| 50 | Ethiopian Pan-Africanist Party | EPAP | * | |
| 51 | United Ethiopian Democratic Forces | UEDF | * | |
| 52 | Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement | OFDM | * | |
| 53 | Sidama Hadicho People Democratic Organization | SHPDO | | * |
| 54 | Ethiopian National Unity Party | ENP | * | |
| 55 | Afar Liberation Front Party | ALFP | | * |

| | Full name of the party | Abbreviation | National party | Regional party |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 56 | Unity of Southern Ethiopian Democratic Forces | USEDF | | * |
| 57 | All Ethiopian National Movement | AENM | * | |
| 58 | Bench People Democratic Organization | BPDO | | * |

Source: The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. http://www.electionethiopia.org/en/

Table 2 Results of the 2005 parliamentary elections

| Party/(Coalition) | Affiliation | Number of seats (547) |
|---|---|---|
| Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) | Ruling party | 327 |
| Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) | Opposition | 109 |
| United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) | Opposition | 52 |
| Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) | Opposition | 11 |
| Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 08 |
| Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 08 |
| Gambela People's Democratic Movement (GPDM) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 03 |
| Sheko and Mezenger People's Democratic Unity Organization (SMPDUO) | Opposition | 01 |
| Harari National League (HNL) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 01 |
| Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 23 |
| Argobba National Democratic Organization (ANDO) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 01 |
| Independent | | 01 |
| Vacant | | 02 |

Source: National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. http://www.electionethiopia.org/en

Table 3. A summary results of the 2010 parliamentary elections for the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) of the federal government

| No. | Winner party | Affiliation | Seats in the HoPR |
|---|---|---|---|

| No. | Winner party | Affiliation | Seats in the HoPR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) | Ruling party | 499 |
| 2 | The Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 24 |
| 3 | The Benishangul Gumuz Peoples Democratic Party (BGPDP) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 9 |
| 4 | The Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 8 |
| 5 | The Gambela People's Unity Democratic Movement (GPUDM) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 3 |
| 6 | The Harari National League (HNL) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 1 |
| 7 | The Argoba People Democratic Organization (APDO) | Affiliated to the EPRDF | 1 |
| 8 | The Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (Medrek) | Opposition | 1 |
| 9 | Independent | Private | 1 |
| Total number of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives | 547 | | |

Source: The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. http://www.electionethiopia.org/en/

# Separation of powers and its implications for the judiciary in Ethiopia

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This paper examines the role of the judiciary in Ethiopia. Implicit in the notion of separation of powers is the fact that the judiciary has a crucial role in resolving disputes impartially, ensuring the rule of law and in setting limits to power. Yet in Ethiopia the legislature has sought to take away power from the courts, placing them in quasi-judicial bodies within the executive. The judiciary has also failed to check that the executive is acting within the framework of the law. The overall assessment is that the judiciary has not yet defined its role; has not properly interpreted the concept of separation of powers; and has not yet become a key organ for enforcing human rights. The judiciary has abdicated its core function of reviewing acts and decisions of the executive and administrative agencies and is in danger of paving the way for arbitrary and unchecked government.

"The major work for the judge is to settle chicken and goat theft cases …"[1]

Among several recent studies concerning the judiciary in Ethiopia,[2] none have dealt adequately with the central issue of the role of the judiciary within Ethiopia's existing constitutional framework. Recent political developments affecting the judiciary call for fresh debate on what has traditionally been taken for granted. It is often assumed that the judiciary has a crucial role in resolving disputes impartially, ensuring the rule of law, and in setting limits to power. Yet current developments in Ethiopia seem to indicate otherwise. A thorny relationship is emerging between the judiciary and the political branches of the state. One indicator of this is the tendency of the legislature to issue ouster clauses that take away power from courts, placing powers instead in quasi-judicial bodies within the executive. It must be questioned whether this development is in line with the notion of separation of powers as outlined in the federal constitution.

The relationship between the executive and the judiciary has not been smooth in Ethiopia. The acts and decisions of the executive do not enjoy the same level of judicial supremacy as do those of parliament. The judiciary is expected to check whether acts of the executive are in line with the principal legislation issued by parliament, and whether the executive is acting within the framework of the law. Based on cases decided by the Federal Supreme Court and the practice within the executive, this paper explores the relationship between the judiciary, the executive and the different administrative agencies of the government. More generally, thepaper asks whether the judiciary in Ethiopia is meant to have any role beyond settling “chicken and goat theft cases”?

## Background

Pluralist legal and judicial systems exist in Ethiopia. Customary and traditional courts, religious courts, and formal courts all operate alongside one another. *Sharia* courts, applying Islamic laws on family matters, marriage and succession exist in Addis Ababa as well as in the regional states. Parties voluntarily submit to the jurisdiction of these courts, or the dispute is redirected to regular formal courts. Customary and traditional Courts operate within the different ethno-linguistic groups in Ethiopia. Despite the massive codification made in the 1960s and designed to do away with customary laws, it is widely recognized that traditional legal mechanisms have remained important in much of the country, including in the central highlands and in urban areas where state institutions have a strong presence.[3] In practice, transplanted laws and institutions were unable to penetrate deep into rural Ethiopia, where they lacked legitimacy.

The 1995 federal constitution recognized this plurality: the constitution stipulates that disputes relating to “personal and family issues” can be resolved by application of customary and religious laws, so long as parties give their consent to that effect. Customary and religious courts are thereby also given limited space and recognition.[4] In fact, in practice such courts even handle serious crimes, such as homicide, and, in the regional states of Afar and Somali, they have been involved in settling inter-group conflicts. But while the rulings of religious, customary and traditional courts may be widely supported by local communities, the decisions reached can at times conflict with the provisions and rights provided under the current

constitution, particularly with regards to the position of women and children.

Ethiopia's judicial system is generally characterized by a fusion, not separation, of administrative and judicial functions in one organ. In historic Ethiopia, adjudication of cases has formed part and parcel of public administration. One finds a merger of functions, with the adjudication of cases being considered a principal function of the executive. For example, in Menelik's (1889–1913) era, the Minister of Justice was also the Chief Justice.[5] Attempts to separate the judiciary from the executive have not proved easy. A long and tiring process of negotiation in 1942 led to a partial victory for the judiciary with the High Court and the Supreme Imperial Court being able to free themselves from the influence of provincial administrators for the first time. In all other respects, until 1992 Ethiopia's court structures reflected the traditional practice of combining judicial and executive functions in the person of the local chiefs and provincial governors. At the apex of the court structure, the Emperor (until 1974) dispensed justice in the *Zufan Chilot* (Crown Court). Under the *Derg* regime, from 1974 until 1991, the Ethiopian judicial system was unitary with the country divided into fourteen provinces in which High Courts sat with one Supreme Court in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Thus, Ethiopia's judiciary has never had a separate institutional existence distinct from the executive. Since the time of the Emperor, then under the *Derg*, and now in current Federal Ethiopia, each government has set up its own version of the judiciary to suit its own purpose. This has left an impression on ordinary citizens to the effect that changes in government will entail another round of appointments and dismissals of judges. So it was that in 1991, when the EPRDF came to power, the prestige andreputation of the judiciary had reached its lowest ebb, being associated with nepotism and corruption and linked to a regime that had given up any semblance of due process of law.[6] As indicated later in this paper, the judiciary continues to suffer from the political influences and its independence remains to be established.

Yet Ethiopia's current federal constitution establishes federal and regional state courts that are distinct from the political branches of government. A dual court structure was introduced during the transition (1991–1994), and was then more fully elaborated in the new Constitution of 1995.[7] This states that supreme federal judicial authority is vested in the

federal Supreme Court, and reserves for the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) to decide by a two-third-majority vote to establish lower level federal courts as it deems necessary. There is only one federal Supreme Court with nationwide jurisdiction, and, until 2003, the federal High Court and First Instance Courts were limited to Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. As far as the organization of the lower level federal courts in the states is concerned, the Constitution stipulates that the jurisdictions of the Federal High Court and of the First Instance Courts are delegated to state courts. By virtue of this delegation, the state Supreme Court exercises, in addition to its state jurisdiction, the jurisdiction of the federal High Court. The state high courts exercise, in addition to their state jurisdiction, the jurisdiction of the federal First Instance Court. In order to guarantee the right of appeal of the parties to the case, decisions rendered by a state high court exercising the jurisdiction of the federal First Instance Court are appealed to the state supreme court, while decisions rendered by a state supreme court on federal matters are appealed to the federal Supreme Court.[8]

One probable reason for the original design of the dual but delegated court structure under Article 78(2) of the Constitution when it was established in 1995 was the lack of trained legal experts. There was then estimated to be fewer than 1000 professional judges in the country.[9] Then, in 2003, parliament decided to establish lower level federal courts,[10] to create a fully fledged dual court structure in five regional states (Afar, Somali, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, and South). As a result, there are lower level federal courts in some states while the delegated power continues in three others – Oromia, Amhara and Tigray. It is acknowledged that these partial developments have caused problems in the administration of federal laws.[11] Following the inter-ethnic conflicts in the South in 2002, and in Gambella in 2003, state courts were blamed for lack of impartiality and for taking sides in conflicts: since then inter-ethnic conflicts have been transferred to federal courts.

As far as the state courts are concerned, the judicial structure consists of the state first instance courts at the lowest level (*wereda* courts), above which are intermediate zone/high courts, and at the highest level the state supreme court.[12] As a result the Ethiopian judicial system consists of two parallel court systems, the federal courts and the state courts, each with their own independent structures and administrations. As regards powers,

the Constitution stipulates that the Federal Supreme Court shall have the highest and final judicial power over *federal matters* while the State Supreme Court shall have the highest and final judicial power over *state matters*. However, what constitutes a federal or state matter is often contested.[13] Moreover, the Federal Supreme Court has a very controversial power of Cassation over state matters where it establishes that state courts have committed "basic errors of law".

## Separation of powers

In polities with written constitutions, the constitution establishes the key political institutions, defines their powers and indicates some *limit* on their powers. The main function of the legislature is to make laws, that of the judiciary to settle disputes and of the executive to implement laws. This notion, however, also implies that each branch may, in addition to the major function, undertake another minor function that belongs to the other branch, so long as that minor function is strongly linked to the main function. For example, it is not a violation of the notion of separation of powers if parliament takes disciplinary measures or removes the immunity of its members, functions that resemble more of adjudication than law making. The same holds true if the executive or the administrative agencies decide technical cases related to the civil service, labour, etc. The judiciary as well sets some precedents and fills gaps in the law while deciding cases, a matter that has some impact on policy making.

Separation of powers implies that every branch of government discharges its function according to its own understanding of its powers and without intervention from the other branches. Every branch determines the scope of its authority. But this autonomy remains valid only as long as the branch acts within the limits of its jurisdiction. If it exceeds its limits or exercises it unlawfully, there should be a legal mechanism to check this and correct it.

Such "checks and balances" are relevant even in situations where the judiciary has limited powers, as in Ethiopia. Although each branch is autonomous in the exercise and determination of the scope of its powers, if a dispute arises as to the legality of the interpretation, then the judiciary should render a final and binding decision. Separation of powers is not about absolutism of each branch, nor is it a licence to violate the law: each

branch can only have a mandate as defined in the constitution. Separation of powers is intended to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one governmental institution, political party or person and to strengthen freedom. Separation of powers is, therefore, about limiting power. In the Ethiopian context, the House of Federation (HoF) has final authority on determining the interpretation of constitutional issues.

According to the Ethiopian Constitution, Articles 62 and 83, the HoF is empowered to decide constitutional disputes and to interpret the constitution.[14] In this process the HoF is advised by the Council of Constitutional Inquiry (CCI), a body composed of eight legal experts (including the President and Deputy of the Federal Supreme Court) who are appointed by the President of the country and three members from the HoF. But unlike second chambers in other federations, the HoF has no law-making functions: Ethiopia's HoF is a quasi-political body composed of representatives of the "nations, nationalities and people", all members of the HoF having thus far been elected indirectly by the state legislatures.

The HoF has already played an important role in the adjudication of constitutional issues, particularly over those cases that are of high political significance – the Silte secession from the Guraghe in March 2001 to establish local/zonal administration in the South, and the settlement of border disputes between Oromia and Somali regional states in 2004, being two notable examples. With Ethiopia's federal system currently operating under a dominant party system the HoF's impartiality in such political cases has not been brought to test, though itremains to be seen how the HoF would handle important inter-governmental conflicts if a multiparty system was to emerge.[15]

### *(i) Proclamations 250/2001 and 251/2001: the mother of all confusions?*

Regular courts in Ethiopia are clearly prohibited from reviewing the constitutionality of laws enacted by the legislature. Yet this is not the end of the story, for Proclamations 250/2001 and 251/2001 have also had an impact in defining the powers of the judiciary.[16]

Firstly, we must note that the Constitution does retain a role for the judiciary in review of disputes.[17] Moreover, in parliamentary systems the supremacy of parliament, subject to the supremacy of the Constitution, requires that all other branches of government are bound to assume that

legislation enacted by parliament is constitutional and the courts are prohibited from nullifying such legislation. The presumption of constitutionality has expressly been incorporated in Proclamation 251/2001.[18] But the executive does not enjoy the same level of supremacy. Parliament is in principle supreme, the executive's power depending on the continued support it gets in parliament: the constitution explicitly states that "The House of Peoples' Representatives is the highest authority of the Federal Government."[19] Despite this, the vast majority of the laws and policies of the federal government are initiated by the executive. Yet, in theory administrative acts and decisions of public bodies could be questioned for their constitutionality as well as for their conformity with the enactment of parliament by the judiciary. The practice of the CCI suggests this position: in the cases of *Addis Ababa Taxi Drivers Union* v. *Addis Ababa City Administration*[20] and *Biyadiglign Meles et al* v. *Amhara National Regional State*,[21] the CCI ruled that remedies concerning the conformity of regulations with the enabling legislation, as well as violations of rights by the executive, do not amount to reviewing constitutionality of laws. Thus, parties have to seek remedy from the courts.

However, the constitutional position and the practice of the law have been confused with the enactment of Proclamations 250/2001 and 251/2001. According to these new laws, "law" (that is subject to the investigation for its constitutionality by the HoF) shall mean proclamations issued by the federal or state legislative organs, and regulations and directives issued by the federal and states government institutions, and shall also include international agreements that have been ratified by Ethiopia.[22] Thus, by defining "the law" too broadly to include all conceivable acts of the legislature and the executive, the drafters of the new laws that are supposed to define the role of the HoF and the CCI, have themselves apparently come up with an unconstitutional law. By so doing the new laws appear to have wiped out the jurisdiction of the courts, creating widespread confusion among judges. It remains to be seen how this anomaly is to be settled.[23]

### *(ii) Ouster clauses: undermining judicial authority*

Judicial authority has come under further attack through the tendency of the legislature to issue ouster clauses. Since 2009, the government has

increasingly established by law administrative agencies and tribunals with adjudicatory powers that take away the power of the courts. This has happened despite the explicit constitutional clause under Article 78(4), stipulating that "special or *ad hoc* courtswhich take judicial powers away from the regular courts or institutions legally empowered to exercise judicial functions and which does not follow legally prescribed procedures shall not be established".

The net effect of this is either partial or complete withdrawal of jurisdiction from courts.[24] To take a specific example, the Agency for Government Houses has been empowered to give and execute expulsion orders to tenants of government houses and order the police force to this effect, if it thinks there is breach of contract or the tenant is an illegal occupant.[25] Key questions remain unresolved here: what if the tenant thinks that s/he is illegally evicted or has proof of valid lease contract or the Agency abuses its power? The Appeals Commission established by the re-enactment of Urban Land Lease Holding law is empowered to make final decisions on land and buildings to be expropriated for public interest, except on the amount of compensation. It is not uncommon to find a lease contract concluded with two private investors over the same plot of land: in such circumstances, it is now deemed the job of the Commission to decide who is the rightful possessor, which contract is valid, and why the administration concluded two lease contracts over the same plot of land. A party therefore cannot enforce the lease contract in court, and an abuse of power by the administration (why should it conclude two lease contracts over the same plot of land?) that calls for strict scrutiny by the courts is now curbed. This paves the way for arbitrary government that is against the legitimate expectations of the citizen.

A second example relates to Proclamation 97/1998, wherein banks are empowered to foreclose the property of defaulting debtors. The same proclamation requires that the bank should comply with procedures set in the Civil Procedure Code. But what if the bank fails to comply with the procedures and sells the property with a price less than the market value? What if the bank abuses its power? These were the central issues in the case of *Gedera Hotels PLCv. Commercial Bank*[26] before the Cassation Division of the Federal Supreme Court. The Cassation Court decided by a majority vote stating that it has no power to review a debtor's foreclosed property

despite indications of anomalies related to either abuse of power or corrupt practice – even though the law does not expressly prohibit review by courts.

In a number of other cases, the Federal Supreme Court has quashed lower courts' decisions reviewing the legality of such decisions and declaring the tribunal's decision within the several federal agencies as final.[27] In sharp contrast, the Federal First Instance court seems to have adopted a correct interpretation of the concept of separation of powers. In the case of *Getachew Yimenshiwa* v. *The Office of General Auditor*[28] and in the case of *Birtukan Mideksa* v. *Federal Prison Administration*,[29] the court reviewed the decisions of the respective government offices. In the former, it ordered it to renew the licence of the plaintiff as the Auditor General had refused to do so for arbitrary reasons. In the second, the Court ordered the Prison Administration to respect the rights of the prisoner as stipulated in the constitution and other laws. The regrettable impact of the Cassation Division in overturning decisions of the lower courts is clear.

Yet this discussion should not be taken to imply that semi-judicial bodies are unimportant. On the contrary, they can play a vital role alongside the regular judiciary, as they do in the United States, India, Germany and Switzerland, for example.[30] But in these countries the decisions of quasi-judicial bodies are subject to review by the regular judiciary. The problem in Ethiopia is that the Supreme Court has failed to undertake review and thus left the executive with a free hand. Somecommentators have suggested that this lack of faith in the courts allows the government to keep the judiciary weak, making it subservient to government goals.[31]

## The executive and the judiciary

While parliament is considered supreme because the judiciary must obey its laws, acts of the executive and its decisions do not enjoy the same level of supremacy. Although it is widely recognized that the executive has broad authority to enact regulations and directives (often referred as secondary legislation), the general policies and criteria for issuing such regulations must be established in legislation enacted by parliament.[32] The regulations of the executive can only derive their authority from the parent legislation.

Two consequences follow from this. First, there must be an institution that checks whether the acts of the executive are in line with the principal legislation issued by parliament. Secondly, there must be an institution that

checks whether the executive is acting within the framework of the law and that power is exercised lawfully. The executive of course has the discretion to choose if there is more than one way of implementing laws – there is wide consensus about the need for some level of executive discretion: policy issues should be subject to political control.[33] But the principles of good administration dictate that the judiciary must be able to review executive power. The most common grounds for review include the principle of proportionality, *legality/ultra vires*, reasonableness, consistency, fairness, duty to give reasons, and so on.[34] This power is particularly crucial in parliamentary systems characterized by the fusion of power between the legislature and the executive in parliament, and especially in a dominant party system such as in Ethiopia.

In recent regulations the executive has even gone so far as to override judicial decisions. Take, for example, Article 37 of Regulation No. 155/2008, dealing with the procedures to be taken against any civil servant suspected of corruption.[35] The Article states that:

1. Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, the Director General may, without adhering to the formal disciplinary procedures, dismiss any employee from duty whenever he has suspected him of involving in corruption and lost confidence in him.
2. An employee who has been dismissed from duty in accordance with sub article 1 of this Article may not have the right to reinstatement by the decision of any judicial body.

In this regulation the executive has sought to explicitly deny the judicial powers of the courts, despite having no clear authority to issue such a direction.

Equally relevant are recent decisions of the Supreme Court in effect abdicating the role of the courts in reviewing acts and decisions of the executive. For example, in *Yeka Land Development and Administration Office* v. *Asmelash Tafese and others*[36] the respondents sued the appellant in the Federal First Instance Court to issue a title deed for a building in their possession. The Court ruled in favour of the respondents and ordered the appellant to issue the title deed. On appeal, the High Court affirmed the lower court's decision and the case reached the Cassation division. The

latter then ruled that the federal courts did not have jurisdiction to hear the case, as by virtue of the Revised Charter of Addis Ababa, this power in fact belonged to City Courts.[37] But the judgment went further still, to declare that the business of the City Administration lay beyond the jurisdiction of *any* Court. This has removed the City Administration from any form of legal scrutiny or review. It is difficult to understand the logic of this decision, which has had the impact of crippling the City Courts.[38]

## Public pressures on the judiciary

While it must be acknowledged that judicial reforms under way over the past decade have shown significant improvements in terms of access, efficiency, transparency and case flow management,[39] this has yet to be reflected in better public confidence. A recent study on the "Level of Trust and Public Confidence" enjoyed by Ethiopia's national institutions gave the courts a rating of only 65%, with parliament rated at 41%, the police at 68%, and the civil service at 59%. In contrast, the executive achieved an 83% confidence rating. In assessing the trust and confidence people expressed in the court systems within each regional state of the Ethiopian federation, the same study found that the highland regions fared best (Amhara 67%, Addis Ababa 79%, Dire Dawa 63%, Gambella 90%, and Tigray 85%), while courts in Afar only achieved a 37% confidence rating, Harari only 30%, Oromia 61%, Somali 34%, and the South 61%.[40]

Public wariness of the judiciary reflects the position taken by the executive. Although the preamble to the federal constitution talks about "building a political community founded on the rule of law", and the same constitution stipulates details of a judiciary that is declared independent, the EPRDF has continued to treat the courts with suspicion, considering the judiciary to be hostile to reform and associated with the actions of previous regimes.[41] The judicial system in Ethiopia is thus under serious pressure both from the executive and what Cappelletti calls "the consumers of law and justice"[42] – that is, the citizens of the society under which it operates. There is public concern that the judiciary is dragging its feet in rendering decisions at state and federal level. As a result, its role in enforcing contracts and creating an atmosphere of stability and predictability for business and economic development has been questioned. There are also allegations of widespread corruption within the judiciary.[43] Whether these

claims are true or not, public perceptions severely affect the reputation of the judiciary.

The Ethiopian courts are especially notorious for failing to comply with constitutional obligations to respect the rights of the accused. Courts are very reluctant to order the release of those accused under Article 19(4) of the Constitution, even in ordinary offences, when the police or prosecution request two-week remands in order to complete investigations. The constitution stipulates that remand should only be for a time *strictly required* to carry out the necessary investigation, but in practice remands can be repeatedly requested extending over periods of months and even years. Such practice has brought the judiciary into disrepute with the public and led to criticism parliament and in the local media.[44] These comments add to the pressure upon the judiciary, and may be a factor in the high rate of resignations among federal judges.[45]

## The judiciary and human rights provisions

Among African countries, Ethiopia is notable for having signed numerous major international treaties on human rights and for having expressly made such treatiespart of its domestic law.[46] Article 13 of the constitution states that such rights and freedoms shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia. One-third of the constitution (chapter three) also contains a broad range of individual and group rights.

Despite this, Ethiopia's record in enforcing these wide-ranging rights remains poor. The constitution is heavily influenced by the need to address the "nationality question", and thus gives emphasis to the powers of the regional states and lower levels of local governments, such as the zones and *Weredas*.[47] This has created difficulties for the rights of individuals and groups that are found as minorities within the regional states or under different local governments.[48] The judiciary is obviously the most important mechanism for the resolution of these rights issues between the various levels of government; however the role of the courts in the enforcement of human rights has become deeply contested in Ethiopia.

There is widespread confusion among judges at all levels on issues of human rights. Judges at federal and regional level generally think that they

have little or no role in interpreting the provisions of human rights enshrined in the constitution. Yet this is in sharp contrast to what is provided in the constitution. In chapter two of the constitution (a chapter that contains *fundamental principles*), Article 10 states that human and democratic rights of citizens and peoples shall be respected.[49] And Article 13(1) states that: All Federal and state legislative, executive and judicial organs at all levels shall have the responsibility and *duty* to *respect* and *enforce* the provisions of this chapter (chapter three).

Although Article 13 equally imposes obligations on all branches of governments at federal and regional state levels, the interpretation and protection of these rights cannot be effective by majoritarian organs against which the limits are imposed. Consequently, when the political branches fail to comply with their obligation to protect rights and freedoms, a right holder's hope ultimately rests on the role played by the judiciary. Indeed, the judiciary's role in "respecting and enforcing" rights and freedoms cannot be meaningful unless it is involved in interpreting the scope and limitation of those rights. As commentators have observed, it would be naïve to think that one can simply apply the provisions of chapter three without interpreting them.[50]

This implies that the role of the judiciary in enforcing rights provided in the constitution should be clear, but as Table 1 indicates there is widespread confusion on this point among judges at all levels.[51] It is apparent that the judiciary is not active in regarding human rights provisions. It is not surprising, therefore, that human rights violations feature prominently in the criticisms made of the EPRDF led government by the US State Department, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. This echoes John Markakis's long-time worry, indicated in his classic 1974 book *Ethiopia: Anatomy of Traditional Polity*, that human rights in Ethiopia are a luxury which the government does not take seriously and that their inclusion in constitutions has simply been a matter of formalism.[52]

## Conclusion

Since 1991, Ethiopia's judiciary has been organized as a distinct institution, a third branch of government, separate from the executive and legislature. The basic principles of its autonomy and organization have been stipulated in the constitutionand other laws issued by parliament. Despite this, and as

the decisions of the Federal Supreme Court indicate, the judiciary has not yet defined its role within the constitution. Whether the role of the judiciary is simply to settle "chicken and goat theft cases" only, or to engage itself more directly in constitutional matters is yet to be properly resolved.

Table 1. Enforcement of human rights provisions in chapter 3

| Level of court | Number of judges | Role in enforcement of human right provisions of the constitution |
|---|---|---|
| Supreme Court | 51 | More than 50% of the judges think that judges have limited or no role in enforcing and interpreting chapter three of the constitution |
| High Court | 116 | 54 (46%) think that judges have limited or no role in enforcing and interpreting chapter three of the constitution |
| *Wereda* Court | 174 | 84 (48%) think that judges have limited or no role in enforcing and interpreting chapter three of the constitution |

Source: Unpublished report, in possession of author (in Amharic) *Sene* 22, 2001.[53]

The judiciary has not properly interpreted the concept of separation of powers and as a result has abdicated its core function of reviewing acts and decisions of the executive and administrative agencies. Sadly, there is no big distinction in this regard between lower courts and the supreme courts. The latter have not defined their role in developing the jurisprudence of the law and in ensuring uniformity, particularly that of federal laws. Regarding the enforcement of human rights enshrined in the constitution, the position is quite disturbing. Proclamations 250 and 251 may partly be blamed for the confusions that exist in defining the role of the judiciary, but the major pitfall lies within the judiciary itself: judicial review of administrative bodies and their decisions for the most part does not involve constitutional interpretation. It is simply a matter of subjecting the executive to the rule of law.

## Notes

1. Statement by President Museveni of Uganda made in 2004, quoted in Mzikamanda, "The Place of the Independence of the Judiciary."
2. World Bank, "Ethiopia: Legal and Judicial Sector Assessment"; National Judicial Institute of Canada, "Independence, Transparency and Accountability in the Judiciary of Ethiopia"; Dutch Center for International Legal Cooperation, "Ethiopia Comprehensive Justice System Reform Program."
3. Pankhurst and Getachew, *Grass-roots Justice in Ethiopia*.

4. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Proclamation No. 1/1995, *Constitution*, Arts 34 and 78 (hereafter FDRE, *Constitution*).
5. Aberra, *An Introduction*, 219, 227, 240.
6. See Toggia, "The State of Emergency," 116ff. For a detailed account of the arguments behind the dismissal of judges in the Transition period, see Elgesem, *Derg Trials in Context*.
7. FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 50(2). See also FDRE, Proclamation No. 322/2003.
8. FDRE, *Constitution*, Arts 78(2); 80(2) and sub (4), (5) and (6).
9. One law school was established during the imperial era (in 1963). The total number of graduates never exceeded 50 a year. Most preferred to work in Addis Ababa. Since the expansion of the 1990s, there are now 12 public law schools. Since 2010 private law schools have been allowed. There are now some 7000 law graduates annually, and an estimated 6000 judges throughout the country.
10. FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 2.
11. Interviews, Ministry of Federal Affairs, January 2003.
12. FDRE, *Constitution*, Arts 80 and 81, and Art. 50(7). This is also covered in the individual state constitutions of Amhara, the South, Tigray and Oromia.
13. FDRE, *Constitution*, Arts 79(1), 80(1). This is rather vaguely defined in FDRE, Proclamation No. 25/1996, Art. 3. The proclamation allocates subject matter jurisdiction to federal courts on the basis of three grounds: laws, parties and places. The border line between federal and state matter however is far from clear in practice. See Assefa, *Federalism and the Accommodation of Diversity*, 357–68.
14. See FDRE, *Constitution*, Arts 62 and 84.
15. Mgbako et al., "Silencing the Ethiopian Courts," 281.
16. FDRE, Proclamation No. 251/2001, "Consolidation of the House of the Federation"; see also, FDRE, Proclamation No. 250/2001, "Council of Constitutional Inquiry Proclamation"; FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 84.
17. FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 84(2) reads in full: "Where any Federal or State *law* is contested as being unconstitutional and such a dispute is submitted to it by any court or interested party, the Council shall consider the matter and submit it to the House of Federation for a final decision." In this provision, the Amharic version makes it clearer by specifying that "laws," or *Higoch*, refer to an act of the *legislature* (*Be Federalu Mengistim Hone Be Kilil Hig Awchi Akalat Ye Miwotu Higoch*) at federal and state level.
18. FDRE, Proclamation No. 251/2001, Art. 9, states: "Unless otherwise proved to the contrary, the enacted law is presumed to be constitutional…"
19. FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 50(3).
20. Decision of the CCI on *Tirr* 17/1992 EC, January 25, 2000, unpublished.
21. Decision of the CCI on an application made on *Miazia* 30 1989 EC, May 8, 1997, unpublished.
22. FDRE, Proclamation No. 251/2001, "Consolidation of the House of the Federation," Art. 2(2); and FDRE, Proclamation No. 250/2001, "Council of Constitutional Inquiry Proclamation," Art. 2(5).
23. The two proclamations are in the process of revision by the HoPR.
24. FDRE, Proclamation No. 272/2002, Arts 17–19; FDRE, Proclamation No. 455/2005; FDRE, Proclamation No. 555/2007, Arts 6 and 12; FDRE, Proclamation No. 286/2002, permits the Inland Revenue Authority to confiscate the property of defaulting tax payer without going to courts, Arts 77–78. Of the several semi-judicial tribunals, the Tax Appeal Commission, the Administrative Tribunal for Civil Servants, the labour courts, Re-enactment of Urban Lands Lease holding Proclamation (Arts 17 and 18) allow appeal to the regular judiciary only if there is a *basic error of law*. See FDRE, Proclamation No. 42/ 1993; FDRE, Proclamation No. 272/2002.

25. The proclamation does not expressly prohibit review of such measures by the regular courts. It remains to be seen how the practice will evolve.
26. Federal Supreme Court Cassation File No. 33552 *Hamle* 24, 2000 EC.
27. The most outrageous decision is "Mahberawi Watsina Belesiltan vs Ato Birhanu Hiry and Ato Kebede G. Mariam," Federal Supreme Court Cassation Division, File No. 18342, *Tahsas* 17, 1998.
28. Federal First Instance, Arada Bench, File No. 25016, decided in 1997 EC.
29. Federal First Instance, Lideta Bench, File No. 140618, decided in 2001 EC.
30. Kommers, "Autonomy versus Accountability," 135.
31. Mgbako et al., "Silencing the Ethiopian Courts," 281.
32. In constitutional jargon this is called non-delegation doctrine. See for example Kischel, "Delegation of Legislative Power."
33. See Jowell, "The Legal Control of Administrative Discretion," 178–220.
34. In countries with developed systems of administrative law, one of the goals is to keep powers of the government within the legal bounds and thereby prevent abuse of power.
35. See for example FDRE, "Regulation No. 155/2008," Art. 37.
36. "Yeka Land Development and Administration Office v. Asmelash Tafese and others," Federal Supreme Court Civil Cassation File No. 27604, March 2007.
37. FDRE, Proclamation No. 361/2003, Art. 41.
38. See, for example, "Solomon Shiwaye and Birhanu Yalew v. Felege Limat Mesriyabet Cooperative Association and Nefas Silk Lafto Land Development Administration," Civil File No. 05308, March 2009. Other lower federal courts, however, seemed to have qualified the implications of the above case. The author has greatly benefited from discussions and cases collected by former students, currently judges, see Kedir, "The Status, Powers and Functions of Local Government"; Desta, "The Role and Competence."
39. Discussions with Presidents of Federal Courts, August 2009. See also Mandefrot, "A Review of the Ethiopian Justice System," 429–50.
40. Steadman Group and InterAfrica Group, *Ethiopian Opinion Poll Survey*.
41. This has been highlighted in a number of EPRDF documents, but see especially Amare, *Finote Gedil*.
42. Cappelletti, *The Judicial Process*, 58.
43. Dutch Center for International Legal Cooperation, "Ethiopia Comprehensive Justice System Reform Program," 159.
44. In the last decade expressions like "*ande tera dagna*" (a certain ordinary judge abusing his power), or "*leba dagna*" (thief judge), were commonly repeated in press reports and other commentary.
45. During 2003, out of 120 federal judges appointed, 20 had resigned within a year. Anon., "Ke Federal Megemeria Derega"; Anon., "Ye mangewalel higu dagnochim"; Anon., "Meles be wastina mebit lay."
46. Article 9 of the Constitution makes such treaties expressly part of Ethiopian Law.
47. Turton, *Ethnic Federalism*.
48. For example, van der Beken "Ethiopia: Constitutional Protection."
49. FDRE, *Constitution*, Art. 10(2).
50. Yonatan, "Whose Power is it Anyway"; Mgbako et al., "Silencing the Ethiopian Courts," 278.
51. The President of the Regional Supreme Court stated that it is not common to find decisions citing the provisions of the constitution on rights: Interview, Addis Ababa, March 2009.
52. Markakis, *Ethiopia*, 333. See also, Ottaway, "The Ethiopian Transition," and Abbink "The Ethiopian Second Republic."
53. The figures come from an unpublished study carried out by Assefa Fisseha and Solomon Niguse. The study covered Oromia, South, Somali, Benishangul Gumuz and Addis Ababa

regions, with 341 judges participating in all.

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# The press and the political restructuring of Ethiopia

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Divisive debates on what constitutes the Ethiopian nation, how the state should be structured and how power should be devolved, have dominated Ethiopia's private press since the ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), came to power. The press has served as both a mirror reflecting these issues and a space for literate elites to engage in political debates. This article analyses the role of the media, and the press in particular, in Ethiopia's political debates. It also explores how the tenets of "Revolutionary Democracy" have shaped the media. This has polarized Ethiopia's media, which has been unable to effectively serve as a forum for the negotiation of political power or for reconciliation between divided sectors of society.

When the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, they liberalized the press allowing for unprecedented levels of freedom of expression. The end of the Cold War raised the importance of democratic credentials for governments seeking international legitimacy. The EPRDF wished to demonstrate they were different from the Soviet-backed *Derg* military government, and needed to earn the confidence of a nation that had endured decades of guerrilla war, recurrent government clampdowns, and the targeted assassinations of the "Red Terror" (1977–78).

More than 200 newspapers and 87 magazines were started in Ethiopia between 1992 and 1997.[1] Many of these publications were deeply critical of the EPRDF's ambitious political project to consolidate power and fundamentally restructure the Ethiopian state through "ethnic federalism". Responding to this criticism, the EPRDF sought to control the press through arresting journalists and using the state media for propaganda. In the long

term, this contradictory strategy failed to facilitate the development of a media system that could contribute to genuine democratic governance.

This crisis was clearly exposed after the May 2005 elections, which have been termed “the most democratic” in Ethiopia’s history.[2] Both government media and the private press enjoyed extensive freedom during the campaign period and on voting day. But the situation took a dramatic turn after it became clear that the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) had made unexpected gains. Subsequent months saw the outbreak of violence as approximately 200 people were killed, hundreds more were wounded and tens of thousands arrested.[3] Fifteenjournalists were among the more than 100 opposition party leaders and civil society leaders that were arrested and placed on trial. The journalists were primarily charged with crimes of “treason” or as “conspirators” of the opposition who were accused of “attempted genocide”, “armed rebellion” and “outrage against the constitution”. A few journalists were charged with violations of the press law.[4]

After the 2005 violence, the majority of the newspapers that were opposed to the government were closed – either because their editors and journalists had been arrested, fled the country or due to the presses refusing to print their papers. This period has left a legacy that still affects the media today. While many influential journalists remain in Ethiopia, most are cautious and reluctant to be critical. Journalists seeking to revive publications have often been denied permits to do so, leaving the press significantly weaker than what it was prior to the 2005 elections.

This article explores what went wrong in 2005. It asks why the EPRDF has had such an ineffective approach to the media, why it has failed to take the independent press seriously, and why it did not productively engage and foster a dialogue with the media. The EPRDF ostensibly embraced a degree of freedom of expression as part of its political project, but did so within the context of “revolutionary democracy”. This Leninist approach emphasizes the role of a politically astute and dominant party, directing policies from the centre. In this context, freedom of expression is accepted in so much as “the masses are consulted”, but the centre is not necessarily obliged to change policy in response. This echoes what Lenin termed “democratic centralism”, enacted through the slogan “freedom of discussion and criticism, unity of action”.[5]

Understanding the role of the media in Ethiopia under the EPRDF requires a close analysis of how the EPRDF has sought to shape communications, informed by its vision of "revolutionary democracy" as well as building on its experience during the long struggle against the *Derg* government. A normative approach must be avoided: the role of the media in Ethiopia cannot be understood through the lens of media in Western democratic countries, or even countries in "transition" that are moving towards democracy, but must be analysed in its own unique historical and political context.

The article begins by offering a historical perspective on the development of the mass media in Ethiopia, focusing on the impact of the student movement and the experience the *Tigrayan* Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in its management of media. These experiences have informed the approach towards media policy adopted by the EPRDF. Thus, the government media and the EPRDF-aligned private media post-1991 are then examined in the context of media used during the struggle. This offers insight into the practices and meanings of "revolutionary democracy", as well as explaining the approach adopted by the EPRDF the impact of which has been negative.[6] Despite calls for dialogue, reconciliation and "unity", the EPRDF's approach is characterized by a refusal to engage and the isolation of critics. The effects of this approach are most evident in the period immediately after the EPRDF came to power in the early 1990s and the period around the 2005 elections.

## The media of the TPLF

While newspapers in Ethiopia date back to the late 1800s, it was not until the student movement of the 1960s that an independent media really began to develop. It was also out of the student movement that armed groups, such as the TPLF, emerged. During this period, new student publications served as a forum for arguments thatwere critical of Emperor Haile Selassie's government. Initially, there was a relative tolerance of free expression which was both unique and unprecedented.[7] This was partially attributable to the arrival of African scholarship students from across the continent. Many of these students had some experience with critical and vibrant student newspapers in their own countries, and set about encouraging similar publications at Haile Selassie I University (now renamed Addis

Ababa University). In 1959, for example, the Kenyan scholarship student Omogi Calleb started the first outspoken publication, *Campus Star*. The paper challenged the authorities and argued that the Ethiopian student body was too apathetic. At the time, most students were concerned about how to negotiate the thin cultural line between "criticism" and "insult", which were often regarded as the same among the Ethiopian intelligentsia who saw the criticism of someone's ideas as an attack on the individual.[8]

Addressing the cultural sensitivities around criticism of authority was a major challenge in the development of private publications that would cover current affairs. While *Campus Star* did not last long and was closed by the authorities, the Ethiopian-run official student paper, the *Newsletter*, accepted critical writing in its section on "news and views". But this had limits: the *Newsletter* deferred to the authorities in the belief that a free and unregulated press would lead to chaos.[9]

It was not until the well-known *Struggle* magazine appeared, first published by the Union of the University Students in Addis Ababa (USUAA) in the late 1960s, that students began supporting "free" publications with real political debate. Arguing that it should be "responsible for the political education of the masses",[10] and encouraging dissent against Haile Selassie's government, *Struggle* carried key articles that spurred the student movement. An often-cited article in 1969, by Walleligne Makonnen, questioned the role of ethnicities in a greater Ethiopia arguing "in short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask".[11]

The student movement soon developed as the core element of national dissent, adopting a strong Marxist-Leninist ideology. Debates centered on land rights and the "nationalities question", including the notorious dogma of "self-determination up to secession". Reflecting the Leninist rhetoric typical of the period, the students referred to Ethiopia as a "prison house of nationalities", arguing that revolution was needed to transform the imperialist and feudal state.[12] Within the student movement a substantial group believed that class interests had to form the basis of the struggle against the imperial regime, while other groups, including the TPLF, placed ethnic struggle at the centre of their agenda.[13] These debates have continued to dominate the private press under the EPRDF.

A number of publications circulated at this time, most being aligned with particular ethnic or political groups.[14] In Addis Ababa, for example,

the Tigrayan University Students Association (TUSA) established two newspapers, *Etek* (To arms!) and *Dimtsi Bihere Tigray* (Voice of the Tigrayan Nation).[15] In addition, TUSA joined with other Tigrayan organizations in leading a clandestine political awareness campaign that included disseminating their ideas through leaflets, songs and discussions both within Addis Ababa and Tigray.

With the February Revolution of 1974, Mengistu Haile-Mariam's *Derg* regime initially allowed newspapers such as *Democracia, Labader* and *Goh*, to continue publishing, but then clamped down. Those publications that survived were forced underground.

While students were sent to the United States and Europe for further training under the Emperor, the *Derg* shifted focus to the USSR. Soviet media trainers now came to Ethiopia. Some of the journalists active in the student movement were absorbed into the new *Derg* government and participated in the state media. As a journalist who wrote for *Addis Zemen* under the *Derg*, and later for private newspapers under the ERPDF, noted:

> We were all enthusiastic that a new event was unfolding. I was editing the largest national newspaper … At the revolution the social outlook was transformed. The question was could one fit into the revolution; if they couldn't, they left. Marxist journalism was socialist-oriented journalism … Class analysis was the major issue so we had to look at everything from a class perspective.[16]

Among those that "left" were many of the Tigrayan students that joined the TPLF to fight against the *Derg*. These students built upon their university experience to develop a strong communications apparatus for the TPLF. Communications was central to the work of no less than four departments: the Department of Propaganda was responsible for the printed media and radio; the Department of Culture sought to mobilize the population through songs, poetry and plays; the Department of Mass (Civic) Organization would organize public meetings at the village level; and the Socio-Economic Committee was concerned with issues of agriculture, health and education, among others. In addition, other departments, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, also had a strong media and communications agenda.

Newspapers and magazines were the first mass media used to publicize the war. During the struggle a variety of TPLF pamphlets and newspapers were published, including *Ittek* (Get Armed), *Niqah* (Be Conscious), *Tegadel* (Struggle) and *Woyyeen* (Revolt). These played an active role in

conveying the struggle's ideology as defined by the political arm. The publications were produced by the Propaganda Department, initially headed by Abay Tsehaye, with Meles Zenawi as his deputy. But publications were not limited to the parties. Schools or hospitals would also sometimes have their own publications.[17] Similarly, magazines, such as *STORM*, were published in the diaspora, to keep Tigrayans and the diplomatic community informed with developments on the ground. These magazines presented a counterpoint to much of the international media reporting on Ethiopia.

While such publications were important for the leadership of the TPLF in communicating internationally, oral communication including slogans, poetry and songs were essential for communicating with the largely illiterate Ethiopian peasantry. As the TPLF strengthened, musicians and artists were actively recruited by the TPLF's Department of Culture. Troupes would visit villages in the evening, calling on villagers to collectively rise up and mobilize through revolutionary songs and plays. These evening events were regarded an effective tool for involving youth, women and children in the struggle. Related to this approach were efforts to engage with churches and local leaders. Fighters, for example, visited churches and markets to address crowds. The TPLF also established schools, training teachers to give academic and political tuition.[18]

Radio was one of the most important tools for the TPLF's campaign. Broadcasts initially began in 1979, using the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Fronts' (EPLF) radio three times a week for half an hour.[19] The TPLF started its own station, "The Voiceof the Rebellion", in 1985, with financial support from Tigrayans in the diaspora.[20] From its base in Tigray, the station had a reach across much of the country, eventually gaining clear reception in Addis and parts of Southern Sudan. Originally broadcast in Tigrinya and Amharic, Oromiffa was later added in an effort to reach those outside the liberated areas.

Running a radio in the bush was extremely difficult and dangerous. Like much of the infrastructure for the TPLF, the radio station and printing presses were protected within caves and were frequently moved to avoid detection. Fighters found innovative ways of deceiving the *Derg* and continuing the broadcasts. Amare Aregawi described this challenge:

> You wouldn't say [the radio station was] portable, but we made it portable ourselves. Whether it was by donkeys or camels it had to be portable. For example we had two transmitters and (I don't think that the Cubans or the Russians even understood it) when there was a big campaign

> coming, [the *Derg*] would gather some information through personal spies or maybe technology – where the radio waves are coming from, so they would target that area to destroy the radio station … We would turn off one of the transmitters and we would move it to a very safe place somewhere else, where we would plan to go when the enemy comes …. So when that one stops, the other one starts in a different location. When the enemy comes, they think that they are hitting the radio station, but after the operation they realize that the radio still works. They think they were wrong, but they were not wrong, it was there.
>
> Sometimes we had a problem with the antenna. So for example in the Simian mountain station area, there are some very long straight hollow plants, so we had to put the antenna inside those plants. So out of 1000 plants, it is very difficult for the enemy to know in which plant the antenna is.[21]

The broadcast content was primarily propaganda, focusing on the destruction and brutality of the *Derg* and the persecution of Tigrayans, including the restrictions on local languages. Information on the party conferences was broadcast over the radio.

The strategy for convincing the population to join the struggle emphasized economic development more than political ideology. Programming focused on disseminating best practices; experts in agriculture, education, or medicine would explain how villages could improve their standards in these areas. Engaging the active participation of ordinary people in the struggle was central to mobilization. This was a complement to the primary approach of reaching out to villagers through what the TPLF termed “empiricism”. As Fetlework Gebre-Egziaber, a female fighter who was active in mobilization during the struggle described it, empiricism was the “idea to practice first rather than just disseminating ideology.” She noted “We were not using theories to explain to people. We had to act first to show them.”[22]

A major part of the strategy of empiricism was the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), established in 1978 in response to the *Derg*’s restrictions on humanitarian and economic assistance to the areas controlled by the rebels.[23] But REST, alongside the peasant associations that were established by the TPLF, was also clearly rooted in the TPLF’s desire to have greater control over the population. Drawing on examples from China and Vietnam, the TPLF placed the role “mass associations” at the core of its revolutionary project. Critics, however, have argued that these associations were also a mechanism allowing the TPLF to restrict criticism and coerce people to join the struggle.[24]

## The government media under the EPRDF

During the past 20 years of "revolutionary democracy" the government media in Ethiopia has attempted to reform but continues to reflect the experience with communication during the struggle. The quality of the state newspapers, television and radio has remained poor, and is dominated by political objectives. This has had a significant impact on the media system as a whole, because the EPRDF is seen as ineffectively communicating its policies and not engaging in political debate. At the same time, the government has continued to prioritize communication with "the masses". The result has been a polarization of the media system. In recent years, following the electoral setbacks in 2005, the EPRDF party leaders have acknowledged this weakness.

The EPRDF has kept the state media firmly under party control, rather than allowing a state-owned but independent media to emerge. Despite the 1999 Broadcasting Proclamation, which allows for commercial stations, the EPRDF has been extremely cautious in granting licenses for private radio stations. In 2006, the first two were issued to companies led by journalists seen as sympathetic or aligned to the party. The government has granted licenses to community radio stations, but these are closely watched and have not been particularly effective.

The primary medium for government communication is Radio Ethiopia, the national state broadcaster. Local stations, such as Amhara FM or Dire Dawa FM, controlled by their respective regional governments, are also important. But the TPLF has also continued operating the "Voice of the Rebellion" bush station after the EPRDF came to power, with the Amharic service becoming "Radio Fana", based in Addis Ababa and having national reach, while the Tigrinya language service became "Radio Voice of Tigray", based in Mekele. International broadcasters such as Voice of America (VOA) from the United States and Germany's Deutsche Welle remain major competitors, despite attempts to curtail reception. Recently, in March 2010, the Ethiopian government jammed the VOA Amharic service, citing poor journalist ethics and incitement of hatred.[25]

In contrast with the radio oriented towards the masses, the government newspapers are primarily aimed at party cadres and government bureaucrats. There is a palpable sense of failure and discontent about the state news outlets, including the two major newspapers, *The Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Zemen* (the government publishes two others in Arabic

and Oromiffa). Both have among the lowest circulation in the industry and they are difficult to obtain outside of government offices. The government newspapers fall under the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), an organization that is typically run by a cadre and political appointee. Technically, the head of the EPA is accountable to the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Culture, although the extent to which this happens is debatable and a source of political tension for those who would like to have more independence. The head of the EPA is directly responsible for all editorial content, journalists taking cues from his office.

Despite being government-run, journalists at state media outlets complain of difficulty in getting access to those in government. It can take months for an interview to be granted. The content of the government media has generally focused on development projects, such as road construction or agriculture, or information about other government programmes. This gives the state media their notoriously dull character. There is also a strong culture of “brown envelopes”, with journaliststaking payments from NGOs or other organizations in the expectation that favourable coverage of an event will be published.[26]

The press and the radio stations, including private outlets, rely heavily on the government-run Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) and the TPLF-affiliated Walta News Agency (WNA) for any news from outside of Addis Ababa. This has a significant impact in politicising news and information that is available about Ethiopia. The ENA is the larger of the two and has been criticized both internally and externally for politicizing information and selectively covering events from the regions. Part of this criticism has stemmed from the structure of the organization. There are more than 38 bureaus around the country, but the news from rural areas is heavily filtered in the interest of “maintaining stability”. Additionally, some employees have suggested that the ENA gives preferential treatment on the basis of ethnicity when allocating reporters to the regions, as well as access to domestic and international training and promotions.

Aware of many of these problems, the government has experimented in supporting the development of private but government-aligned media outlets. For example, when independent papers such as *T’obbiya* and *Ruh* dominated the newspaper market in Addis Ababa in the early 1990s, the EPRDF attempted to capture readers through launching similar magazines that represented government interests, such as *Maleda* and *Eftoya*.[27] They

also experimented with publications in local languages, including Tigrayan and Oromo, but these were not successful. In some cases, the early EPRDF magazines adopted the same sensational style of the private ones. For example, in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, *Iftin* was started by Zerihun Teshome, the husband of journalist Mimi Tsebatu. Tsebatu was also one of the first recipients of a license for her company, Zami communications, to operate a private radio. *Iftin* was a direct response to the press in the election period and attempted to support the government's position on the constitution.

Only during the period surrounding the 2005 elections has the state-run media allowed space for more critical views by giving the opposition parties unprecedented access.[28] Seemingly confident of a comfortable EPRDF victory, journalists at the state media were given significant leeway in setting the coverage and tone of the election campaigns. A "free" media, and equitable access to the state media, are significant factors for election monitoring assessments, and the Ethiopian government appeared to assume that a more liberal approach would re-affirm the transparency and fairness of the elections. One journalist from *The Ethiopian Herald*, called this time "exceptional": his paper was

> So neutral … it was relatively liberal in the entertainment of views of other individuals. During the election, [there were] campaigns and debates [and] we would pick up the live transmissions, translate and print them in the *Herald*.[29]

The strength of the opposition that emerged over the election period, in the form of the CUD, quickly put an end to this openness, with government returning to a policy of using media to discredit its opponents and reassert its leadership. Immediately after the elections the media "returned to editorial": self-censorship was re-established, and the press again closely followed the cues from the head of the Ethiopian Press Agency. Government insecurity was reflected in the tone of its propaganda. Abandoning any semblance of objectivity, news reports regularlyused strong adjectives and hard criticism of the opposition, a move that quickly became counter-productive as people reacted against it.[30] While many private newspapers referred to the EPRDF as a minority-led regime and expressed grievances with its ethnic emphasis, the government sought to manipulate the ethnicity issue by suggesting that an alternative to the government-imposed state of emergency would be violence between the

different nationalities.[31] In this context, during the party debates before the election, the private paper *Lisane Hizb* noted that the "EPRDF's labeling of CUD as the Interahamwe of Rwanda is irresponsible".[32]

In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, the EPRDF has sought to use new technologies in the state-owned media as a means to strengthen centralized control, making ambitious efforts to block critical websites and blogs, and demonstrating a continued resistance to liberalizing the telecommunications sector by monitoring email, text messaging and other electronic communications. The text messaging service, for example, was interrupted for more than a year, and in May 2006 the Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation also started blocking oppositional blogs – claiming the inability to access sites such as Blogspot was "due to a technical fault".[33] These efforts are significant for a country that has such limited, and slow, internet connectivity.

But the EPRDF has also embarked on ambitious efforts to shape the internet in ways that are beneficial for the state, if less so for the free flow of information. Woredanet has been a unique project to connect the centre of the state apparatus to the regional and district governments through 42-inch plasma TV screens that offer video-conferencing.[34] Through a satellite connection that links the central government with the 11 regional and 550 district administrations, ministers and high-level civil servants are able to instruct officials in the regions on policies. One of the primary objectives of Woredanet has been the practical implementation of ethnic federalism, in essence an effort to control the so-called decentralization process. Woredanet was designed to address some of the paradoxes of ethnic federalism: it aimed to make the local administrations more effective at providing services by offering training through the use of technology and information about policies and projects; at the same time, the fact that this information is provided by political figures also helps asserting the presence of the central power in the peripheries of the state. In the mind of some of the political cadres that envisioned it, face to face interaction and a constant communication with the leadership were also meant to recreate the communication practices experienced through the village councils or party meetings during the TPLF's struggle.[35]

Closely connected to this experience are the recent attempts on the part of the EPRDF to mobilize the peasantry with more traditional communication approaches, such as associations. According to Bereket

Simon,[36] one prong of this post-election approach has been a push to enrol farmers in the party. Before the 2005 elections, only 760,000 Ethiopians were members. By the 2008 local elections there were more than four million.[37] As he explained, the EPRDF identified

> farmers who were ready to accept new ideas … We wanted to focus on those ready to accept new ideas and new techniques. They are the advanced elements of the rural community. They are the ones with the propensity to listen and apply what they have learnt. They become the messengers of our ideas. We decided not to communicate with everybody but only with the advanced part of rural society.

This, along with strategies such as Woredanet, echoes the days of the struggle, and Leninist policy, when the TPLF strongly believed that the face-to-face meetings were important in creating a form of consensus even if the process was not entirely two-way or democratic.

## The EPRDF and the private media

Under the EPRDF, the private press has been very active, if not vibrant at times.[38] This vibrancy, however, appears to contradict the fact that the media have faced significant challenges, including government interference. Despite the initial phase of freedom in the early 1990s, a gradual restriction of media space has occurred. Dozens of journalists have been imprisoned over the years.[39] At the peak of the private press, prior to the 2005 elections, there were 82 newspapers – among them *Ethiop*, the circulation of which reached 97,500[40] at a time when other popular bi-weekly newspapers were lucky to reach 40,000.

Thus, in contrast to the monopolies retain over the broadcast and television sectors, the EPRDF liberalized the press.[41] Since 1991, hundreds of papers have come and gone in Addis Ababa. This approach towards press freedoms was a response to both domestic and international pressures, but the EPRDF was also aware that space for dissent could help to legitimize the government. In 1992, Dimma Noggo, the first Minister of Information for the Transitional Government noted, “A country’s democratic tradition, and a government’s democratic credentials, are today being measured by how much the press and the media in general are free.”[42] In answer to critics who argue that the EPRDF really did not believe in the principle of an open media, Bereket Simon, the former Minister of Information, argued

> We wanted the people to feel free, to believe in themselves. To see that governments can be criticized if it's well founded, to show that governments are accountable to the public and that they are bound to be criticized if they make mistakes. We wanted to show we were a tolerant government.[43]

According to Bereket, to clamp down on freedom of expression in the early stages, would be "a risky choice. If we restricted it, people wouldn't feel free".[44]

When they came to power the EPRDF disbanded much of the *Derg* media, replacing journalists at the Ministry of Information and government news agencies. This raised fears that the EPRDF was pursuing ethnic politics. As one individual who worked in the *Derg* government argued:

> When the TPLF first came they didn't know who was who. They locked us all up. A new order was unfolding. It was not a new government but a new order, a new era. Everything of the other regime was gotten rid of… Sensitive places were taken over … [they] didn't want any interference or to coexist with anyone. That was the aspiration of communism and Lenin's [theory of] political cleansing – getting rid of the Tsarists. The EPRDF wanted to get rid of these people so they couldn't have any feelings of the past, unless they were indispensable people.[45]

Journalists who lost their jobs or were sent to early retirement established many of the independent newspapers.

The impact of this was plainly seen in the case of *T'obbiya*, published by the Atbia Kokeb Publishing and Advertising Company (AKPAC) and one of the most influential newspapers of the 1990s. The founders, some of whom are now in exile in the US and Europe, were mostly seasoned journalists from the *Derg* era who held key posts such as head of the censorship office, editor-in-chief of Addis Zemen and editor of the *Derg* party magazine.[46] As one of the founding journalists noted, "the first motive to establish the paper was because most journalists- more than 50- were laid off… They had to eat and work …".[47] Due to their experience, and their access to significant start-up capital, *T'obbiya* quickly became the most professionally produced of Ethiopia's newspapers. At the time it was seen as the trendsetter in the independent media.

*T'obbiya* adopted a clear editorial line that was "against ethnic politics and against the separation of Eritrea".[48] Early editorials and articles stressed the disintegration and the loss of unity they argued the EPRDF was imposing on the country. The following examples of editorials illustrate the arguments that were common in the early months of publication:

> We understand that we are living in a time when some are deliberately and full-heartedly involved in distorting the country's history; and of course, destroying it … They say Ethiopia has colonised Eritrea and some other nationalities … this is treason, history will pass judgment on the doers of such acts.[49]

This editorial stressed the point that the EPRDF was breaking with the historical identity or roots of Ethiopia for their own gain and power. Ethnic federalism was regarded as destroying the unity that previous governments worked hard to foster, and it is doing so for what some perceived to be the benefit of a minority, the Tigrayans.

The early issues of *T'obbiya* often accused the Ethiopian government of allowing Eritreans to intervene in, if not overtly control, local affairs.[50] The secession of Eritrea and the loss of the port of Assab figure central in this discomfort:

> The attempt by the fascist Italians to divide the people and the country was not successful, but now it is getting rooted thanks to the current regime. The people of the country are being divided along ethnic lines… The 1991 Charter follows and adheres to the secessionist ideology of a few Eritreans. It seems that the Charter was prepared to facilitate the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia … The attempt to view unity as a marriage is very simplistic and incorrect. The people of Ethiopia are connected by history, nature, culture and psychological make-up … We also think that no group should be allowed to disintegrate the country.[51]

*T'obbiya*'s editorials made many references to the loss of "unity". "Unity" has been a powerful term throughout Ethiopian history and has been used in different ways by successive regimes in an effort to consolidate power. For example, many of the *Derg* newspapers until the EPRDF's seizure of power in Addis had headlines declaring the TPLF to be "anti-unity elements" that were "engaged in destructive activities in the name of democracy".[52] And the permanent masthead of the pre-1991 *Addis Zemen* and the *Ethiopian Herald*, read "in unity lies our strength". The slogan was, and continues to be, laden with meaning. As one editorial in the early 1990s noted:

> In the new Ethiopia, the unique and terrifying term is "unity". The charter is not in favor of unity. It also seems that the constitution fears the same term. It rather pronounces and emphasizes the phrase "self-determination up to secession" … The regime supports the division and disintegration of the country and we think this is the first national government to do such a thing in the world.[53]

Not surprisingly, a common and prominent theme in these independent newspapers was that of the rights and role of the "free press". Editorials

often focused on the EPRDF government's persecution of journalists, the politics of the journalists' associations, or the role of civil society more generally. These discussions reflected the criticism that the journalists' associations and newspapers were often aligned with specific political groups. Despite that the "free press" was not in itself a cohesive group, by failing to engage with the calls for dialogue the EPRDF indirectly fostered a stronger opposition press.

Over time, a new group of private newspapers (including both Amharic and English language newspapers) emerged that attempted to occupy the space between the government and opposition media. This approach has been significantly more difficult for the Amharic papers, as the government is more sensitive to their possible impact than that of English papers. Titles in this category include *Capital, Reporter, Fortune* and *Addis Admas*, all characterized as supporting the federalist project of the EPRDF and accepting that it came to power undemocratically, but often critical of government policies and management. *Addis Admas,* however, remains focused on culture and literature while engaging in politics through polemics, poetry or parables.

If *T'obbiya* in the 1990s could be seen as a trendsetter among the "opposition" or "free press", the leading and most influential "middle-ground" newspaper has been *The Reporter*, which was started several years after the first wave of the independent press emerged. As with most newspapers in Ethiopia, the past experience and network of the owner-editor of the publication is central to the paper's role and position. *The Reporter*'s founder and managing editor is Amare Aregawi, a former TPLF fighter who was involved in communications during the war, was later appointed head of Ethiopian Television, and subsequently became head of the Ethiopian News Service under the EPRDF. The fact that he left government service to pursue journalism in the private sector did not immediately compete with the EPRDF's goals. When the EPRDF outlined its revolutionary democratic principles in the early 1990s, it recognized that the state media were poorly staffed and organized and that "we should, hence, mobilize the financial and material resources of our revolutionary democratic forces not only to modernize our existing media but also to set up new ones and control the market".[54]

Amare's high-level contacts among those in the ruling party quickly made *The Reporter* a prominent paper. While the public may have at first

been unsure of what to expect from a former TPLF fighter, *The Reporter* soon won a strong following for its relatively balanced and objective coverage. From Amare's perspective:

> There were other newspapers [but] *The Reporter* was … different from its inception. We set a different norm in media. There were some private papers but there was a highly polarised situation between the government media and the private media. The government media was saying everything in this country is good, there is nothing bad. And some of the private papers said everything in this country is bad … There was nothing for the public to call a spade a spade. So one of the reasons for the creation of *The Reporter* was: can't we have a balanced free and fair media in Ethiopia? Exactly when we started we were attacked from both sides.[55]

Initially, *The Reporter* focused on criticizing government policy and was regularly charged with libel and contempt of court for its reporting. Staff avoided some potential penalties because of Amare's connections with the EPRDF, but the newspaper has come under continued pressure for its reports on corruption; Amare has been arrested and was once severely beaten up outside his son's school.[56]

The 2005 election period was extraordinarily difficult for the independent press. The success of the opposition took all sectors of the press by surprise and they were unsure of how to report it. By this time, a splinter group of prominent journalists had left *T'obbiya* to form *Lisane Hizb*. As one journalist argued "*Lisane Hizb* was the strong part; it had the editor, publisher, columnists. The other part [*T'obbiya*] became infiltrated by the EPRDF".[57] In the run-up to the election, *Lisane Hizb* continued expressing frustration with the "failed process of reconciliation" and the deep frustration with the EPRDF as a "minority party" arguing

> We cannot be sure of our future because of the past fourteen years of ethnic politics, unity is now very loose. Elites of one particular ethnic group have a monopoly over the wealth and power of the nation and have created a long-standing problem. Today, even a national reconciliation may not solve the problem …[58]

*Lisane Hizb* was not shut down by the government, as *Ethiop* or *Menelik* were, but its printers became fearful of government retaliation. Prominent journalists, such as Goshu Moges were later arrested (although this may have stemmed from a personal confrontation.)[59]

The *Reporter* and English-language papers such as *Fortune* also continued to be printed, taking a more conciliatory line. These publications were critical of the government's handling of the post-election period, but

lent support to the EPRDF. Where other publications condemned the elections as fraudulent, *The Reporter* urged the opposition to join parliament. As the title of editorial stressed: "Opposition should accept election results for the sake of democracy, unity and the people",[60] *The Reporter* also increased its criticism of the opposition and the diaspora, a major source of support for the CUD. Some in the media argued that *The Reporter* was now strongly aligned with the EPRDF since it saw the government as legitimate despite such "fundamental flaws".[61]

More than five years after the 2005 election, the role of private press has diminished. Those in the middle ground, including *The Reporter, Fortune* and *Addis Admas*, continue to publish, while more critical and independent publications have withered or been closed. During the 2010 elections, the EPRDF was determined not to allow a repeat of the 2005 elections, passing new and highly restrictive counterterrorism and civil society laws that effectively restricted those who might wish to challenge the government.

## Conclusion: A "Revolutionary democratic" approach to the media?

In 2011, the media in Ethiopia remains weakened and is largely ineffective in stimulating public debate on key political issues. The press is reflective of a polarized and divided society and is indicative of a failure to reconcile differing perspectiveson the present and future of the Ethiopian state. While the EPRDF has committed itself to "poverty reduction" and "economic development", it has done little to facilitate dialogue or advance broad-based democratic development.

When the EPRDF came under increasing pressure from critics and opposition members after the 2005 elections it responded forcefully by shutting down avenues for dissent; these well-publicized and overt actions have been motivated by fear and the overriding concern has been to maintain power.[62] But the more subtle characteristics of the EPRDF's approach to the media and communications sector have been ideologically driven with precursors that are identifiable during the struggle. Overall, the concept of "revolutionary democracy" has been ambiguous; confusion over its meaning and intentions has often been an area of debate within the press itself, as was seen before the 2005 elections when critics accused the EPRDF of failing to explain it to the people and even party members have

seemed unsure of what the approach to state and nation building meant. Simply put, in the words of one newspaper editorial: “Since it captured state power, it [the EPRDF] has been ruling the country … with an undefined and inconsistent revolutionary democracy.”[63]

In theory, the EPRDF’s vision of “revolutionary democracy” allows scope for criticism and an independent mass media, but in practice it operates within the framework of one-party rule. Elite opposition voices and parties are tolerated as long as they are not a serious distraction. Ethiopia’s Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi likes to draw parallels with the coalition governments and the role of the media seen in Scandinavian countries and Japan. He notes that ruling coalitions have had regular and open elections while remaining in power for extended periods in such countries – in the case of Japan, for fifty years.[64] In such a democracy, freedom of expression, and the vibrant debate that emerges in an unfettered mass media, does have a role. The development project, Meles argues, would be achieved faster and have greater resonance if it emerges from free debate and dialogue.[65]

In this context, press freedoms serve part of a utilitarian policy rather than a firm belief; they are a privilege for those involved in the press and a tool to be exploited when beneficial for consolidating power and making better policies. Debate, it can be argued, could then make governance more effective;[66] but the EPRDF expects to confine such discussion to issues of development, rather than focus on the constitution, issues of succession, federalism, and land reform.

“Revolutionary democracy” also differs from liberal democracy by the protections (or rather privileging) it offers of group rights in addition to individual rights. It gives preference to the “right to basic needs” such as food and shelter over freedom of expression. It also prioritizes the so-called “rights of the masses” over the “ruling classes” or elites. In this context, propaganda is targeted at the peasantry. Thus it is not surprising that since 1991, the government has largely maintained a monopoly over the radio and television while the press has been the only space for the private media to develop. The EPRDF was relatively tolerant of the private press because debate was limited to the literate urban elites (mostly in Addis Ababa) who have been regarded as less consequential to the overall state building project.

In practice, the impact of the ideology of "revolutionary democracy" on media policy has been muddled. The EPRDF appeared to be surprised by the extent and depth of the opposition that emerged in the early 1990s. Bereket noted they were "surprised that it wasn't people that were against the previous regime but it was *Derg* leaders, etc … that found their way to control the private press".[67] In many respectsthe polarization could be seen as one ministry of information against another; with both groups having members and arguments reflecting policy disputes over class struggle, or ethnic struggle that characterized the student movement. The EPRDF also appeared to believe that these arguments would simply dissipate. This attitude was explained by Ahmed Hassan MP, chair of the Information and Cultural Affairs Standing Committee:

> We hoped that a democratic process would have come through the civil society and we were hoping also through the media. But the media did not participate. They were just adversarial. And so our approach was to just ignore them. At the time of the transitional government they were attacking Meles personally but he decided just to ignore them. […] Unfortunately there is no middle ground in Ethiopia. The culture of dialogue is not there.[68]

The missed opportunity to use the media to encourage reconciliation is perhaps one of the EPRDF's most significant failures. Even those currently active in the EPRDF note that there should have been reconciliation – as one journalist working for the state media reasoned:

> The problem is that the government came to power through violence. There needed to be reconciliation and free elections that included every group, even Mengistu's regime. Your defeater cannot be your judge. [It must also be understood that] circumstances can compel you to be involved. Not everyone should go to jail. [I] wish we had reconciliation.[69]

The polarized press, and the previously recurrent debates it hosted over the constitution, land tenure, and the rights and emphasis given to "nationalities" have reflected how problematic it has been to build a nation through the current political discourse and agenda. The emphasis on the developmental state, and the use of the media for such ends, has ignored the latter's potentially powerful role as a space for elite negotiation and reconciliation. Other post-war states offer examples of governments that have effectively engaged in the media space, often co-opting opposition, but still nevertheless engaging to put forward and explain policies. Sometimes this has been done through popular government media, as in Uganda. At a minimum, it requires frequent press conferences and executive engagement

with the media, both of which PM Meles Zenawi eschewed. Until very recently the private press was rarely, if ever, invited to press conferences. This lack of dialogue has been significant in Ethiopia. There does appear to be some realization among the EPRDF that this policy has been counter-productive, though there is as yet little sign that they know how to tackle the problem.[70]

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## Notes

1. Shimelis, *Survey of the Private Press*, 185.
2. For an analysis of the 2005 elections, see Abbink, "Discomfiture or Democracy?"
3. "Ethiopia 'in Danger' after Deaths," *BBC News*, June 9, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4074822.stm; "Ethiopian Protesters 'Massacred'," *BBC News*, October 19, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6064638.stm.
4. Crawford, "Ethiopia: Politics, Poison and the Press."
5. Lenin, "Report on the Unity Congress."
6. The opposition media does not generally tackle ideological struggles, and so has been excluded from this study. Online media have become increasingly significant, but they too lie beyond the scope of this study. Some of the most important blogs include: nazret.com, ethiopianreview.com and ethiomedia.com. All are all primarily run from the Diaspora. Blogspot has been blocked in Ethiopia since the 2005 post-election period. Prior to the 2005 blockage, newspapers such as *Menelik* would regularly carry commentaries and articles copied from the blogs. Also excluded are religious media and media from insurgencies (such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front, see http://www.onlf.org/news.php, and the Oromo Liberation Front, see http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/
7. The first student magazine was published in 1952, but was soon discontinued through lack of interest: Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students*, 71.
8. Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students*, 74.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 178.
11. As quoted in Merera, "Contradictory Interpretations," 123.
12. Aregawi, "The Origins of the TPLF," 580.
13. Aside from the TPLF, other prominent groups emerging during Mengistu's time included the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF).
14. Markakis and Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, 103–16, discuss the publications that contributed to the 1974 revolution. Leaflets were popular in Addis Ababa, often targeting soldiers.
15. Aregawi, "The Origins of the TPLF," 577.
16. Interview, former journalist at Addis Zemen during the *Derg*.
17. Interview, Aberra Tensai, Mekele, 2008.

18. For example, see the EPRDF's use of Schoolnet, a programme teaching secondary school students primarily through the use of plasma television screens.
19. Interview, Aberra Tensai, Mekele, 2008.
20. In early 1990s the TPLF radio split into Radio Fana, the Amharic service which began broadcasting from Addis as the EPRDF party radio, and Radio Woyane which remains based in Mekele and is the TPLF's radio broadcasting in Tigrinya.
21. Interview, Amare Aregawi, Addis Ababa, 2005.
22. Interview, Fetlework Gebre-Esgabier, Axum, 2008.
23. "Empiricism" was later criticized by Meles, when he argued that the failure to rely on "scientific theory" to guide all policies led to the TPLF losing its way in the 1980s: Aregawi, *Political History of the TPLF*, 220.
24. Ibid., 282.
25. "US Criticizes Ethiopia for Jamming VOA Signals," Voice of America, March 20, 2010, http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Ethiopia-Criticized-by-US-for-Jamming-VOA-Signals-88733542.html
26. Berhanu and Skjerdal, "Freebies and Brown Envelopes."
27. Bureau, "Naissance d'une nouvelle presse éthiopienne."
28. Simon, "Workshop on Press Freedom."
29. Interview, government journalist, 2005.
30. Editorial, August 13, 2003, *Lisane Hizb*, p. 2, noting that "the programmes are actually reinforcing people's hatred towards this media." A lengthy editorial in *Lisane Hizb* on July 15, 2005, p. 2, was dedicated precisely to this issue.
31. Turton, *Ethnic Federalism*.
32. Editorial, *Lisane Hizb*, 14 April 2005, 2.
33. Opennet Initiative, "Ethiopia," electronic version.
34. Woredanet has a counterpart in Schoolnet.
35. Gagliardone, "The Socialization of ICTs in Ethiopia."
36. Until 2005 Bereket Simon was the Minister of Information. He is a close confident of the Prime Minister. He is now head of the EPRDF Political Department and continues to wield tremendous influence over the government media structure. He remains Chairman of the Board of the Ethiopian Press Agency.
37. Aalen and Tronvoll, "The End of Democracy?"
38. Bureau, "Naissance d'une nouvelle presse éthiopienne."
39. Committee to Protect Journalists: http://www.cpj.org/africa/ethiopia/; Reporters Without Borders: http://en.rsf.org/ethiopia.html.
40. Source: Ministry of Information.
41. In 2006 the EPRDF did grant two FM radio permits, both to private companies friendly to the government – including Zami Multi Media, led by Mimi Sebatu, formerly of the VOA.
42. Dima Noggo, 'Keynote Speech'.
43. Interview, Bereket Simon, Addis Ababa, 2005.
44. Ibid.
45. Interview, journalist that worked for a newspaper critical of EPRDF, 2006.
46. The Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE).
47. Interview with a journalist from *T'obbiya*, Addis Ababa, 2006.
48. Ibid.
49. "Against History," *T'obbiya*, September 29, 1993, 2.
50. Editorial, *T'obbiya*, January 13, 1994, as quoted on January 20, 1994 in *Press Digest*, 4.
51. "A Serious Threat Faces the Country," *T'obbiya*, November 4, 1993, 2.
52. "For Still Greater Determination," *The Ethiopian Herald*, February 21, 1991, 2.
53. "A Serious Threat Faces the Country," *T'obbiya*, February 21, 1991, 2.

54. "TPLF/EPRDF's Strategies for Establishing its Hegemony & Perpetuating its Rule," *Ethiopian Register*, June 1996, 28.
55. Interview, Amare Aregawi, Addis Ababa, 2005.
56. Committee to Protect Journalists "Attacks on the Press in 2008: Ethiopia," http://www.cpj.org/2009/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2008-ethiopia.php
57. Interview, member of ERCHO, Addis Ababa, 2006.
58. Editorial, *Lisane Hizb*, February 4, 2005, 2.
59. This meeting is mentioned in the open letter published by the Committee to Protect Journalists: "Another Journalist Faces Antistate Charge," Committee to Protect Journalists, April 20, 2006, http://www.cpj.org/2006/04/another-journalist-faces-antistate-charge.php#more
60. "Opposition Should Accept Election Results," *The Reporter*, August 6, 2005, 2.
61. This view was expressed frequently on blogs such as Ethiomedia (http://www.ethiomedia.com.) Also see: http://seminawork.blogspot.com/2007/02/three-journalists-abandon-tplfs.html. Last accessed December 12, 2007. Aversion of this argument was also put forward by CUD leader Birtukan Mideksa in a letter from Kaliti Jail posted on http://ethiopundit.blogspot.com/2006/01/letter-from-kaliti-jail.html. Last accessed 12 December 2007.
62. The consolidation of power around the Prime Minister can also be seen to pre-date the 2005 elections. In 2001 there was a major split in the party during which some high-ranking individuals were purged from government.
63. Editorial, *Lisane Hizb*, February 25, 2005, 2.
64. Meles Zenawi, *African Development*, 12.
65. Ibid., 14.
66. Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*, 43.
67. Interview, Bereket Simon, Addis Ababa, 2008.
68. Interview, Ahmed Hassen, Addis Ababa, 2008.
69. Interview, government journalist, Addis Ababa, 2005.
70. Interview, Bereket Simon, Addis Ababa, 2008.

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# Decentralization to the household: expansion and limits of state power in rural Oromiya

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This article sheds light on the impacts and dynamics of the latest decentralization phase in Ethiopia, which seeks to professionalize and democratize local government. Based on recent field research in Oromiya Region, we draw attention to the paradoxes inherent in the top-down decentralization of public administration within an authoritarian one-party state. On the one hand, decentralization in Oromiya has empowered *kebele* administrations and facilitated the expansion of service delivery into rural hinterlands. In particular the sub-*kebele* state and party structure is instrumentalized by local governments to mobilize and control households. On the other hand, state authority remains limited as peasants resist and subvert state-led development works and *kebele* officials must rely on clientelistic networks to implement policies. Consequently, decentralization and *kebele* reform in post-1991 Ethiopia have so far neither altered the tradition of hierarchical state-society relations nor improved the lack of genuine representative democracy at *kebele* level.

In an attempt to break with the centralist and authoritarian legacy of the Ethiopian state, the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has overseen an ambitious decentralization agenda since assuming power in 1991. While a four-tiered institutional set-up consisting of regional states, zones, *woreda* (districts), and *kebele* (local government) was broadly maintained, Ethiopian state institutions were restructured in successive and partly overlapping phases of decentralization in the past two decades.[1] A first round of federal restructuring took place under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–1994) and ended with the adoption of the new federal constitution (December 1994), instituting nine predominantly ethnic-based regional states. A second phase was launched

in 2001 with the District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP), increasing the administrative autonomy and capacity of district or *woreda* administrations.[2] Decentralization entered its third phase with various reforms, political as well as administrative, implemented at the *kebele* or local government level since the mid-2000s.

For the EPRDF, decentralization is the institutional solution for the country's historic nationality question. The 1994 constitution grants ethno-linguisticgroups – dubbed "nations, nationalities and peoples" in Marxist-Leninist parlance – the right to self-determination at local and regional level. Decentralization is also praised as a means for more effective government service delivery and increased popular participation in local government. Post-1991 decentralization in Ethiopia has combined elements of deconcentration, i.e. a shift of administrative tasks from the federal and regional government to districts and *kebeles*, as well as the delegation of decision-making authority to lower bureaucratic entities, which are not directly controlled by the federal government.[3] Western donors and multilateral funders have supported these state reform programs to a remarkable extent, as part of their efforts to foster "good governance" and "democratization" in Ethiopia.[4] EPRDF's development policies and institutional reforms greatly expanded public service delivery in the last two decades, in particular health and education services. Yet Ethiopia's decentralization record remains strongly contested. Critics including opposition parties and human rights organizations as well as independent scholars argue that the centralized EPRDF party-state invalidates many of the potential advantages of decentralization.[5] While the government vaunts the administrative reforms of the past decade as part of a "developmental state" that regularly delivers double digit economic growth, critics describe post-2005 decentralization as part of an authoritarian conversion by the EPRDF and its affiliated parties. Mass recruitment of EPRDF party members from 700,000 in 2005 to 5 million in 2010,[6] evidence that access to public services and livelihood security is increasingly conditional on party membership, the stifling of media and civil society organizations and, most importantly, all but two of the seats in the House of People's Representatives for the EPRDF in the May 2010 federal and regional elections that is a reminder of the one-party period of the *Derg* are indicators of this trend.[7]

Much has been written about the impacts of decentralization at the regional and district levels. Yet relatively little research has been done on the dynamics of decentralization and administrative reform at the *kebele* level. As the lowest administrative unit the *kebele* and its organs are the most prominent embodiment of the state in rural areas. The *kebele* is an important service provider and the site of everyday encounters between the Ethiopian citizenry and its now "decentralized" government. Created by the *Derg* as peasant associations in 1975 – initially tasked with land-administration, tax collection and a range of development tasks but later transformed into a tool of repression and control[8] – *kebele* became increasingly professionalized and differentiated administrative bodies after 1991. Three reforms of the *kebele* stand out in particular in the past decade. First, in a bid to make the *kebele* more representative, legislative councils with up to 300 members tasked with appointing and overseeing the *kebele* executive cabinet were elected for the first time in the April 2008 elections.[9] Second, *kebele*'s administrative capabilities were enhanced with the appointment of more qualified civil servants as well as a *kebele* manager. Third, a sub-*kebele* structure that effectively fuses party and state personnel and interests was established in many rural areas of Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).[10] While these reforms are part and parcel of the government's decentralization program, the remaking of the *kebele* is clearly driven by an expansion of bureaucratic structures of control, which are a reminder of the *Derg*'s project of "encadrement".[11] Similarly, as a 2008 comparative study in four regional states demonstrates, service delivery by the *kebele* remains "largely top-down, supply-led, government-organisedand standardised"[12] in spite of the official narrative of participatory and accountable local administrations.

In this article we document recurrent political practices of the decentralized party-state at the *kebele* and sub-*kebele* levels. Based on recent fieldwork in Oromiya by the first and second author, we draw attention to the paradoxical effects resulting from the expansion of the Ethiopian state's "infrastructural power"[13] that took place in parallel with decentralization reforms at the (sub-)*kebele* level. Our empirical analysis offers a more ambiguous picture of post-2005 local government restructuring in Ethiopia and its impacts on state-society relations, contradicting the EPRDF story, but also some of the overly domination-

focused accounts of the Ethiopian state at local level. While our case study material supports the observation of a growingly authoritarian Ethiopian state under the aegis of the ruling party, it also highlights how the expansion of the party-state in rural hinterlands is met with numerous obstacles. Although the new *kebele* structure enhances local officials' capacity to mobilize and coerce households into state-led development projects, rural dwellers continue to subvert state capture. While the EPRDF as a party has augmented its outreach over voters after the incisive 2005 federal and regional elections, party membership more often may reflect an economic calculus rather than genuine political conviction. In addition, although the "professionalization" and "democratization" of the *kebele* administration have brought local government in close proximity to households, the impunity of corrupt or abusive *kebele* officials reproduces the normative distance that exists between state and society.

Of particular interest is the study of state-society interactions surrounding the recent decentralization and reform of local government in Oromiya, Ethiopia's most populous regional entity. Equally important is a first investigation of the heavily politicized party-state structure under the *kebele* level that has been observed in Oromiya.[14] Although focusing on different localities within Oromiya, the two multi-site case studies in this paper provide very similar accounts of the nexus between ruling party, state officials and peasantry in the process of local decentralization. They offer complementary insights into everyday interactions between (sub-)*kebele* party-state representatives and local populations on the one hand and intra-institutional dynamics within the *kebele* administration on the other hand.

Our first case study investigates recent development activities of local government in rural Oromiya through the prism of state-led peasant mobilization. Focusing on the *garee misoma* and its role in rural road construction, the first author documents state-peasant interactions at *kebele*, *garee* and household levels based on three months of field research in Meta Robi *woreda* in mid-2009.[15] Meta Robi is located about 100 km northwest of Addis Ababa in West Shewa zone, connected by daily buses to the capital but highly dependent on low profitability subsistence farming. Rural dwellers in Meta Robi *woreda* predominantly identify as ethnic Oromo and adhere to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Research concentrated in five of the district's 42 *kebele*, located in the sloping highlands at an altitude of 2400 to 2900 m.

Exploring everyday political practices of local administrators in the wake of decentralization reforms in Oromiya, the second case study assesses recurring dynamics within the newly created *kebele* councils as well as between local officials and the wider citizenry. It pays particular attention to the nexus between administrators' party membership and their lack of accountability in regard to land allocation and taxation. These observations are the condensed result ofnine months of field research carried out by the second author in 2008 and 2009 in dozens of rural and urban municipalities in West Arsi, Southwest Shewa, East Wollega, East Hararghe and Borena zones. Inhabited by ethnic Oromo, research localities were purposively sampled to reflect variation in terms of religion, access to formal education and infrastructural development. Both researchers made use of semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, participatory observation and focus group discussions with civil servants, party members, elders, farmers, pastoralists and/or merchants in the various localities.

The following section provides a brief summary of the reformed *kebele* administration and the sub-*kebele* institutions. Although focusing on Oromiya, this overview of the latest phase of local government decentralization applies to other regions of Ethiopia as well. The subsequent sections present the two case studies, which illustrate some of the above-mentioned dynamics and analyze the impacts of local-level decentralization in rural Oromiya. While the first case study highlights interactions between *kebele*, *garee misoma* and farmers in state-led rural road construction, the second case study sheds light on the dynamics within the *kebele* administration and on state-peasant relations in the context of administrative reforms that perpetuates abusive bureaucratic practices to the detriment of representative local government. In the final section we discuss the main findings of the two case studies and position them in regard to broader debates about the nature of post-1991 decentralization and democratization of the Ethiopian state.

## The politics of local decentralization in Oromiya region

Ethnic federalism accommodated some of the key demands by Oromo nationalists – particularly the use of Afaan Oromoo as a language of instruction in schools – and produced an Oromo ethnic elite within the Ethiopian polity.[16] Yet competition over who politically represented the

Oromo continued, if not intensified after 1991.[17] The administration of the region by the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), a constituent party of the ruling EPRDF, is fraught with controversy.[18] Since the 1992 fallout between the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), OLF sympathizers and members of more recent legal opposition parties such as the Oromo People's Congress (OPC)[19] and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) portray the OPDO as authoritarian, corrupt and a client of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that dominates the EPRDF. They contend that despite regime change and institutional reforms, Oromo continue to be victims of highland – this time Tigrayan rather than Amhara – repression and exploitation.[20] Contentious relations between OPDO officials and broad segments of the Oromo population nurture recriminations, suspicion and government repression in local politics.[21] Opposition supporters and critics are regularly accused of being OLF members, "terrorists" or "anti-peace elements", an allegation that often leads to their imprisonment.[22] Student protests in various towns across Oromiya in the wake of the 2005 elections have been met with brutal repression by the federal police and other security organs.[23] As part of a carrot and stick approach, the OPDO ranks were swelled after 2005 as employment in the public sector and access to state services has become increasingly dependent on party membership.[24]

Decentralization has considerably altered the face of public administration in Oromiya in the past decade. After 2002 districts were empowered administratively by block grants that are directly transferred from the region, bypassing the zones.[25] Subsequently, *woreda* were given overall responsibility for providing rural services including agricultural extension to *kebele* after 2002.[26] They thus represent the most powerful local government entity as the regional government awards little decision-making power to the *kebele*. Yet *kebele* play an important role in implementing *woreda* plans and policies. They are the "first point of contact" between state and society and are tasked with elaborating an annual development plan, collecting land and agricultural income tax, mobilizing communities to contribute to government initiated development projects, and conflict resolution through the social court.[27] *Kebele* administrations also issue identity cards, register, distribute and maintain housing, collect and provide documentary evidence related to a host of socio-demographic issues including residence or marriage status,

communicate with the *woreda* and initiate a range of developmental activities. The *kebele* consists of three entities; a unicameral legislative council acting as the highest representative organ, the executive cabinet whose members are elected council members, and the judicative social court composed of three judges.[28] The usual term of office of all *kebele* authorities in Oromiya, including the social court, is five years in Oromiya.[29]

### *(i) The reformed kebele*

In 2008 the number of *kebele* council members in Oromiya was increased from – depending on local demographics – formerly 30 to 50 members to 100 to 300 members.[30] The *kebele* council is accountable to the district council and the *kebele* electorate by which it is elected.[31] The expansion of the *kebele* councils was part of the government's "good governance package" aiming to enhance "participatory democracy" at local level.[32] Concomitantly and in a bid to re-assert its grasp over the electorate after the challenging 2005 federal and regional elections, the April 2008 local elections allowed EPRDF to staff the augmented *kebele* councils with hundreds of thousands of party loyalists.[33] In Amhara Region, Lefort observed that the vast majority of new *kebele* councilors elected in 2008 were either party members or "model farmers", i.e. peasants whom the government considered as role models in adopting new agricultural extension programs.[34]

The *kebele* cabinet is located at the *kebele* field office where the everyday administration of the *kebele* is run.[35] The main task of the *kebele* cabinet, as defined in the 2008 Oromiya constitution, is to plan and implement development activities: its members shall "[p]repare development plans and programmers [*sic*], submit to the Kebele Council for approval and implement same".[36] Legally the *kebele* cabinet consists of the *kebele* administrator, his deputy and other members that "shall be determined by law".[37] Most cabinet members receive only a small stipend, but their status and party membership qualifies them for other state sponsored handouts.[38] According to the Oromiya constitution the *kebele* chairperson is appointed "upon recommendation by a political party or a coalition of political parties that constitutes a majority in the Council".[39] Before 2008 the *kebele* cabinet consisted, in most cases, of three council

members who shouldered the tasks of *kebele* chairperson (or administrator), his or her deputy and the secretary as well as four office heads in charge of administration and justice, social court, security (militia), and women affairs.[40] These office heads are nominated by the *kebele* chairman, but approved by the council.[41] After 2008, these cabinet members also oversee the work of the *kebele*'s civil servants, namely the development agent responsible foragricultural extension, the head of school and the head of health, which together form the *kebele* administration.[42] Civil servants tend to have higher formal education levels than the cabinet members, in the case of Oromiya region they have completed at least 10th or 12th grade and hold a certificate.[43]

Another recent invention of local government reform in Ethiopia is the position of the *kebele* manager. According to Lefort *kebele* managers were appointed to relieve the cabinet from secretarial tasks, to mediate between local officials and the community as well as to advise cabinet members.[44] Known in Amharic as *yesira halafi* or "the head in charge of work",[45] the *kebele* manager attends both *kebele* council and cabinet meetings and supervises all development activities by the *kebele*. Despite his name and function, the *kebele* manager is fully employed by and ultimately answers to the *woreda*, often officiating as a de facto counter-power to the *kebele* chairman.[46] He is widely seen as an element of "upward accountability" that characterizes the four-tiered Ethiopian public administration.[47] The creation of the *kebele* manager is evidence of the contradictions inherent in the latest round of decentralization in Ethiopia. It reflects both the resoluteness with which EPRDF has expanded local government capacities and service delivery and the concomitance and continuity of hierarchical intra-government relations and practices that undermine the very principle of decentralization. Furthermore, the *kebele* manager marries a neo-liberal understanding of public management with bureaucratic and party control by higher echelon district officials.

### *(ii) Sub-kebele institutions*

In addition to augmenting the *kebele*'s bureaucratic capacities, the regional government strengthened the *kebele* administration through the creation of sub-*kebele* institutions known as *gott* (hamlet) and *garee* (group or team) in rural areas throughout Oromiya.[48] In doing so, the *kebele* was divided

territorially into groups of households; while the *gott* usually contains between 60 and 90 households, the *garee* groups together about 20 to 30 households.[49] The *garee* consists of the household heads who live within the *garee* territory.[50] *Garee* members elect representatives who form a five member committee. A *gott* committee of the same size supervises three *garee* and links them to the *kebele*, establishing a chain of accountability between *garee* committee, *gott* committee and *kebele* officials. In 2008 the Oromiya regional government dissolved the *gott* committees and the *garee* committees were placed under direct supervision of the *kebele*. Although the *gott* was disbanded institutionally, it continued to exist as a geographical principle of organizing the *garee*. In line with this change the *garee* committees were restructured and reduced to three representatives; the *garee* chairman, the secretary and the cashier.

While the *gott* and *garee* were recently established in Oromiya, similar institutions were introduced before in other regions such as Amhara, Tigray or SNNPR.[51] Historically, the *garee* can be traced back to the *mengistawi budin* or "government team", which was created by the *Derg* and which is mainly documented in regard to its purpose in state-led development.[52] Based on information obtained in Meta Robi *woreda*, both the *garee* and the *mengistawi budin* engaged in development related activities but differ in organizational and territorial terms. The *mengistawi budin* under the *Derg* was constituted by three leaders – a woman representative, a youth representative and a member of the administration. While the number of *mengistawi budin* within each peasant association (former *kebele*) is difficult to reconstruct, thepresent *garee* and the historic *mengistawi budin* do not overlap territorially in Meta Robi. Despite these differences, community members saw the two in historic continuity. Hence an elder explained that "[w]hat was once called *budin* is now called *garee*".[53]

EPRDF presents participation as the means by which the government is brought to the people and responds to popular demands.[54] In Oromiya the *garee* figures as the most decentralized organization improving administration in rural areas and enabling community participation in local development projects.[55] *Garee* members form a fairly permanent group – the so-called *garee misoma* or development team – which provides the required manual labor for building the infrastructure of various development projects related to irrigation, education, health or rural roads. The composition of the development team varies slightly depending on the

work at hand: e.g. by excluding widows or more elderly persons or by including additional, predominantly young, household members. The *garee misoma*'s activities mainly take place on non-working days such as weekends or religious holidays and they account for one to three days per month.

However, there are also more critical interpretations regarding the ultimate *raison d'être* of the *gott* and *garee*. While the sub-*kebele* structure "acts as a channel of communication and mobilization for a given number of households" as Dessalegn Rahmato remarked, the sub-*kebele* structure has also been criticized as a highly politicized government "tool of control as well as development".[56] A series of reports issued by Human Rights Watch describe the *gott* and *garee* in Oromiya as effective mechanisms for suppressing political dissent against the ruling and omnipresent OPDO.[57] Contradicting the supposedly voluntary character of participation in the sub-*kebele* development teams, observers have drawn attention to the overlap between *gott* and *garee* on the one hand and a decentralized party cell structure on the other hand.[58] Hence Bevan concludes that the penetration of households by state-party officials serves primarily a propagandistic purpose, aiming to convince farmers of the benefits of joining government sponsored rural development programs and, ultimately, voting for the EPRDF.[59]

## The *garee misoma* as a bridge between peasantry and the state

Rural road construction in Meta Robi reflects the importance of the sub-*kebele*, but is also in continuation with a long history of top-down policies and interventions by the Ethiopian state at local level. The *Derg* ordered peasants to organize in so-called *mengistawi budin* and to take part in development activities as rural road construction works within the *kebele*, formerly known as peasant associations. With the arrival of the EPRDF, *kebele* militia began to shoulder the responsibility of mobilizing the peasantry for development projects. As one farmer remembered: "The people themselves maintained the road and were organized by the *kebele* chairman. The *kebele* chairman ordered the people by the militia who have guns. The militia was given an assignment and it was done accordingly."[60] After 2003, the *garee* inherited the task of peasant mobilization in Meta Robi from its predecessors.[61]

### *(i) Peasant mobilization*

The *garee* is instrumental in road construction in rural parts of Oromiya region. Its functioning must be understood in a broader set of hierarchical developmentencounters between local government officials and communities. At the district level, the Woreda Rural Road Office (WRRO) is tasked with the administration, construction and maintenance of rural roads.[62] While the WRRO plans the district's rural road network, its role in construction is reduced to sporadic coordination and supervision as it tasks the *kebele* administration with the actual construction works. *Kebele* officials then mobilize the peasantry in several steps. First, *kebele* officials and *garee* leaders hold meetings to gather the inhabitants of the locality and inform them about the impending works. Second, the *kebele* administration divides the planned road geographically and assigns each *garee* to a particular section. Third, the *kebele* instructs *garee* leaders to convene their members at a specific time and place. Fourth, the *garee* leader orders his *garee* members – organized in a team of about 20 to 30 laborers – to build the road. *Garee* leaders also participate in and coordinate the manual work that consists in clearing the surface and digging the floor's unevenness. Furthermore, they oversee *garee* members' presence at the worksite and regularly report to the *kebele* administration.

*Kebele* officials deploy a variety of discourses and strategies to rally the peasantry for government-led development projects. Their rhetoric emphasizes the major role and importance of rural roads for development in terms of health, communication, education, transport, agriculture or market access. This development rhetoric is articulated regularly during *kebele* as well as *garee* meetings and appropriates a great deal of national development policy discourse, which is transplanted to the local arena.[63] In conversations with *kebele* and *garee* officials, they argued that the expected benefits of new rural roads convinced local people to participate in their construction. Contrary to local officials' perception, interviews with *garee* members and ordinary peasants revealed that participants in rural road construction projects did so primarily because they were ordered to, not because they saw it as a beneficial development effort in their interest. For example, a farmer complained that "[w]e don't say anything, they just order us (…) participation does not change anything".[64]

When it comes to government-led development initiatives, rural dwellers in Meta Robi perceive little difference between participation and mobilization and some even used these terms interchangeably in interviews. In reality, *garee* leaders mobilize farmers and instruct them to partake in construction efforts as manual laborers. The *garee* leader justifies his actions by reference to the written letter received from the *kebele* and hence as the consequence of an order received from above. Furthermore, armed militia accompany the *garee* leader and enforce his authority in case people refuse to participate in rural road construction.[65] Several participants referred to the coercive role of the *kebele* militia and particularly their guns, which represent a powerful tool in mobilizing the peasantry. Peasants who refuse to take part in rural road construction are fined both at *garee* and *kebele* level. Informants further reported that a refusal to participate in rural construction can also result in losing access to those resources distributed by the state such as fertilizer or land, as well as range of legal and administrative sanctions by the *kebele* administration. Individuals who refuse to follow these orders are often accused of being OLF members or sympathizers and of opposing the government.[66] This accusation carries potentially devastating consequences. It not only threatens ordinary farmers but also *garee* leaders who resist the *kebele*'s orders.

It is this combination of local government's authoritarian traits and its control over rural means of production,[67] which compels peasants to comply with the*kebele*'s demand for unpaid labor. However, from the viewpoint of some of those who participate in rural road construction, this very act offers an opportunity to ensure access to state controlled resources such as agricultural inputs or land. In Meta Robi, a farmer's ability to maintain his livelihood crucially depends on maintaining good relations with local government. In his analysis, Pausewang argues that "[a]ccess to land is a question of life and death for an Ethiopian peasant".[68] As a young farmer in Meta Robi stated: "[w]e hope that the government helps us if we participate (…) in *garee* activities (…). But so far, we did not win the lottery".[69] Vice versa, farmers' compliance with demands to provide unpaid labor to rural road construction reproduces state authority at local level as evidenced in the following statement by a *garee* leader: "Most people participate because we ordered them. We did not force people but they agreed themselves."[70] Rather than a forum where people can voice their demands, the *garee* is utilized by *kebele* administrators as an instrument to mobilize the peasantry.

In Meta Robi the *garee* did not initiate development activities on its own. As a *garee* leader clarified: "We just order people to attend meetings when we are ordered from above."[71] In popular perception, *garee* gatherings or activities never occurred on an independent or autonomous basis, but were always the result of a prior order from above.

### *(ii) The government's long arm*

The creation of the *garee* has significantly enhanced government control at household level and reflects an expansion of state power far beyond its claimed development realm. Several informants emphasized *garee* leaders' proximity to the community as an advantage for them in reaching out to those expected to enroll in state-led development projects. As a *woreda* official pointed out: "The main reason for the establishment [of the *garee*] is more control over the people to participate."[72] This squares with Dessalegn Rahmato's conclusion that "[t]he new government has thus extended the power and influence of the state even further than the *Derg*".[73] This claim is also echoed by Pankhurst who argues that "[d]espite decentralization (…) state penetration has reached deeper than ever before into rural society".[74]

When compared to the prior period when militia shouldered the task of peasant mobilization, the *garee* has significantly augmented the *kebele* administration's capacity to mobilize the peasantry as well as to implement development policy. This said, the importance of the *garee* in rallying peasants for construction works was relatively short-lived and decreased after 2005. During field research in mid-2009, *kebele* officials insisted that the *garee* worked efficiently in a variety of development related activities, but this view was often contradicted in private conversations. Vaughan and Tronvoll's observed that "local administrators control the public political arena at the local village level, and (…) their authority is seldom publicly questioned by the people".[75] This also holds true for Meta Robi where some informants argued in private that the *garee* is weak. This viewpoint is nicely captured in the following explanation by one of the *garee* leaders:

> once we constructed a school, road, health clinic, but the *garee* leaders are currently sitting at home and the *garee* leader is in his house. At the same time, people are farming and treating their crops, but they may participate in *kebele* activities if they are ordered. (…) Look, the *garee* is existing in name, but is not functional. In the past there weremeetings held at the *garee* level,

> but today there are just meetings at the *kebele* (…). The *garee* as such has no initiative to hold meetings and the *garee* gets weaker and weaker.[76]

While this account emphasizes the *garee*'s inactivity, it also reveals that the *garee* remains institutionalized and its leaders are kept in place.

Besides mobilizing peasants for development projects, the *garee* is at the center of local government's political control and surveillance of households and an important channel for government information and propaganda. Several informants reported that the *garee* was used by the ruling OPDO to mobilize voters and advocate their policies in the run-up to the contested 2005 federal and regional elections. More importantly, as a *kebele* manager stated, the *garee* "keeps security and counteracts aggression, which is directed against the government".[77] He further argued that the *garee* collects information about those who act against the regime and that it advises people not to follow the "enemy". Since the *garee* leader lives among the people, "the *garee* knows everything, also the secrets of the people".[78] Vaughan and Tronvoll report very similar practices by peasant associations during the *Derg* regime: "[L]ocal administrators worked as informers and spies, keeping the grassroots under surveillance and reporting any 'anti-revolutionary' and 'anti-government' activities back to the party and intelligence services."[79]

In Meta Robi, the boundaries between the state and the ruling party are blurred both in their officials' daily practices and in ordinary people's perception. This is apparent not only in the way the ruling party instrumentalizes the *garee*, but also in the way state and party structures overlap at household level. In the district's countryside, the OPDO's outreach has expanded significantly since early 2009 through the creation and multiplication of local party cells, locally called *celli*. Their establishment aimed at consolidating the ruling party at the household level by promoting the government's development efforts and achievements among the populace. A cell leader described the cell's activities as follows: "We study newspapers every two weeks (…) to produce members for the party, the OPDO, that's the main objective."[80] Following the establishment of the cell, several former *gott* and *garee* leaders became cell leaders in their respective locality. The overlap between state (*garee*) and party (OPDO cell) leaders makes it difficult – if not impossible – to distinguish between the ruling party and the state. Rural dwellers hardly perceive a difference between the local state structure and the party structure. Some

interlocutors argued that the cell is just another name for the *garee*.[81] A cell leader emphasized that "both are the same and both work for the government (…) all people are members of the OPDO and other statements are propaganda".[82] Others assumed that the cell has substituted the *gott*, executes the *kebele's* orders and therefore commands authority over the *garee*.[83]

### *(iii) Avoiding the* garee

Except for the *garee* and cell leaders, Meta Robi's inhabitants do not identify with the *garee* but rather perceive it as part of the government. Thus, a distance between peasantry and local party-state persists, limiting the ability of a decentralized government to fully encapsulate households and opening up a space in which the latter can be challenged. In private conversations few ordinary people support the government and its development initiatives. As a farmer complained: "I don't understand the purpose of the government because there is no development andchange at all. Although there are so many obligations and they strive for bringing their own power structure but I see no development."[84] An elder lamented: "They have done nothing and the *garee* is for nothing. They put the name *garee*, they call for meetings, they hold a speech, but they do nothing."[85] Intrusive interventions by the government and its manipulation of the *garee* reproduce and at times even widen the gap between peasantry and the state. As a result *garee* leaders' social standing in the community is constrained as they derive their authority from their privileged relation with the *kebele* administrator and the militia. Several *garee* leaders expressed the difficulty they faced when attempting to convince households to follow *kebele* directives. As one *garee* leader complained: "If we try to widen up the road, the people do not participate and even elect us away (…) we don't have power."[86]

Moreover, the abatement of *garee*-led rural road construction activities after 2005 gave peasants elbow room to resist government mobilization.[87] Rural dwellers interpreted the *garee*'s inactivity in different terms. While some agreed that there is no choice in obeying governmental directives, others questioned the *garee*'s authority. As a young farmer stated: "So far, I have not observed *garee* activities because the people do not accept the *garee*'s order."[88] During field research in mid-2009, refusing to take part in

*kebele* meetings was a recurrent and accepted practice among local farmers in Meta Robi. However, it was mainly understood that the *kebele* "would be" strong enough to achieve people's participation for activities of the *kebele*. In his analysis of state-peasant relations in Ethiopia, Aspen argues that as a result of the entrenched power imbalance the peasants' most rational strategy is "to minimise the contact with the state by obeying only the inescapable demands it imposes on the peasantry, and otherwise to ignore it".[89] Despite the recent decentralization of the party-state to the household level in rural Oromiya, peasants continue to honor the maxim of avoiding the state whenever possible, and obeying the required works whenever necessary.

The establishment of the *garee* also sparked criticism by some *garee* leaders. In many ways the appointment of numerous *garee* leaders at household level increases local government's presence in ordinary people's lives. Indeed, there are *garee* leaders who genuinely support the government as the following example shows:

> For me this government is great and I have never seen such a government in my life. They show us that they are strong and we believe in it. The government advises us and because of these advices people are capable to manage their life, to work properly, especially on their farm, and to cooperate with each other.[90]

However, in conversations various *garee* leaders question for example the instru-mentalization of the *garee* by the OPDO during the 2005 elections, the authoritarian interventions by *kebele* and *woreda* officials or the government's approach to rural development. At least in private, these leaders challenge state authority, yet most of them maintain their position as *garee* leaders within the established structure.

## *Kebele* reform and the (un-)making of representative local government

The benefit of occupying a position in one of the *kebele* organs is evident in the case of the executive cabinet. The *kebele*'s control over land, agricultural inputs and public services is important to understand local officials' desire to achieve or maintain access to these state controlled resources. Within the decentralized localgovernment bureaucrats, civil servants and party members compete for positions and influence at *kebele* level.[91] Tensions that are inherent to a decentralization process driven by a

dominant party-state come to the forefront as local officials justify their actions both in terms of their position within the party and in terms of their bureaucratic expertise. Political loyalty to the ruling OPDO on the one hand, and education that qualifies for civil service on the other hand thus accompany *kebele* reform, co-existing as conflicting repertoires used by local officials.[92]

### *(i) Mobilizing the party shield*

The predominant role of the OPDO in Oromiya's political life has a strong bearing on the *kebele* councils. Although some of the opposition parties are legally registered, none of them can compete with the ruling OPDO for seats in the *kebele* as well as district councils. As a result, all members of the *kebele* councils are either members of or at least supporters of the ruling party which reflects the little space for opposition parties to participate in the region's governance. Given this unanimity of political opinion within the councils, their legislative function is limited. In practice it is the *kebele* cabinet that holds the real power within the *kebele*, often by dictating or manipulating the council. The decisions by *kebele* cabinet members rather than those of the councilors influence the daily lives of urban and rural dwellers, which explains why the first are much better known in the community than the second.

Although the Oromiya government has made efforts to improve the planning and implementation capacity of *kebele* administrations by recruiting more educated civil servants, these measures have not yet achieved their objective at the time of writing. One of the reasons for this failure is the difficult cooperation between *kebele* cabinet members. In contrast to the other cabinet member appointed from the *kebele* council, civil servants are nominated upon recommendation of the local OPDO branch because they were assumed to be "more educated". In contrast, *kebele* administrators often suspect these professionals to be resistant and are therefore uneasy about collaborating with them. A recurrent pattern reported in West Arsi zone in beginning of 2008 is the following; when the educated cabinet members want to suggest measures by which local people participate in development activities, the other four cabinet members – in this case the chairperson, deputy, secretary and head of women affairs – are often reluctant, partly because they consider themselves politically more

important.[93] In case the more educated cabinet members attempt to defy the maladministration of the four cadres, they can be transferred to another locality, which might be distant from infrastructural facilities including health centers, markets and roads. The denoted reason for this is that the *kebele* administrator – often without consulting with the rest of the council members – reports to the district administration that his colleagues are resisting government directives, which can lead to their dismissal or transfer. As this report indicates, the latter are expected to be submissive to the "less educated" administrators and members of the ruling party more generally. Likewise, people are also expected to submit to the administrators regardless of what they have done as part of their official duties.

To be considered for appointment as a member of the *kebele* administration, one has to join the ruling OPDO party. It is essentially this party membership, which licenses *kebele* officials to use public office for their personal advantage. This phenomenon has maybe dampened popular acceptance of the OPDO in Oromiyamost, although Oromo now have the right to use their own language in regional administration and as the medium of instruction in schools and regional colleges. Informants in different parts of the region pointed out a spreading of corruption by local officials, a practice that seems to have percolated with decentralization from regional to *kebele* level. In informal discussions interlocutors would make this point by saying that "These days, bribe taking has come and [*sic*] knocking at our door and windows. Before this government, it was far from us and we knew it more at district and above levels."[94]

*Kebele* administrators make strategic use of their party membership to shield themselves from criticism of their conduct by the public. Their reluctance to cooperate with more educated civil servants within the cabinet, their tendency to distance themselves from the population rather than engaging with them, and their use of public office for personal advantages are rendered possible by their party affiliation. As they are ultimately accountable to the OPDO, *kebele* administrators are protected from criticism and disapproval by non-party members until the party decides to remove them. However, the great challenge of local politics in Oromiya is that there is no criterion for knowing who supports the opposition. Consequently, deterrence of opposition supporters is largely only based on suspicion, which in turn allows certain administrators to stay

in power by frightening individuals with allegations of subversive intent.[95] To this effect, becoming an OPDO party member is advantageous as it allows deterring others from making unfounded accusations.[96] Many educated civil servants within *kebele* cabinets have joined the party for this reason, although their original mandate was less political, namely to assist the local cabinet executive.

### *(i) Abuses by* kebele *administrators*

*Kebele* administrators are aware that they will eventually be removed from their post. Therefore they attempt to make use of the opportunities that present themselves while holding office. Publicly officials underline that they exercise and embody the rule of law, daunting those who resist or question their actions. Anybody who attempts to challenge malpractices by the *kebele* administration risks being accused as an OLF supporter. Since the four core members of the *kebele* cabinet usually are familiar with one another, either as party and work colleagues or because of close kinship ties, they are often at the center of a clientelistic network that includes selected farmers and elders in the community and party officials at district level. In many cases these networks serve the purpose of soliciting bribes in exchange for administrative favors. For instance, *kebele* administrators might expect a bribe for giving an individual an urban land plot, (re-)allocating farming or grazing land, or settling other administrative issues. Those who have money and ties with *kebele* officials are thus in a privileged position to obtain services or have their case decided in their favor.

As informants in Southwest Shewa, North Shewa and West Arsi zones reported, bribing *kebele* officials is common and it excludes certain segments of the community – those with less financial means – from access to public services including urban and rural land. Bribes are usually paid in cash and at times are accompanied by an invitation for beer. In some parts of Oromiya this practice has motivated merchants to bring beer from urban areas and sell it in rural villages. Peasants typically invite *kebele* executive members of their locality for beer, but enjoy themselves with *areqee*,a local drink, while officials discuss and decide on the matter of the petitioner.[97] Hotels and beer houses are thus important sites where *kebele* members settle individual cases presented to them. In this sense *kebele* offices exist

primarily to provide an aura of legality to decisions made in beer houses. In some localities *kebele* officials are regularly found in places where beer is served and it is easier to encounter them in the beer house than their workplace.

Administrators also use their power to (re-)allocate urban and rural land within the *kebele* to solicit bribes. Land use disagreements are settled by the *kebele* and claimants know that they need to pay something. If one of the parties appeals to the district administration, the latter may refer the case back to the *kebele* administration. This is a common practice in Oromiya, giving *kebele* officials considerable sway in determining who has access to farmland. Local inhabitants thus depend on the goodwill of *kebele* administrators as they have little alternative legal recourses available. Another major opportunity for favoritism are *kebele* court decisions pertaining to contested land allocation. As evidenced by the following statement by Tadele Nagisho, president of the Oromiya Regional State Supreme Court, the regional authorities recognize the problem posed by the multiplication of land disputes, which end up in courtroom:

> Claims and counter-claims pertaining to farming land represent the most common cases of which individuals often accuse each other in Oromiya region. They account for about seventy to eighty percent of all cases that are presented to court. (…) For instance, within six months, that is, in 2009, three thousand land-based cases were presented to court. (…) In this process, families and friends of claimants and counter claimants accompany and also 'attend' the court. This is greatly damaging their livelihood because they are spending more time in attending cases. In addition, farmers, merchants, and government employees are all upset and thought about court process in the region.[98]

As under previous regimes land taxation rates are decided by higher authorities and then forwarded to *kebele* administrators. As local inhabitants have little information about tax issues, *kebele* officials at times may use this gap to their benefit by demanding arbitrary tax amounts from different households. They may thus order some households on whom they want revenge to pay more tax than the legal requirement, splitting the difference among themselves. In other cases certain households are asked to pay taxes twice a year instead of once. In all these cases abusive *kebele* officials draw on their privileged relations with district officials. Such abuses as reported by informants in West Arsi zone undermine local level decentralization. Both the federal and the Oromiya governments have admitted that the delegation of power to districts has been faced with challenges such as a

“lack of well established local governance system accountable to local people and responsible to service delivery” and “lack of commitment and attention by sector bureaus”.[99]

## Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed recurrent administrative practices and intra-institutional patterns by *kebele* and sub-*kebele* officials as part of the latest round of decentralization in Ethiopia’s Oromiya region. Highlighting everyday interactions among local officials and between the party-state and the broader populace, our empirical material reveals a reproduction of hierarchical state-society relations thatco-exist with (and at times are reinforced by) decentralization and local government reform. Rather than enhancing community participation in local state affairs or making the *kebele* more accountable, state-society interactions at *kebele* and sub-*kebele* level in Oromiya continue to be informed by a deeply rooted tradition of hierarchy. In this authoritarian tradition of *mengist* (government) local administrators dispose of discretionary powers in commanding and controlling peasant labor and other contributions to the state, most importantly political loyalty. Peasant mobilization for state-led development activities at sub-*kebele* level is informed by a logic according to which the party-state issues orders and people obey.[100] A similar imposition of hierarchical relations is observable within *kebele* cabinets where “more educated” civil servants are expected to submit to less professionally qualified, but more politically connected cabinet members. The investigation of *kebele* administration practices in Oromiya demonstrates how local bureaucrats make strategic use of their position in the party-state to obtain benefits and maintain power in their local political arena. Similar strategies are observable at *garee* level, as popular participation is not only the result of state coercion, but is also a strategy to access state-controlled services.

Decentralization in Oromiya has empowered *kebele* administrations and facilitated the expansion of state authority to rural hinterlands. Particularly the *garee* is instrumentalized by the *kebele*, operating as the long arm of the government, which mobilizes, surveys and controls households far beyond its proclaimed developmental goals. Yet the power of the local party-state is neither absolute nor unlimited as peasants and even *garee* leaders also resist

or subvert state-led development works and *kebele* officials must rely on clientelistic networks to implement policies. In this sense the convoluted nexus between mass party, state and people that characterizes the everyday politics of EPRDF's "revolutionary democracy" is both a source of strength and weakness. Although local government expands to households in the guise of "decentralization" and the name of "development", this process – which critics describe as an intrusion by an authoritarian government – also provides some room for maneuver for those who seek to utilize the party-state for their own ends. Hence, accounts of absolute and unchecked bureaucratic domination by the OPDO in Oromiya as suggested by some Oromo nationalists and human rights organizations deserve more nuance.[101]

This said, the lack of genuine representative democracy within the restructured *kebele* is evident. Although citizens have the right to elect representatives to the *kebele* council every five years, *kebele* cabinet members who play a much more important role in people's everyday lives eschew popular election. In Oromiya region the administrators are selected from and appointed by the *kebele* council upon recommendation of the ruling party.[102] As a result, administrators are more accountable to the *kebele* council and the district administration than to the electorate. Similarly, at sub-*kebele* level *garee* members elect *garee* leaders as their "representatives", but they hardly feel represented by the *garee*. Contrary to official claims the *garee* is widely perceived as part of the state structure and not as a platform where people can voice their demands. So far, local government decentralization in Oromiya has failed to produce increased political participation and administrative accountability. The conflation of party and state officials and agendas, the top-down imposition of rural development initiatives and the expansion of party-state control over rural masses counter the promises of "good governance" associated with a decentralized administration.[103]

Post-1991 decentralization in Oromiya, which seeks to "promote and support the people's self-rule at all levels",[104] remains – depending on one's viewpoint – either an unfulfilled promise or work in progress. As optimistic decentralization proposals become embedded in local arenas and existing power relations, self-preservation by the party and individual officials trump efforts to break with the authoritarian legacies of the Ethiopian state. While the reformed *kebele* and the creation of the *garee* have decentralized the state to the household level, they did not bring the OPDO-run

government closer to the people. As one of the author's informants observed pessimistically: "Government policies seem [like a] mountain at region, but shrink to the size of [a] camel, [a] leaf, and finally turn to ash at zone, district, and *kebele* [level] respectively."[105]

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## Notes

1. Also called *killil*, zone, *woreda* and *kebele* in Amharic respectively.
2. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 244; Tegegne and Kassahun, "A Literature Review," 10.
3. Rondinelli, "Government Decentralization," 138. According to Rondinelli's classic distinction, decentralization in Ethiopia does not correspond to devolution, which entails "that local government be given autonomy and independence and be clearly perceived of a separate level over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control." For different typologies of decentralization in Ethiopia see Meheret, "Decentralization in Ethiopia"; Tegegne and Kassahun, "A Literature Review."
4. The DLDP transferred planning, fiscal and administrative autonomy from the regions to the district (see Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 244–6; Meheret, "Decentralization in Ethiopia"; Meheret, "A Rapid Assessment of Wereda Decentralization"; Tegegne and Kassahun, "A Literature Review," 10, 26) and was a major component of the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) (2002–2005). A more comprehensive decentralization package that included civil service and tax revenues reform as well as urban management capacity-building was implemented under the Public Sector Capacity Building Program (PSCAP), which was part of the subsequent Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005–2010). After 2005 the Protection of Basic Services Program supported district and *kebele* service delivery (see Spielman et al., "Local Governance Systems"; Taye, *Digest of Ethiopia*). These and other programs were significantly funded by (Western) donor countries and the World Bank.
5. Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism"; Abbink, "The Ethiopian Second Republic"; ICG, "Ethiopia"; Keller, "Making and Remaking State and Nation"; Paulos, "Clientelism"; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*.
6. HRW, "Development without Freedom," 67.
7. Aalen and Tronvoll, "End of Democracy?"; HRW, "Development without Freedom"; HRW, "One Hundred Ways"; only two seats in parliament did not go to the EPRDF – one to the opposition and one to an EPRDF-friendly independent candidate, see Tronvoll, "The Ethiopian 2010."
8. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*.
9. Before the April 2008 local elections *kebele* councils consisted of a maximum of 15 members including the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary, see Aalen and Tronvoll, "The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections," 116.

10. Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopian’s Rural Communities”; HRW, “Development without Freedom”; HRW, “Suppressing Dissent”; HRW, “One Hundred Ways”; Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants …: Post-2005 Interlude”; Segers et al., “Be Like Bees.”
11. Clapham, “Controlling Space,” 14.
12. Pankhurst, *Enhancing Understanding*, 25.
13. Mann, “The Autonomous Power.”
14. Initially referred to as *gott* and *garee*, see HRW, *Suppressing Dissent*, 30.
15. A more extensive account of the role of the *garee misoma* in rural road construction in Meta Robi is found in Emmenegger, “Decentralization to the Household” and Emmenegger, “Roads of Decentralization.”
16. Keller, “The Ethnogenesis.”
17. For a critical engagement with the notion of a homogenous Oromo nation see Haneke, “Multidimensionality of Oromo Identity”; Sorenson, “Learning to be Oromo.” The emergence of a collective Oromo national consciousness is of relatively recent date as Oromos are divided into at least five groups: Wellega Oromos who are mostly Protestant farmers, Oromos in Shoa who are often Amharized, small groups of Oromo pastoralists in the South, conservative Muslim Oromos in Hararghe region and agro-pastoral Borana living in the Ethio-Kenyan borderlands; for details see Tronvoll, *Ethiopia*, 8.
18. The core of the OPDO was initially constituted by former Oromo prisoners of war whom the TPLF had captured during the conflict with the *Derg*. The OPDO won all 537 seats in the regional council in the May 2010 elections.
19. Formerly the Oromo National Congress (ONC).
20. Mohammed, “Conquest, Tyranny and Ethnocide.”
21. Pausewang, “Ethiopia: A Political View,” 77.
22. Remnants of the OLF, itself divided by internal power struggles and a recent expulsion from its Kenyan hinterlands, carry out sporadic attacks against government buildings and officials.
23. Arriola, “The Politics of Protest.”
24. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections”; ICG, “Ethiopia.”
25. The same district reform occurred in Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and later on the remaining regions.
26. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 246; Tegegne and Kassahun, “A Literature Review,” 15, 26; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 92.
27. Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 6, 12. Bevan, Pankhurst, and Lavers, *Ethiopian Village Studies*, 63; Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 92.
28. Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 46, 76, 90 (91 and 95); Tegegne and Kassahun, “A Literature Review,” 13–14. The names and functions of the *kebele* organs are subject to considerable terminological confusion. Partly reflecting inconsistent translations between Amharic and English, partly echoing the perplex division of labor between the *kebele* council (formally the highest representative body but de facto playing a rather ceremonial role) and the *kebele* cabinet (formally executing the development priorities decided by the council but de facto instructed by the *woreda*). Hence the *kebele* cabinet is sometimes also referred to as “*kebele* administration” or “*kebele* administrative council” and the *kebele* administrator and chairman are one and the same. The Amharic name for the *kebele* cabinet is *sira asfetsami*, while the council is referred to as *gubae* or *mikir bet* and the social court is known as *mehaberawi fird bet*; see Pankhurst, *Enhancing Understanding*, 11.
29. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 247.
30. District council speaker Mamo Kedir in discussion with the second author, Dodolla, March 2008. See also Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 5–6.
31. Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 91 (2–3).
32. Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 8.

33. Aalen and Tronvoll, “The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections,” 116.
34. Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants.…: Post-2005 Interlude,” 443.
35. Kumera, “Decentralized Governance.”
36. Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 96 (1a).
37. Ibid., art. 95 (1).
38. Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 7.
39. Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 97 (1).
40. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 42, point out that, according to capacity and need, the *kebele* cabinet was occasionally composed of five or nine individuals before 2008, for example in charge of mass mobilization.
41. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 247; Tegegne and Kassahun, “A Literature Review,” 13–14.
42. Interview with *kebele* manager, Meta Robi, August 26, 2009.
43. Sibilo, “The Practice of Decentralization,” 13.
44. Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants.…: Post-2005 Interlude,” 446–7.
45. Pankhurst, *Enhancing Understanding*, 11.
46. We are indebted to René Lefort for this observation (email correspondence, January 16, 2011).
47. Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 12. For Oromiya see also Pausewang, “Ethiopia: A Political View,” 72.
48. Article 45 of the Oromiya constitution grants the regional government the right to establish “other” administrative structures that “may be necessary” (Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 45).
49. HRW, “Suppressing Dissent,” 30.
50. Heads of household (usually male) are referred to as *abba warra* in Oromiffa and pay taxes to local government for the land they “own”. In case a male head of household dies, his widow inherits his *garee* membership as well as his land and duty to pay taxes.
51. The *gott* in Oromiya refers to the *gott* in Amhara or *qushet* in Tigray, which are also placed between the *kebele* and the *garee*. The *garee* or *garee misoma* finds its equivalent in the *limat budin* in Amhara and the *gudjle lm’at* in Tigray. Despite the similarities, different reports indicate slight difference regarding the constitution of these sub-*kebeles* in different regions. See also Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants.…: Post-2005 Interlude,” 448–9; Segers et al., “Be Like Bees,” 8, 13; Yilmaz and Venugopal, “Local Government Discretion,” 4.
52. Bevan and Pankhurst, “Power Structures,” 134; Pankhurst, *Enhancing Understanding*, 12; Segers et al., “Be Like Bees,” 13. For a description of the *mengistawi budin* and its recent counterpart, the *lema’at budin* (development team), see Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 40.
53. Interview with elder, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.
54. Teferi, “Decentralized There, Centralized Here,” 611.
55. Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopia’s Rural Communities,” 63.
56. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 331; HRW, “One Hundred Ways,” 23–4.
57. HRW, “Development without Freedom”; HRW, “Suppressing Dissent”; HRW, “One Hundred Ways.”
58. See for example HRW, “One Hundred Ways,” 23–4; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 40. Since both party and state structure at household level – the *garee* and the cell – are coordinated and organized by *kebele* leaders, we subsume the two as sub-*kebele*.
59. Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopia’s Rural Communities,” 22.
60. Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.
61. HRW, “Suppressing Dissent,” 30, dates the creation of the *gott* and *garee* to 2004.
62. The WRRO was created as decentralization entered its second phase with the DLDP. As an executive sector office, it is run by the *woreda* administration and implements regional government policy.

63. As an example of the national discourse see ERA, “Road Sector Development Programme.”
64. Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.
65. The militia consists of *kebele* dwellers, mainly farmers, who are tasked with security. They receive basic military training, carry a gun and report to the *kebele* chairman and the head of security. According to local informants, one of the local *kebele* with about 900 inhabitants had 74 militia, while a neighboring *kebele* of 1100 inhabitants had 250militia. It is important to note that many militia are concomitantly *garee* leaders, which blurs their roles in everyday life.
66. See also HRW, “Suppressing Dissent,” 38.
67. Harrison, “The Problem with the Locals,” 600; Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants …: The May 2005 Elections,” 254; Pausewang, “No Environmental Protection,” 98.
68. Pausewang, “No Environmental Protection,” 98.
69. Interview with young farmer, Meta Robi, August 17, 2009.
70. Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.
71. Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 16, 2009.
72. Interview with head of Woreda Rural Road Office, Shino, August 24, 2009.
73. Dessalegn, *Peasant and the State*, 328.
74. Pankhurst, *The Influence of the State*, 12.
75. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 34.
76. Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009.
77. Interview with *kebele* manager, Shino, August 26, 2009.
78. Interview with *garee* leader, Shino, August 22, 2009.
79. Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 41.
80. Interview with *cell* leader, Meta Robi, August 31, 2009.
81. Interview with *kebele* manager, Meta Robi, August 18, 2009.
82. Interview with former *gott* leader, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.
83. Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 30, 2009; former *gott* leader, Meta Robi, August 24, 2009.
84. Interview with farmer, Meta Robi, August 16, 2009.
85. Interview with elder, Metta Robi, August 31, 2009.
86. Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 28, 2009.
87. This seems to be one of the results of the “good governance” measures devised by EPRDF after 2005, including the “democratic right” to refuse to participate in meetings, community work or other government interventions, see Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopia’s Rural Communities,” 20.
88. Interview with young farmer, August 22, 2009.
89. Aspen, “Models of Democracy,” 69.
90. Interview with *garee* leader, Meta Robi, August 31, 2009.
91. Bevan, “The MDG-ing of Ethiopia’s Rural Communities,” 13 notes that the “EPRDF structures is a potential route to upward mobility” as well as “a battleground for competing networks.”
92. The following section is drawn from an unpublished manuscript by the second author, which summarizes the main research findings of his nine months of field research in different localities in Oromiya, see Sibilo, “The Practice of Decentralization.” The co-authors have copy-edited this section and inserted the (sub-)titles, but otherwise attempted to stick to the original wording.
93. Informal discussions with farmers, students and teachers, Nansebo district of West Arsi zone, February 2008.
94. Formal and informal discussions with elders, farmers, pastoralists, merchants, civil servants and district officials, see Oromiya, “Revised Constitution.” See also Sibilo, “Practice of Decentralization,” 14.

95. The armed struggle of the OLF is used by the OPDO to justify political repression at local level, see HRW, “Suppressing Dissent”; Pausewang, “Ethiopia: A Political View.”
96. This point was recently confirmed by Human Rights Watch who reported that teachers in Ambo were forced to join the OPDO “or else be suspected of sympathizing with the rebel Oromo Liberation Front,” *Development without Freedom*, 57.
97. *Areqee* is a locally made drink, which is cheaper and stronger than beer.
98. Interview with Tadele Nagisho, president of the Oromiya Regional State Supreme Court, Reporter Newspaper, Amharic version, April 5, 2009 (http://www.ethiopianreporter.com), translation by Sibilo Keno.
99. FDRE, *Federal Plan on District*, 3; Oromiya Regional State, *An Overview*, 19.
100. See also Pausewang, “Democratic Dialogue,” 187; Vaughan and Tronvoll, *Culture of Power*, 33; and more recently in Fekadu-Nigussa and Mberengwa, “Challenges of Productive Safety Net Program.”
101. This is not to deny serious human rights violations committed by state security organs in Oromiya upon orders of the EPRDF.
102. Also Lefort, “Power – *Mengist* – and Peasants.…: Post-2005 Interlude,” 450, reports that in his study area in Amhara Region *kebele* concil elections “were considered a non-event” and “entirely in the hands of the local officials.”
103. A very similar point is also made by Merera, “Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralization.”
104. Oromiya Regional State, “Revised Constitution,” art. 103 (1).
105. Interview with local elder, Oromia, 2008.

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# EPRDF's revolutionary democracy and religious plurality: Islam and Christianity in post-*Derg* Ethiopia

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In 1991 the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) introduced policies aimed at recognizing the country's long-standing religious diversity, providing a public arena for religious groups, and maintaining a sharp division between religion and the state. This further eroded the traditionally dominant position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, strengthened Protestant Christian and Muslim communities, and created a more fluid and competitive configuration among the religious communities. Seeking to maintain its political power, the EPRDF has at the same time made efforts to monitor and control the different religious communities. Therefore, the last 20 years have been marked by uneven developments, in which the government's accommodating attitudes have been interlaced with efforts to curtail the influence of the religious communities. This article surveys the intersection and reciprocal influences between EPRDF policies and religious communities over the last 20 years, and discusses how Muslims and Christians (Orthodox and Protestant) have negotiated their roles in relation to politics and public life. These developments have, the article argues, led to the emergence of divergent and competing narratives, reconfiguring self-understanding, political aspirations and views of the religious other. The EPRDF ideology of "revolutionary democracy" has, in this sense, enabled religion to surface as a force for social mobilization and as a point of reference for attempting to define nationhood in Ethiopia.

The 1991 political transition announced a new era for Ethiopia's Christian and Muslim communities. The Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (EPRDF) issued new policies and introduced a legal framework aimed at recognizing the country's inbuilt diversity. The lifting of earlier restrictions on religious expressions made religion more visible in public, and led to a

sharp increase in religious activities and religious diversity, in effect strengthening Protestant and Muslim communities and counterbalancing the traditional hegemonic position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).

This article surveys the intersection of EPRDF's policies and the reconfiguration of the religious landscape in contemporary Ethiopia. By assessing the legal and political parameters for religions in post-*Derg* Ethiopia, the article demonstrates how the ruling party provided a government-independent framework for religious plurality, yet at the same time sought to control and monitor religious activities.The article also explores the strategies adopted by Muslims and Christians (Orthodox and Protestant) in maneuvering under such circumstances, and points out how the increasing religious activities and diversity have intensified debates about religion and politics – and about being Ethiopian.

## Political and legal parameters for religion in Ethiopia

The religious policies of the present Ethiopian government are remarkably different from any of the previous ones with regard to the measure of religious freedom they provide. During the Imperial Government of Haile Selassie modernizing impulses had already led to tentative provisions of religious liberty, like freedom of worship, recognition of *shari'a* courts, and provisions for the registration of religious associations, but these were not put into practice, and the EOC retained its monopoly and political power until the revolution of 1974.[2]

In this revolution, religious freedom became one of the passionately voiced demands. These were initially realized to some degree, for example with the acceptance of Islamic holidays as public holidays, the permission to establish the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), and with Pentecostals allowed to congregate in public. However, the revolutionary rulers' turn to scientific socialism soon brought about polemical campaigns against religion as well as the violent co-optation of the old religious center of the Ethiopian highland state, the EOC. This process, culminating in the deposition, murder, and replacement of Patriarch Theophilos in 1976, signaled the end to whatever religious freedom the revolution had brought. In the following years all Pentecostal and many Protestant churches were closed, and Muslims in Eastern Ethiopia, accused of siding with the Somalis during the Ogaden-war, were

hit hard by the *Derg*. After the political consolidation of Mengistu's regime and as a result of the humanitarian crisis of the 1980s, some faith communities were given a measure of religious freedom in exchange for their participation in the political system. The constitution draft commission of 1986, for example, not only included the Orthodox patriarch, but also leaders from the Lutheran Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), the Catholic Church and the EIASC. Members from these religious communities were also elected to the *Shengo*[3].

When the EPRDF ousted the *Derg* in 1991, religious liberties were quickly introduced at an unprecedented scale. This had little to do with ideological differences to the *Derg* regime,[4] but more with a different political strategy of appropriating religion. On the one hand, their reliance on rural peasants for revolting against the *Derg* had taught the new rulers to respect the deep-seated religious sensibilities of most Ethiopians,[5] and on the other hand the religious plurality of Ethiopia dovetailed nicely with the new governing philosophy of ethno-regional federalism, as is stated in article 13 of the new constitution: "[t]he national emblem on the flag shall reflect the hope of the Nations, Nationalities, Peoples as well as religious communities to live together in equality and unity." Accordingly, article 11 marks a clear separation of religion and state, rules out a state religion and provides the assurance of no government interference in religious matters and vice versa. Article 27 warrants freedom of religion, belief, and opinion, which includes the right of believers to "establish institutions of religious education and administrationin order to propagate and organize their religion". Furthermore, the constitution opens up the possibility for the recognition of religious marriage ceremonies and of religious courts relating to personal and family issues (articles 34, 78). The new government also brought an end to restrictions on the *hajj*, suspended the ban on the import of religious literature and eased the restrictions on the construction of mosques and religious schools.[6] The Imperial regulations regarding the registration of religious communities now were put into practice, resulting in the first official recognition of many Protestant and especially Pentecostal churches. These churches also succeeded in reclaiming property that was dispossessed by the *Derg* and were given land grants for burial sites and church buildings.

However, the laws pertaining to the registration of religious organizations may also be seen to contradict the constitutional provisions of

religious freedom and equality. The EOC is still exempt from registration by the Civil Code of 1960, whereas for all others registration is a legal mandate. The Penal Code of 1957 and its replacement, the 2004 Criminal code, contain punishments for participating in, or leading the activities of an unregistered association.[7] Furthermore, the Legal Notice of 1966, which still governs the process of registration, states that an application may be denied if the purposes of the association are found to be "unlawful or immoral", or "against national unity and interests".[8] However, so far there is no indication that applications have been denied for anything but formal reasons.

Another area in which the current legislation may lead to government interference with religious activities pertains to land use. All land is owned by the State according to article 40 of the constitution, but the relevant legislation governing the lease of urban and rural land does not address issues related to religious bodies, such as how to prioritize applications, whether to lease land to very small religious communities, or where churches, mosques, or cemeteries should be placed within the infrastructure of a settlement. All of these decisions are delegated to local governments where the influence of a religious majority may guide decisions.

Thus, comparing the present situation of religious politics with previous Ethiopian governments, there has been an evident improvement with regard to religious liberty and equality. The Ethiopian constitution promotes religious plurality, which is supported by the separation of religion and state, the promulgation of religious freedom, as well as provisions for religious courts and institutions of religious propagation. However, the legal framework for registrations and land lease gives considerable power to the executive, which corresponds to the EPRDF's interest to closely monitor religious communities, being conscious about the potential power they represent. This concern has led to government interventions contradicting the legal provisions for religious freedom as will be shown below.

## The impact of EPRDF politics on religion

The combination of increasing religious plurality and executive influence on religions has played out quite differently for the Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim communities, producing dissimilar trajectories in the renegotiation of public space, political power and religious freedom.

### *Plurality and fragmentation*

The current religious composition of Ethiopia is characterized by the 2007 census as follows: Ethiopian Orthodox Christians hold the majority with 43.5%, followed by Islam (34.0%), and Protestant Christianity (18.5%).[9] There is a considerable regional variation with regard to religious predominance. Muslims are dominant in the Afar Region (95.3%), Dire Dawa (70.8%), Harar (69.0%) and the Somali Region (98.4%), as well as in the special enumeration areas (92.5%). Orthodox Christianity predominates in Addis Ababa (74.7%), Amhara Region (82.5%), and Tigray Region (95.6%), whereas Gambella and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region are largely Protestant (71.1% and 55.5%, respectively). Even religiously heterogeneous regions, such as Oromiya are made up in part of fairly homogenous zones. Furthermore, in all regions, religious majorities are amplified in rural areas, which shows that religious plurality in Ethiopia is first of all an urban phenomenon. The religious distribution in Ethiopia therefore largely correlates with regional and ethnic boundaries, making it compatible with the EPRDF's political philosophy of ethno-regional federalism.

One of the most significant demographic shifts that the census indicates is the rise of Protestantism, which grew from 5.5% of the overall population in 1984,[10] to 10.2% in 1994,[11] to the already mentioned 18.5% in 2007. Most of this increase has come at the cost of the EOC, whose share declined from 54.0% in 1984 to 50.6% in 1994, and 43.5% in 2007.

The increase of Protestantism is accompanied by a significant and still growing influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic beliefs and practices. Ethiopian Pentecost-alism began to emerge in the 1960s, but was marginalized and for the most part actively repressed during Haile Selassie's government and the *Derg*.[12] However, with the policies of religious freedom inaugurated by the EPRDF, Pentecostal churches have become a highly visible part of Ethiopian Protestantism, especially since their theology and practices have spread to mainstream Protestant churches as well, where speaking in tongues, ecstatic praise, prophesy, exorcisms, and healing prayers now are common phenomena. All of the large mainline Protestant denominations have accommodated Pentecostal beliefs and practices in their doctrinal statements and regulations,[13] and the conflation

of Pentecostalism and Protestantism has an organizational correlate in the Evangelical Churches' Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), which comprises Pentecostals and mainline Protestants at once. In public discourse, all Protestants are labeled "Pente", which at first was a polemic practice by the *Derg* to stigmatize all Protestants,[14] but now has become a self-designation for many of them as well.

Due to their previous repression under the *Derg*, most Protestants were in no need of a political realignment, perhaps with the exception of the EECMY, which after the murder of its general secretary Gudina Tumsa – an outspoken critic of the *Derg* – had taken a more compliant stance. Therefore, when the EPRDF came to power, the church's president, Francis Stephanos did not run for re-election due to his previous involvement in the *Shengo*.[15] There was, however, no further realignment or immediate political conflict in the church regarding this issue.

In general, Protestant churches have benefited greatly from the changes in religious policy. All of them immediately re-emerged in public in 1991 and successfully reclaimed their formerly dispossessed property. Despite occasional local difficulties, it became much easier for Protestants to secure land for churchconstruction and for burial grounds, which had been a notoriously difficult issue before. This is especially significant in areas to which they previously had hardly any access. In the largely Orthodox town of Bahir Dar, for example, Protestants erected tall churches on land granted to them by the government, which visibly compete with Orthodox buildings. This increased public visibility of Protestantism in Orthodox areas has led to a number of clashes and riots, during which government forces have usually protected the Protestant gatherings.[16]

The registration mandate was generally welcomed by Protestant churches, since for many of them – especially those not operating under the umbrella of foreign missions – this was the first time they could obtain official recognition. Moreover, the organizational requirements for registration and the legal recognition it awards are largely compatible with Protestant church models and their tendencies to grow via fragmentation. A list of registered associations obtained from the Ministry of Justice in 2004 indicates the mushrooming of Protestant associations. Of the 291 religious denominations, churches, and ministries in this list, the absolute majority belongs to the Protestant fold and many of them are Pentecostal or Charismatic.

The separation of church and state also has led to a noticeable increase of Protestants and Pentecostals in government positions, in effect weakening the former political influence of the EOC. The most prominent Protestant government official is the current foreign minister, Haile Mariam Desalegne, who belongs to the Hawariyat Church, a large Pentecostal denomination, which, however, is ostracized by all other Christians since it does not accept the dogma of the trinity.

So far, this new public space for Protestants has not been limited by the EPRDF in any significant way, but its policies nevertheless affect the churches' internal dynamics. One area for this is the ethnicization of politics. The issue has had an especially significant impact on the EECMY, which due to its mission history in Western Ethiopia has a strong Oromo base.[17] When the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fell out with the government in 1992 and resorted to armed struggle, the church tried to stay clear of political involvement with the OLF. At the same time, however, it resumed relations with the Berlin Mission, which is a vocal supporter of the OLF and actively aids its relief and development wing, the Oromo Relief Association (ORA). While this issue of whether and how to speak out on behalf of Oromo rights continues to be a politically difficult balancing act, the question of ethnicity erupted *within* the church over the use of the Oromo language in church services in Addis Ababa. A large number of Addis Ababa churches, resisting the introduction of Oromo language services, left the EECMY, registering under the name of Addis Ababa and Surrounding Mekane Yesus Church.[18] This spurred court cases regarding the use of the name and the property involved. After many negotiation attempts, the parties were officially reconciled in February 2010.[19]

In these kinds of church splits, which have also occurred in many of the other Protestant churches over different issues, the government functions as a regulatory power through its policies, especially the requirement of registration. The need to conform to certain standards with regard to uniqueness of name, organizational structures or financial oversight, imposes limitations on church fragmentation and simultaneously defines areas of church conflict. In some cases, like in the EECMY split, the government may even assume an active role in conflict resolution and the celebration thereof.[20] However, outside of these regulatory confinements, occasional executive issues of land allotment, and similar problems, there

are no indications of direct government influence in Protestant churches or political pressure on them.

### *Renegotiating central powers*

The violent co-optation of the EOC during the *Derg*, the expropriation of its property, and ideological campaigns against religion had curtailed the political power and independence of the church. Therefore, when the EPRDF came to power, the EOC leadership once again was strongly impacted, most evident in the replacement of the patriarch in 1991. This was a controversial process, which was driven by a conflation of government and church politics.

An internal observer's report of the Tenth Parish Council General Assembly in October of 1991 reveals a conflicting and deeply divided church.[21] Patriarch Merkorios is noted to have "verbally resigned in August due to illness and the pressure of work". A number of clergy and lay people apparently partook in public demonstrations, partially instigated by the General Secretary of the Church, who was then removed and replaced with a government appointee. This was a clear violation of the EPRDF's policy of non-interference in religious matters, but the underlying motives are unclear. While public demonstrations certainly were not acceptable to the new government, it is questionable whether the EPRDF was interested and capable of replacing the church's leadership only a few months after taking over Addis Ababa. Moreover, the absence of dissenting voices in the internal report may indicate that the faction who sought to replace the patriarch had already taken over within the church.

Political tensions resulting from the *Derg*'s deposition and replacement of Patriarch Theophilos now played out in reverse. The Holy Synod replaced its chairman in February 1992 and in June elected *Abuna* Paulos as the new patriarch, enthroned on 12 July 1992. Paulos was a protégé and political ally of the former Patriarch Theophilos, for whom he had worked as a contact person to the World Council of Churches (WCC), becoming Bishop for Ecumenical Affairs in 1975. When Theophilos was deposed and murdered by the *Derg* in 1976, Paulos was arrested as well, and held in prison until 1983. With the assistance of the WCC, he managed to leave Ethiopia and completed his PhD at Princeton University in 1988. While in the USA he reportedly clashed with his long-time acquaintance *Abba*

Yesehaq, the Archbishop of the Western Hemisphere Diocese, which is the umbrella diocese for Orthodox churches in Europe and America. Yesehaq seems to have arranged himself with the *Derg*-aligned hierarchies and defended the *Derg's* appointment of Theophilos' successor.[22] Paulos on the other hand, probably collected Ethiopians opposing the *Derg* in his New York church, and did not accept Yesehaq's authority. He, therefore, was the ideal candidate to reverse the politics of the church: standing in continuity with the uncanonically replaced Theophilos,[23] he was an opposition figure in exile and well established internationally.

Not surprisingly, it was Yesehaq who initiated and led the secession of the Western Hemisphere Diocese, when Patriarch Merkorios left Ethiopia for Kenya in 1992 and claimed that he had not abdicated willingly. The exiled synod attracted Ethiopian clergy who were opposed to Paulos's election and in 1997 Patriarch Merkorios relocated to the USA. The split proliferated to a number of Western cities, and in 2007 Merkorios anointed 13 bishops for the exile synod, which led to both factions excommunicating each other.[24] The exile synod claims that the election of Paulos, who is a Tigre like most high-ranking government officials, was an orchestrated coup by the EPRDF. However, other than the appointment of a new general secretary, there are no clear indications of direct government intervention,whereas it is clear that members of the church's hierarchy interested in reversing the previous political alignment effectively drove this process and used or welcomed government involvement in order to attain their goals.

This conflation of church and EPRDF politics and the central public role of Ethiopian Orthodoxy contributed to the politicization of the EOC. Paulos' opponents emphasize his ethnicity to paint him as a puppet of the EPRDF, and negative perceptions of the EPRDF usually translate into opposition toward Paulos as well.[25] In the bloody aftermath of the 2005 elections, many hoped for a critical statement from the church and interpreted its call for peace as support for the EPRDF. This in turn led to the heckling of Paulos during the Meskel celebrations in September of the same year.[26] The suppression of government-critical prophesying monks or *bahitawis* has played into this narrative, especially when in 1997 *bahitawi* Fekade Sellasie Tesfaye was shot and killed inside St Stephanos Church in Addis Ababa by one of Paulos' guards.[27]

### *Restricting public space*

As seen from the statistics above, Islam has not experienced such a dramatic increase in numbers as Protestantism. The most significant change during EPRDF rule was that Muslims have become far more visible within Ethiopian public space. Generally, the increasing visibility of Islam is evident by the mushrooming of mosques throughout the country, by the increase of "Muslim clothing", such as *hijab* among women, and skullcaps and white robes among males, as well as by the performance of religious ritual in public.

More specifically, the new political climate in the early 1990s contributed to the institutionalization of Islam. A first important step was the *de jure* establishment of the EIASC in 1991, and the restructuring and election of a new leadership in October 1992.[28] Other crucial organizations were the Ethiopian Muslim Youth Association and the Da'wa & Knowledge Association, both established in 1992. These organizations were heavily focused on "reviving Islam" and played decisive roles in making religious literature available, in the construction of mosques and in supporting various forms of *da'wa*.[29] The early 1990s also saw the emergence of a number of Islamic magazines and various publishing houses – engaged in importing and translating religious texts from Arabic as well as publishing works by indigenous Muslim writers.[30] Islamic education became more organized in the form of *madrasas* with teaching structured through classrooms, defined grade-levels, and syllabi. While such *madrasas* in various sizes appeared all over the country, a major one was the Awaliyah School & Mission Centre in Addis Ababa, which saw the adding of new departments and faculty during the 1990s. The school had been supported by the Saudi-based World Muslim League (MWL) since 1966, and in 1993, the formal ownership of the school was transferred to the International Islamic Relief Organization, a branch of MWL.[31]

While the developments leading to a more organized and visible Muslim community went relatively unchecked in the first half of the 1990s, the years 1995 and 1996 became a watershed for organized Muslim activities. With reference to the growth in the number of mosques all over the country and the increasing number of Muslims holding governmental and public positions, Christians were becoming gradually worried over Islam's increasingly visible role in public space. The government was similarly showing signs of concern over increased religious activism,which

they perceived to be a trend of politicization of Islam. This fear was amplified by a demonstration in Addis Ababa in November 1994, when Muslims demanded that the *shari'a* should be included as one of the bases for the national constitution. When worshippers at the al-Anwar mosque in Addis Ababa clashed with the police on 21 February 1995, leaving nine people killed and over 100 wounded, the government used this as an opportunity to crack down on unwanted developments within the Muslim community.[32] In the following days, hundreds of Muslims were imprisoned, suspected of involvement, and on 22 February, armed police surrounded the offices of the Ethiopian Muslim Youth Association. All those present were arrested, and the offices were closed. The situation worsened after the failed assassination attempt against the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak during his visit to Addis Ababa on 26 June the same year. Five of the attackers were killed on the spot, and it was later learned that the Egyptian organization *Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, allegedly with the assistance of Sudan, was responsible for the assassination attempt.[33] The incident led to continued arrests, and to the extradition of Egyptian and Sudanese nationals. In addition, the bomb attacks by the Somali *al-Itihad al-Islamiyya* on Ethiopian soil from May 1995 to April 1996 – and Ethiopia's retaliation – further fueled tensions.

The ruling party's reactions deprived Muslims of much of the freedoms they had acquired since 1991, and with the closure of Islamic organizations, it left the EIASC to emerge as the sole actor claiming to represent the Muslim population as a whole. The council's vast apparatus and its close links with the government have effectively enabled the latter to monitor and control developments within the Muslim community. The council has on its side proved to be a loyal instrument in curbing unwanted movements – in particular the Salafi movement, or the Wahhabis, as it is referred to locally. In January 2004, the EIASC voted to remove all executive members of the council, replacing them with staunch anti-Salafis. Interesting to note is that the voting session was attended by a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The hegemonic position of the EIASC has consequently impinged on the possibilities of forming alternative organizations, which has contributed to a situation in which Islam in Ethiopia is highly informal and de-institutionalized. An effect of this was, however, that the mosque became increasingly important, to a certain degree representing closed

space for the authorities and consequently encumbering their possibility to monitor the movements of the Muslim community.

The terror-attacks on 9/11 and increased geopolitical tensions in the region spurred increased concern from the ruling party, and Ethiopian Muslims were publicly accused of aspiring to political power based on radical religious ideas.[34] The EPRDF's fear of political Islam was exacerbated by the increasing strength of Islamist insurgents in Somalia, and the political takeover by the United Islamic Courts (UIC) in June 2006 sparked concern over its potential effects on Ethiopia's Muslim population.[35] The Ethiopian response came in late December 2006, when its forces crossed the border, swiftly ousting the weak, yet overconfident UIC from power. The military did not manage, however, to defeat the violent insurgent movement *al-Shabab*, which filled the vacuum left by the UIC and gradually grew in strength. In January 2009 the Ethiopian forces vacated Somalia, leaving it to the African Union forces (AMISOM) to deal with the Islamist insurgency. The EPRDF has, however, continued to meddle in Somalia by supporting political factions like the Sufi-oriented *Ahl al-Sunna wal Jama'a*, which it considers as representatives of amore "home-grown" tolerant and peaceful Islam – in contrast with Salafi actors perceived as representing a "foreign" militant Islam.

In convergence with this, the ruling party undertook several measures further restricting the public space of Muslims in Ethiopia. In May and November 2007, the Ministry of Education issued drafts for a law addressing the question of religious expressions in public schools. The constitutional tension between freedom of religious expression (art. 27) and the mandate to keep education free from religious influence (art. 90)[36] came to bear in the proposition to restrict the use of *hijab* and *niqab* in public schools, as well as the prohibition of congregational prayer within school premises.[37] Moreover, realizing that it was unable to monitor the activities within the growing number of mosques, the EPRDF issued, through the EIASC, in 2009 a registration form to the country's mosques, ordering them to submit information on how they were run, on their sources of income and whether the mosque was linked to any outside donors.[38] On 23 February 2009 the government issued a ban on all Muslim religious activities which had not been approved beforehand by the EIASC.[39] There were also unconfirmed reports saying that the security apparatus had issued a list of nearly 100 Muslims to be arrested.[40] No information on the background and

reasons for this is available, but it seems that regional instability was an important factor.

## Politics, religion, and the negotiation of public space

As seen so far, the combination of policies opening space for religious groups and executive actions imposing limits on the same have had different impacts on the religious communities. With regard to the EOC, still the most visible and influential religious force in Ethiopia, there seems to be a certain conflation of EPRDF and church interests, which arguably is driven more by internal church politics than direct government intervention. The growing visibility of the Muslim community, on the other hand, has been subjected to increasing regulations and limitations, which are partially connected to the larger geopolitical developments in the region. Protestant churches, in turn, have hardly been the target of direct government intervention and have largely profited from the enforcement of religious plurality, while being structurally influenced by some of the government's policies.

These different trajectories have forced religious communities to apply certain strategies when moving in this public space for religion, which become apparent in the production of disparate narratives for the legitimization of religion in society, and in the demarcation of inter- and intra-religious boundaries being played out in public once again.

### *Political narratives*

The EOC has reacted to its loss of political power by more or less reiterating its importance for the integrity and identity of the Ethiopian nation-state with historical and cultural arguments. A book published by the patriarchate in 1997 states, for example: "Our culture, our strength, our freedom, our unity and our basic teachings are built on the foundation of our church. Therefore our church is the symbol of unity and freedom for Ethiopia as a whole and all Ethiopians, and the center of spiritual and social ministry."[41] In a similar way, a history book published by the *Mahibere Kidusan*[42] affirms the centrality of the EOC by outlining its contributions to theadministrative and legal foundation of the country, its cultural and social life, the preservation of Ethiopia's heritage, and the promotion of tourism.[43]

Regretting the disintegration of this religio-political unity, the publication bemoans the “attacks of radical Islam and the spread of mosques” as an example of religious organizations which infringe the rights of the Ethiopian church and inflict attacks in the “name of freedom of religion and democracy”.[44] Moreover, the incursion of “heretics”, i.e. Protestants, is seen as a contributing factor to moral decay and social disintegration, since their insistence on salvation by grace and not by works has led to a decrease of “prayer, fasting, charity, self-control, solidarity, obedience, mutual respect, harmony, and similar goods”.[45] These and similar statements, pointing to the dangers of religious liberty in contrast to the benefits of a close state-church alliance, affirm the political aspirations of the EOC and simultaneously outline its political strategy of compensating for the loss of power. By pointing to the historical and cultural heritage, the idea of an essentially Orthodox Ethiopia is upheld and defended against the perceived threats of Westernization and Islamic growth.

The political outlook of many Protestants, on the other hand, appears to be one of overt de-politicization, articulated in narratives of persecution and of personal faith in Jesus Christ as the solution to all ailments of society. Especially Pentecostals have learned to tell their history as a story of oppression, and in a somewhat triumphalist manner they portray the present religious liberties and the growth of Protestantism as rewards for previously endured sufferings. This legacy of persecution is also accompanied by a verdict on past regimes. In his *Revival in Ethiopia* the Pentecostal historian Bekele Woldekidan reflects on the legacy of Haile Selassie’s government and tells how the emperor had been confronted with the gospel through various evangelists, but failed to stop the persecution of Pentecostals.[46] Bekele’s verdict is clear: “His government tried to stop God’s visitation, using the police force and judicial institutions. God in turn, used his own army and stopped that government.”[47] Though the *Derg* is seen here as God’s instrument to end imperial rule, it is soon judged in similar terms, since it too oppressed the revival movements. Such narratives of course contain an implicit political proclamation for present-day Ethiopia as well: the possibilities for Protestant evangelization define the character and survival prospects of Ethiopia’s governments. This missionary zeal is connected to the assumption that only converted and sanctified believers will be able to abstain from corruption, improve the economy, and bring social change that lasts. The former prime minister of the Transitional

Government, Tamrat Layne, became one of the most prominent proponents of this idea. In 1996 he fell out with Meles Zenawi, was imprisoned for 12 years on charges of fraud, and converted to Protestantism during this time. After his release he asserted that he would abstain from politics, since, in his opinion, Ethiopia could only be improved through people turning to Jesus Christ.[48] His testimony was given center stage in the biggest Pentecostal Church in Addis Ababa and received standing ovations.[49]

A notable exception to this overtly apolitical outlook may be the EECMY which holds a special political heritage in the memory of its former general secretary Gudina Tumsa. Especially during the transition period, the church attempted to revive Tumsa's political legacy and spoke out against different human rights violations.[50] However, in recent years there has been less evidence of such involvement, which arguably has to do with the ethno-political conflict in the midst of the church and the growing influence of the Pentecostal political narrative.

While the developments in 1995/96 impinged on Muslims' access to public space, they did not diminish their engagement in politics. It needs to be noted, though, that Muslim views on politics has taken a different form than the often portrayed notion of seeking power based on Islamic political preferences. The Salafis have in general refrained from partaking in political debates, yet their view on politics – as forwarded by a range of Salafi informants – has largely been congruent with the official secular paradigm of the EPRDF, in which they argue that in a heterogeneous religious society like Ethiopia, religious freedom and equality for the different groups can only be secured under a secular government.[51] The group most explicitly advocating involvement in politics is the so-called Intellectualist movement. Highly informal and devoid of any organizational structure, this rather elitist movement evolved around certain individuals advocating a set of ideas. It has been ideologically affiliated to the mainstream version of the Muslim Brotherhood, and has been actively disseminating the ideas of Hassan al-Banna, and in particular those of Yusuf al-Qaradawi to the Muslim public. Initially surfacing on the campuses of Addis Ababa University and other institutions of higher learning in the early 1990s, it soon gained popularity among Muslim students. Outside the campuses, the movement was able to exert influence through public lectures and through regular contributions in Islamic magazines. Referring to discrimination found in Ethiopia's past, the Intellectualists were much

concerned with the legitimate place for Muslims in Ethiopian society, worked for equal representation of Christians and Muslims in public life, and argued for the creation of a secular political environment safeguarding and facilitating mutual respect between the religions and their peaceful coexistence.

The resurgence of the *Takfir wal Hijra*[52] in Jimma around 2005 pointed to a politicization of Islam. Taking an exclusivist position towards both Salafi and non-Salafi Muslims, the group has moreover assumed a radical position toward the Ethiopian state, seen among others by their refusal to hold identity cards and to pay taxes. When this was stated publicly in 2009, the EPRDF decided to send in the army, leading to violent clashes with the Takfiris and to the imprisonment of allegedly over 1,500 men and women.[53] While the Takfiris probably see the establishment of an Islamist political order as desirable but unrealistic, they may opt for an isolationist strategy, detaching themselves from state and societal structures, seeking to carve out both symbolic and territorial space for the realization of their ideological preferences.

It seems that Muslims in the last decade have become increasingly critical of the EPRDF. From initially being supportive of the federal system and subscribing to the secularist ideology of the state's non-involvement in religious affairs, the lack of democratization in general, the regime's perceived bias towards the Christians, the intervention in Somalia, and the monitoring of the Muslim community are creating more negative attitudes towards the ruling party. A particularly burning issue is the ruling party's interference in the EIASC, which not only is seen as a breach of their constitutional rights, but also as depriving Muslims of independent representations and dividing them as a community.

### *Demarcating intra-religious boundaries*

The rise of Protestant Christianity has led to considerable tensions between the two Christian blocks, which are deepened by their different political narratives. Moreover, Protestants often invoke a renewal rhetoric which may turn into polemics, for example when they allege that the EOC has blurred the message of Christianity with its veneration of saints and elaborate ritual practices, and therefore must be brought back to the faith of the early church.[54] The resulting conflicts from these contrasting outlooks

are not only manifest in public riots and condemnations but run right through many families, where they frequently take on the nature of inter-generational conflicts.[55] The *Mahibere Kidusan* explicitly addresses this point by targeting the educated youth, but their apologetic and unnuanced characterization of Protestants arguably contributes to widening the gap.

The increasing "Pentecostalization" of Protestantism has further hardened the fronts. The highly visible and audible nature of Pentecostal services puts them into direct competition with the EOC, and their strict prohibition of alcohol and dancing tends to divide social activities and family gatherings. In addition, Pentecostalism has helped to vitalize and contextualize mainstream Protestant churches, putting them in more direct competition with Orthodox nationalism.

Pentecostalism has also reached the EOC itself in the form of Orthodox Charismatic movements, some of which have come into conflict and broken away from the church. The most prominent example of this was the Ammanuel Fellowship (now Ammanuel United Church), which began as a prayer fellowship in Nazaret in 1991, left the church in 1995, and became increasingly Protestant in the following years until it finally joined the ECFE in 2004. Similar groups aiming to stay within the EOC, often congregate in secret, because the division between the largely Pentecostal Protestants and Orthodox Christians has left little room for hybrid Charismatic identities.

Intra-religious tensions among Muslims have been much related to the growth of the Salafi movement. While the Salafis' attacks on pilgrimages to shrines, on saint veneration, and on other practices that are seen as "contaminating the true faith" have provoked tensions and divisions among Muslims in Ethiopia, Salafism experienced, at the same time, internal fragmentation with the surfacing of what may be referred to as the so-called Ahl al-Sunna movement, which attracted followers largely from the young generation. This faction favoured a stricter interpretation of the Salafi tenets, in many instances leading to conflict with senior Salafis. Pertinent issues that were addressed referred to morality and individual religiosity among the young generation in the 1990s, like agitating against alcohol, tobacco, *khat*, TV and pop-music, or prescribing certain codes of dress and personal appearance. The most radical wing of the Ahl al-Sunna came to be represented by the already mentioned Takfir wal Hijra grouping.

Intra-religious tensions in Ethiopia have also been related to the already mentioned Intellectualist movement and the *Tabligh*. The latter is probably the largest Islamic movement in Ethiopia, and seems to have arrived in Ethiopia in the early 1970s, by way of South African and Kenyan *Tabligh* missionaries, attracting followers among the Gurage community in Addis Ababa. Its activities remained limited under the *Derg*, resurfacing in 1991. Extensively focused on *da'wa*, Tabligh missionaries are sent out from its *markaz* (centre) in Kolfe area in Addis Ababa to various parts of the country. In accordance with *Tabligh*'s principle of self-reliance, all the missionaries are supposed to take care of their own expenses, thus making the movement independent from any outside funding.

### *Inter-religious relations*

Inter-religious relations in Ethiopia have deteriorated in recent decades, with an increase of skirmishes and violent clashes between Christians and Muslims. Many of the concrete conflicts between Christians and Muslims have been due to competition over public space in the literal sense – connected to construction of mosques or churches, as well as to celebrations of religious holidays. Clashes have mostly been of a local nature, the level of violence has been relatively low, and they do not reflect religiously coordinated efforts in augmenting tensions. Therefore, the inter-religious conflict and the high degree of violence that occurred around Jimma and in Beghi (Wollega) in 2006 and in 2010 came as a surprise to many. The conflict erupted in connection with the celebration of *Timket* in a village outside of Jimma, and gradually spread to the Beghi area. It resulted in casualties on both sides, churches were burned, and unconfirmed reports tell of Christians being forced to convert to Islam.[56] It is interesting to note that the group most actively involved in the conflict was said to "oppose paying tax to the government", detaching themselves from the Christians and denouncing other Muslims – pointing in the direction of the *Takfir wal Hijrah*.[57] Having said this, it is obvious that the conflict was far more complex.

The current fragile situation involves a number of disparate actors, and remains related to the particular legacy of Christian–Muslim relations in Ethiopia feeding into today's religious discourses within both the Christian and Muslim communities. Whereas the peaceful relationship between

Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia has often been celebrated by both Ethiopians and foreign observers, this remains a simplification of a far more complex picture. Christian–Muslim relations on the micro-level have been of a seemingly harmonic character, yet relations on the macro-level have in contrast been more antagonistic, shaped by recurrent conflicts in the past. From the Christian side, emerging as victorious from the historic inter-religious conflicts, this enmity in turn laid the foundation for pejorative and hostile attitudes towards Islam, as well as to a religious fault line in which Islam was perceived as a possible external threat. This has led to policies of alienation, marginalization, and subjugation, and the crucial point is that peaceful inter-religious coexistence to a large degree was made possible because of an asymmetric relationship between the two, in which Orthodox Christians controlled the main political institutions and defined the Muslims as second-class.

Since 1991, this pattern has been dramatically reversed. The rise in Muslim-Christian tensions is arguably due to the new religious plurality abolishing this asymmetry. As constitutional changes and political reforms have highlighted Ethiopia's religious diversity, feelings of hope and expectation have emerged as well as discomfort and fear. Christians are in general seeing the rapid growth of mosques and Muslim representation in public life as a proof of a strategy of Islamization. As was shown above, Orthodox Christians view this as a sign of a disintegrating Ethiopian nation, bemoaning that the "contemporary religious equilibrium is collapsing very quickly",[58] and becoming fearful of "Islamic fundamentalism" produced by local discourses, regional tensions and the global "war on terror" narrative. Whereas the latter notion is equally shared by Protestants, they are more emphatic in their attempts to convert Muslims in all regions of Ethiopia, partially combined with a perspective of "spiritual warfare" in combating "the evil forces of Islam". From the Muslim side, the more fragile relationship towards Christians has produced intense debates about their position in Ethiopiansociety and *vis-à-vis* the other religious groups. It has rekindled the image of being victimized, both in relation to the Orthodox understanding of Ethiopia as a "Christian Island", seen as continuation of past discriminatory sentiments, and in connection to the Protestant efforts to evangelize them.[59]

Leading to a more clear-cut demarcation of religiously marked boundaries, this divide is aggravated by the production of polemical

literature and audio-visual materials, via which both Muslims and Christians are forwarding negative images of the other. Books, VCDs, CDs and DVDs of this nature are made available for mass consumption, both as translations and as locally produced material.

## Conclusions

In contrast to previous governments, the EPRDF has sought to accommodate the role of religions in Ethiopian society. It has provided more space for the country's religions, separate from state and politics, and constitutionally enshrined religious equality and freedom of consciousness. However, the EPRDF has not fully succeeded in keeping religions and politics apart. As this article has demonstrated, the ruling party has been carefully monitoring the space it has provided, and has on numerous occasions interfered in religious matters.

Increased religious activism and fragile inter-religious relations have spurred Protestants, Orthodox and Muslims to create their own, and largely competing narratives on the meaning of Ethiopia. Drawing upon Ethiopian historiography in a highly selective manner, each of these narratives has generated particular perceptions of the "other" and politics in general. For the EOC, the EPRDF take-over has entailed a severe realignment, from the reversal of the political co-optation under the *Derg* to the loss of previous political privileges. Increasingly challenged by the growth of Protestantism, the church has sought to transcend the idea of religious equality by reiterating its centrality for Ethiopian history and identity, a notion which is contested by Protestants and Muslims alike.

Protestants have largely profited from the new political climate, which for the first time awarded them official recognition on par with the other religious communities. Their growth, however, is nevertheless shaped and guided by actions of the executive, most of all in relation to registration and land leases. Therefore, the prominence of the persecution narrative among Protestants can be read as an implicit protest against potential government overreach.

Among Ethiopia's Muslims there is an increasing yearning for building unity, in which religion is gaining ground as a point of identification. One question is whether this will supersede ethnic boundaries, and another question is how the Ethiopian government and the public will react to this

development. The lack of a real democratization process, the continued marginalization of Muslim communities – coupled with regional tensions and global conflicts – could potentially radicalize Ethiopian Muslims and lead to the emergence of groups favoring stronger detachment from the wider society and forwarding a more exclusivist agenda.

The emergence of a pluralized religious factor in Ethiopian politics is therefore connected to vital questions of nationhood, identity and representations, which are likely to remain significant as Ethiopia re-appropriates its legacy. In this sense religion constitutes a significant force and is likely to remain relevant in the years to come.

## Notes

1. The authors contributed equally to the writing of this article.
2. Cf. Haustein, “Navigating Political Revolutions”; for more details on the situation of the *shari’a* courts, see “Proclamation to Establish Kadi Courts,” *Negarit Gazeta* 1, no. 12 (1942); “Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of Naiba and Kadis Councils,” *Negarit Gazeta* 3, no. 62 (1944); Ibrahim, “Freedom of Religion”; Abdul, “Sharia Courts in Ethiopia.”
3. See Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 156; Teferra, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 274–84.
4. Meles Zenawi renounced Marxism-Leninism at about the same time as Mengistu Hailemariam, see Andargachew, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 362.
5. See Young, *Peasant Revolution*, 177.
6. Hussein, “Islam and Islamic Discourse.”
7. See Penal Code, §476; Criminal Code §482. Participation is fined with 500 or 1000 Birr, respectively, leaders can be put into prison for up to six months or up to 12 months.
8. “Legal Notice No. 321 of 1966: Regulations Issued Pursuant to the Control of Associations Provision of the Civil Code of 1960,” *Negarit Gazeta* 26, no.1 (1966): 1–10, here §8(1).
9. Traditional religions (2.7%), Catholicism (0.7%) and others (0.6%) form a small minority. These numbers have been criticized, most of all by the Muslim community. See e.g. “Ethiopia: Muslim Critics Reject National Census for ‘Missing Millions’,” *Jimma Times*, December 27, 2007. http://jimmatimes.com/article.cfm?articleID=31653 (accessed September 23, 2010)
10. Central Statistical Authority, *The 1984 Population*, 60.
11. Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population*, 129.
12. See Haustein, *Writing Religious History* for a comprehensive treatment.
13. See ibid., 19–22.
14. See Donham, *Marxist Modern*, 144.
15. Cf. Eide, *Revolution and Religion*, 243–5; Gemechu, “A Church Under Challenge,” 128.
16. See Tsega, “Protestant Mission Activities”; U.S. Department of State, “Ethiopia International Religious Freedom,” for such occurrences in Bahir Dar (1994) and Mekele (2003).
17. Cf. Haustein, “Navigating Political Revolutions,” 124–30.
18. See Gemechu, “A Church Under Challenge,” 137–42; Mitiku, “The Challenge of Language,” 27–38. The breakaway faction initially was led by the former president of the EECMY, Francis Stephanos.
19. “Separated Mekane Yesus Churches Declare their Unification.” http://www.eecmy.org/?page=!news&article=32 (accessed October 20, 2010).
20. Cf. ibid.

21. Cook, “Observer’s Report.”
22. See Abuna, *The Ethiopian Tewahedo Church*, 89–92.
23. The Coptic Church had never recognized the *Derg*-appointed patriarchs, arguing that unless Abuna Theophilos’ death was confirmed, a new appointment would be uncanonical. The selection of a disciple of Theophilos and the ecclesial burial of Theophilos’ remains one day before Paulos was installed also signify the attempt to restore canonicity and the recognition of the Coptic Church.
24. See Ethiopian Orthodox Church, “Resolutions”; Legitimate Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, “Letter of Excommunication.”
25. See http://www.ethiopianreview.com.
26. Cf. “The 2005 Ethiopian Election Timeline.” http://www.abbaymedia.com/2005_Ethiopian_Election_Timline.htm (accessed October 22, 2010).
27. See Ethiopian Human Rights Council, “Illegal Detention.” The monk had intended to hand a petition to the Patriarch, while Paulos’ guards apparently believed that he wanted to assassinate him.
28. Hussein, “Islam and Islamic Discourse,” 789f.; Nuredin, “The Establishment of the Supreme Council.”
29. Østebø, “Localising Salafism,” 240.
30. Hussein, “Islamic Literature.”
31. Bawer, “The Development of Islamic Propagation,” 79; Nega, “The History of the Awaliyya School.”
32. The incident seems to have been spurred by internal rivalry within the Addis Ababa Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. See Abbink, “An Historical-Anthropological Approach,” 118; Hussein, “Coexistence and/or Confrontation,” 17.
33. This was according to reports in *Addis Zemen*, June 27 and July 5, 1995 and in *Africa Confidential*, June 7, 1995.
34. For some examples of the public Ethiopian debate, see Hibret, “Proof of Wahabi”; Alem, “Saudi-Arabia’s Wahabism”; Johannes, “The Emergence of Radical Islam.”
35. Barnes and Hassan, “The Rise and Fall,” 4.
36. See Corazza, “State and Religion,” 367.
37. Ministry of Education, *Rules and Regulation*; Ministry of Education, *How to Prevent and Solve Religious Challenge*.
38. The order was formally issued by EIASC (letter to the district Islamic Affairs Bureaus, March 25, 2009). The registration form is available at http://blog.ethiopianmuslims.net/negashi/?p=353 (accessed April 29, 2010).
39. “Information on the decrees made by the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council,” letter from EIASC, February 23, 2009.
40. These have been posted on the website http://blog.ethiopianmuslims.net/negashi/ saying that the government in February/March 2009 planned to carry out a massive campaign against the Muslims.
41. General Secretariat, *Ye’ītyop’ya bēte kristīyan tinantinana zārē* [Ethiopia’s Church Yesterday and Today], 7.
42. The *Mahibere Kidusan* is an Orthodox youth movement that emerged from a number of university student groups looking to preserve their religious tradition during the *Derg*. It was officially accepted by the EOC Sunday School Department in May 1990. The *Mahibere Kidusan* supports and promotes various church activities among youths, and by strengthening youth identification with the Orthodox Church it seeks to protect the church from further incursions of Protestantism, and also from a perceived threat of Muslim fundamentalism. See Mahibere, “Who is Mahibere Kidusan,” ch. 3.

43. Cf. Mengistu and Asamenu, *Yebēte kristīyan tarīk* [Church History], 181–95.
44. Ibid., 164–9.
45. See also Esubalew, *Yegehanem dejoch* [Gates of Hell].
46. See Bekele, *Rīvayval* [Revival], 115–50.
47. Ibid., 139.
48. See http://www.ethiopianmuslims.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=141 (accessed October 21, 2010).
49. See http://www.ethiopianreview.com/content/8226 (accessed October 21, 2010).
50. See Gemechu, "A Church Under Challenge," 133–6.
51. The Oromo Salafis have, on the other hand, been clearly supportive of the Oromo ethno-nationalist movement and the OLF, indicating that Salafism as a transnational movement has been unable to surpass ethnic boundaries. However, the internal frictions within OLF in recent years seem to have defused much of the ethno-nationalistic fervor among the Oromo and increased their disillusions.
52. *Takfir wal Hijra* first arrived in Ethiopia in 1992 from Sudan. It was soon denounced by the Salafi establishment and by Muslim scholars in general, causing its eventual decline. The word *Takfir* refers to the issue of declaring a fellow Muslim an apostate. The practical consequence in Ethiopia has been that followers of the *Takfir wal Hijra* refuse to pray with other Muslims in the mosques and organize their own celebrations of Muslim holidays.
53. Interview, Addis Ababa, February 20, 2010.
54. Cf. Memher, *Gedil weys gedel?* [Saint or Abyss?]; Sereqe, *Ts'elot zemutān* [Prayer to the Dead].
55. See Data, "Changing Youth Religiosity."
56. For more details, see Østebø, "Localising Salafism," 280.
57. Zelalem, "The 2006 Religious Conflict," 81.
58. Medhane, "Ethiopia: Religion."
59. Muslims were highly provoked by the extensive celebration of *Timket* (Epiphany) in 2010. They saw it as an explicit demonstration of Orthodox power, and viewed its semi-officialcharacter as a proof of the authorities' religious biases (interview, Addis Ababa, February 16, 2010).

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# Overlapping nationalist projects and contested spaces: the Oromo–Somali borderlands in southern Ethiopia

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Over the past few decades the inhabitants of the Oromo–Somali borderlands of southern Ethiopia have encountered three competing nationalisms: Ethiopian state nationalism (patriotism), Somali ethno-nationalism (irredentism), and Oromo ethno-nationalism. The territories and peoples claimed by each competing nationalism overlap. In the 1960s and 1970s Somali irredentist claims predominated, and generated a severe Ethiopian response. In the post-1991 period, claims and counter-claims over territories around the borders of the Oromia and Somali ethno-national regional states of Ethiopia became the centre of conflicts. These claims specifically contest water points, tracts of land, ritual sites and towns. The ethno-territorial contestation and negotiation between the Oromia and Somali ethno-national regional states are mirrored and explained at the local level by disputes and conflicts between the Borana and Garri pastoralists, who have reformulated their longstanding competitions over pastoral resources along the new political dispensation. This article examines the multi-faceted interactions between state patriotism, ethno-nationalisms, irredentism and ethno-federalism in these borderlands from the 1960s to the present.

Since the 1970s three competing nationalisms have contested in the Oromo-Somali borderlands of southern Ethiopia. From the 1960s, Somali nationalism was established around the idea of a “Greater Somalia”, “a political and symbolic construction”[1] aimed at unifying all Somali-inhabited territories of Northeast Africa into one Somali national state.[2] This Somali irredentism “celebrates cultural particularities”:[3] cultural markers are considered more important features of the Somali nation than are territorial borders. This challenged the Ethiopian defence of the sovereignty of the old colonial borders of the region, and led inevitably to conflict. While Somalia and Ethiopia clashed over their definitions of the nation, Oromo nationalism emerged from within Ethiopia with a third concept of the nation and its

sovereignty, born out of resistance to Amhara domination.[4] In 1973, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was founded, and it began a campaign of guerrilla warfare in 1976 in the Charchar Mountains, eastern Ethiopia, in an area not far from the Oromo-Somali borderlands.[5] The OLF demanded the creation of an independent Republic of Oromia, comprising territory already claimed by both Ethiopia and Somalia. Like Somali nationalism, Oromo nationalism celebrated cultural features, while rejecting existing territorial boundaries.

The emergence of OLF as a political actor, with a newly imagined map, therefore collided with both the Ethiopian and the Somali nationalists in the 1970s. These three nationalist bodies claimed overlapping territory around the Oromo–Somali borderlands, their struggles even transcending the international border into the Somali and Oromo inhabited areas of northern Kenya (see Figure 1). While the Somali and Oromo nationalists set out political programmes that aimed at “liberating their nations from the Ethiopian conquest”, they also developed a deep-rooted mistrust of one another. Sharing a definition of nationalism that emphasized cultural factors, they nonetheless competed over the same territorial claims, irrespective of ethnic boundaries.[6] This ambiguity is exemplified by theSomali proverb, “Wherever the camel goes, that is Somalia”. This proverb was used rhetorically by the Republic of Somalia to encompass its direct claim to huge swathes of territory occupied by Oromo herders.

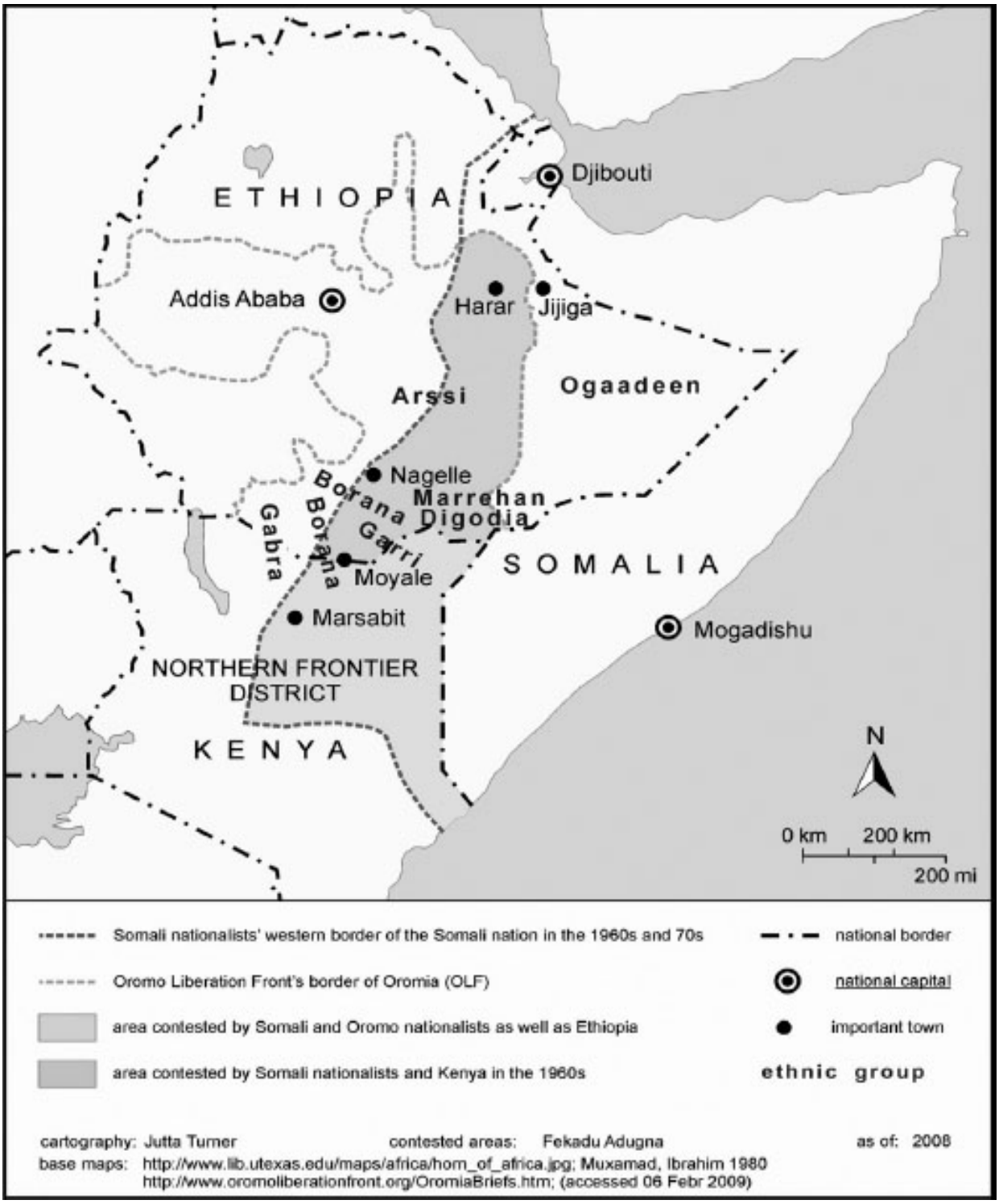


Figure 1. Contested territory and overlapping claims of nationalists around Oromo–Somali borderlands in the 1960s and 1970s.[7]

In 1975, the Republic of Somalia established a political party for the people they designated as the “Oromo speaking Somalis”. The Somali Abo

Liberation Front (SALF) was established to organize the people who lived in the contested areas under the Somali banner.[8] *Abo*! is a friendly form of addressing a man in *Afaan* Oromo. It means "Hey man!", the equivalent term in Somali being *Wariya*! The "Somali *Abo*" was therefore used for the Somali who use *Abo*! form of address and thus implied Oromo-speaking Somali roots.[9] The "Somali *Abo*" were sometimes referred to as Somali *Galbeed* (meaning, the Western Somali), a term used by Somali nationalists for the Somali population in Ethiopia. The groups which the Somali nationalists designated the "Oromo-speaking Somali" included Somali clans who speak the Somali language, such as Ogaaden, Marrehaan and Degodia, but it also includes diverse Oromo-speaking groups such as Garri, Gabra, Gurra, Borana and Arssi. These so-called "Oromo-speaking Somali" did not all share a common sense of their identity. Some were comfortable with the label "Oromo-speaking Somali", while others resisted it and asserted their identification with the Oromo. The SALF was created by the Republic of Somalia as a means to bring all of these groups more firmly within the scope of the Somali nation – that is, to make them accept a Somali identity. The OLF, on the other hand, considered these same groups as part of the Oromo nation, based on language and culture.[10] As Markakis explains:

> OLF claims in Harar and Bale [and Sidamo] provinces overlapped significantly with those put forth by the Western Somali Liberation Front. The regime in Moqadisho regarded the OLF as superfluous and suggested they join the Somali and Abo Liberation Front. However, the youthful Oromo nationalists regarded SALF as misguided at best, because it did not recognize the existence of the Oromo nation and, at worst, as a tool of the Somali.[11]

Mutual suspicion between the Somali nationalists supported by the Republic of Somalia and Oromo nationalists led by the OLF continued throughout the period of the Ethiopia-Somalia war.[12] Then, after both the Somali national army and the SALF guerrilla were defeated in 1978, the OLF was allowed to open offices in Mogadishu and Hargeissa in 1980. However, the OLF offices were closed down again in 1982 as the negotiation between the OLF and the SALF failed to bear fruit. Competition and animosity heightened between them considerably after 1991, when Ethiopian politics was reconfigured in a way that gave the Oromo and Somali nationalists more space in which to further the politics of ethnic identity. Since then, nationalist politics has come to shape local struggles throughout the Oromo–Somali borderlands in important ways. This article

examines those local struggles for nationalist recognition within the borders of Ethiopia.

The first part of this article will consider the impact of Ethiopia's new federalist policy of the early 1990s upon the competing nationalisms of the Oromo–Somali borderlands. The next section will explain how these nationalist arguments have reframed struggles between local pastoralists in the region, this being demonstrated by two case studies: the first dealing with Borana, the second with Garri. The final section will look at the effect of the recent Ethiopian political referendum in the area, specifically through the example of the town of Moyale and its hinterland.

## The "re-mapping" of Ethiopia

Upon gaining power in 1991, the long-standing political programme of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) evolved into a Provisional Charter, the document by which the country was ruled up until 1994. The Charter secured support from other ethnic-based political parties, including the Oromo and Somali, the OLF being widely credited as among the co-authors of the Charter.[13] In 1994, the Provisional Charter was refashioned into the constitution of the country.[14] According to that constitution, the country was reorganized into nine putatively autonomous regional states and two city states. Six of the regional states (Afar, Amhara, Harari, Oromia, Somali and Tigray) are ethno-national regional states. The remaining three regional states, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz, are multiethnic states, but are ethnically organized at the sub-state levels. Generally, depending on the size of their population, ethnic groups were organized into regional state, provincial or district statuses.[15] Accordingly, the new political structure has "re-mapped" Ethiopia after more than one century of unitary state organization.[16]

This has had two very important effects on identity politics and its relation to contestation over space. The first is that ethnicity as a defining principle of the state organization in Ethiopia is now intertwined with resources. The emphasis on identity has encouraged "the further strengthening of ethnicity as a political identity".[17] To benefit from the new ethnic-based opportunity structure, new ethnic groups have continuously emerged since the implementation of ethnic federalism. These groups are

represented in the House of Federation, the second chamber of the bicameral parliament. Between 1995 and 2000 the number of officially recognized ethnic groups was 58. From 2001 to 2008 the figure climbed to 74.[18] The second effect has been to highlight and emphasize the importance of the definition of territorial borders between ethnic groups. Ethnic federalism equates ethnic groups with administrative units. This has played a significant role in solidifying ethno-territoriality and ethno-administrative borders.[19]

As soon as the Oromia and Somali national regional states were established, they engaged in protracted claims and counter-claims over territories along their nominal but indistinct borders.[20] At the height of the problem, 430 *kebele* (territorial units of the lowest level of administration) were contested between Oromia and Somali national regional states. These territories are more or less the areas over which war raged in the 1970s, so the present conflicts have a deeper political continuity. Old struggles have thus been given a new frame of reference. These connections are understood locally and seen as a significant element in current disputes, as this statement from a senior official of the Oromia national regional state shows:

> I very much wondered why the Somali are so bitter about land. For instance, we had border problems with the Gurage. Then, we negotiated, they took some part and we took the remaining part peacefully. But the Somali's is a special case. During Siad Barre, they [Somali] claimed anything east of the Rift Valley. They have also claimed the people on the territory east of the Rift Valley as their lost tribes… How can I be considered as a lost tribe of the Somali? Yes we know that we are all Cushitic … Now, again look, they claimed places such as Shashemene, Adama … Siad Barre's ideology had trickled down to the Somali community. To end this kind of claim, we decided to create a domestic border.[21]

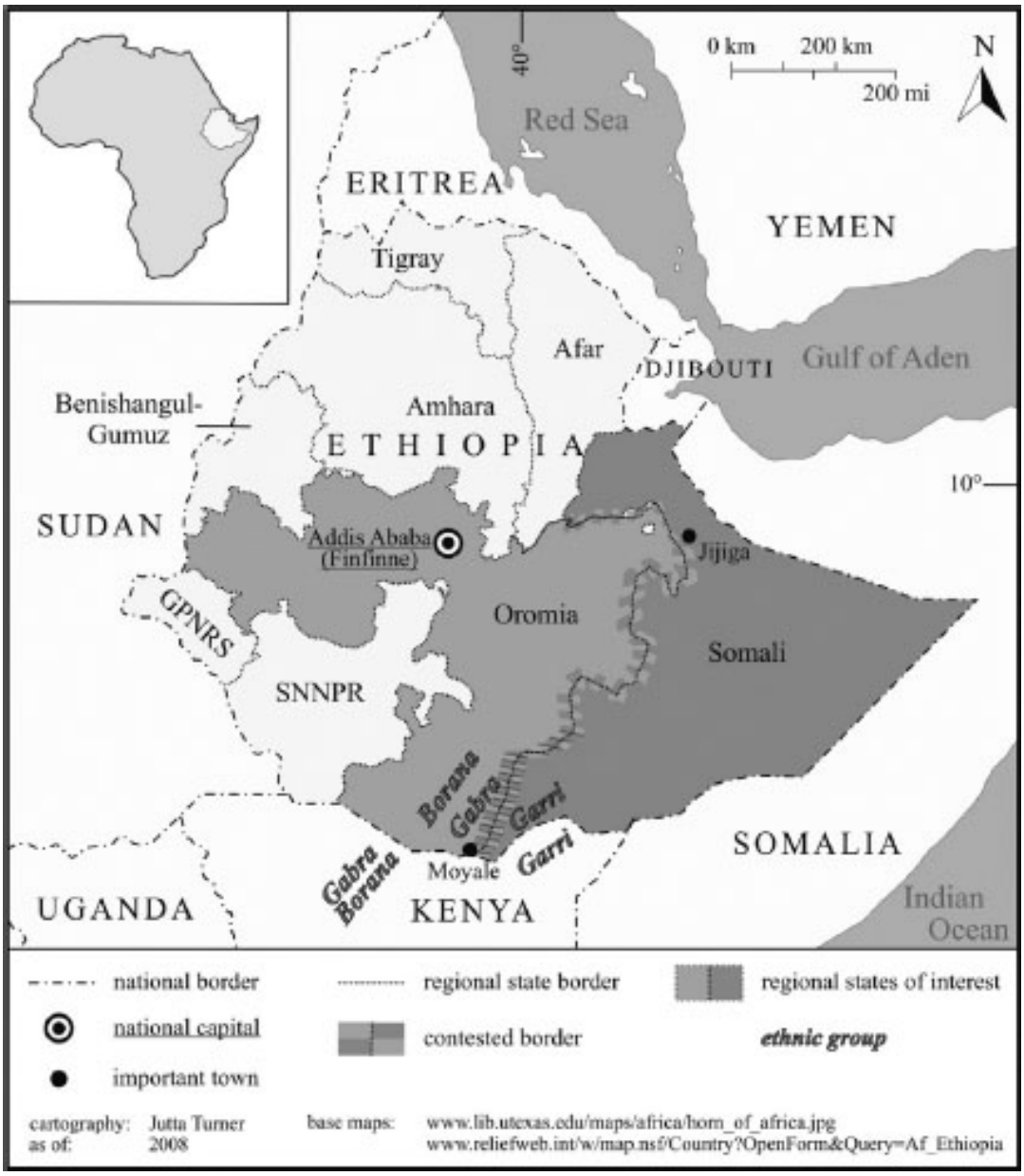


Figure 2. The regional states of Ethiopia and the contested border of the Oromia and Somali national regional states.[22]

The Ethiopian government claims that the strategies to settle the conflicts around the ethno-national borders such as the Oromia-Somali border conflict have been embedded within the constitutional framework of the state. A central tool of these in-built mechanisms of conflict resolution, the state claims, is undertaking referenda to decide the fate of contested territories by a simple majority vote. According to the constitution of Ethiopia, "All state border disputes shall be settled by agreement of the concerned states. Where

the concerned states fail to reach agreement, the House of Federation shall decide on the basis of settlement patterns and the wishes of the peoples concerned".[23] "Peoples' interest shall be ensured in a secret ballot referendum; …".[24]

In 1994, a team was organized by Prime Minister Tamirat Layneh to study the problem of the Oromia and Somali borders. The seven members of the team were drawn from the National Election Board (NEB), Central Statistical Agency (CSA), and the Tigray and Gambella national regional states, led by an official from the office of the Prime Minister. Based on the results of an initial brief study, the team divided territories into Oromo and Somali territories. The inhabitants of these border areas were hardly consulted in this process.[25] The Somali national regionalstate soon opposed the procedure, and finally rejected the ruling. The Somali officials argued that the ruling was unconstitutional, as the issue should have been adjudicated through the House of Federation, not to the office of the Prime Minister.[26] The Prime Minister himself was detained shortly afterwards on charges of corruption, and this led the Somali national regional state to question his decisions further. As this squabble continued, the dimensions of the dispute widened.

In September 2000 a second initiative was launched, when more than 1000 elders, local elites and officials representing the two regional states, met in Addis Ababa. The Ministry of Federal Affairs presided over the meeting, where the key announcement was the decision to undertake a referendum.[27] Implementation of this decision took a further four years, during which time the term *rifirendemii* came to dominate local political rhetoric. Recognizing the importance of the referendum, numerous state and NGO-sponsored meetings, as well as traditional gatherings, were organized to discuss and explain the process and its implications. Local district officials took up the task of encouraging widespread participation in the vote, so that people could be seen to have exercised their rights.[28]

The impact of the planning for the referendum was to make ethnicity and territoriality the key features of all local politics. This can be seen most clearly by examining local politics more closely, and we will now do so through two studies, focusing on conflict among the Borana and the Garri, two pastoral peoples inhabiting the Oromo–Somali borderlands straddling the Ethiopia-Kenya border. The Borana are part of the Oromo nation, and according to the new map of post-1994 Ethiopia they are part of the Oromia

national regional state. The Garri are a Somali clan and they are included in the Somali national regional state. The two have historically shared common territory over a wide area, and the boundaries between them are constantly shifting. Livestock is their most important asset, their pastoral lifestyle being characterized by the mobility of herders and animals in an arid or semi-arid environment. In the southern pastoral rangelands especially, water is the main, but scarce, resource. The pastoralists depend on few water points, which they use by arranging their herding schedule based on seasonality: dry and wet season grazing patterns dictate movement and settlement, and this of course requires a degree of flexibility. Not surprisingly, the referendum stirred up debates about the relevance of fixed borders among pastoralists. Some local elders on both sides came to the conclusion that the fixing of boundaries was unwelcome, as it would limit their opportunistic use of the rangelands. In 2002, united by these practical problems and galvanized by a local civic organization, 25 Borana and 25 neighbouring Somali elders petitioned the office of the Prime Minister protesting against the referendum.

Such protests did not divert the determination of the state to hold the referendum. As local actors came to appreciate that the borders would be delimited come what may, they reacted by taking pre-emptive actions to control key resources, such as water points. Both sides began scrambling for territory out of fear of exclusion. Claims and counter-claims were now articulated in terms of rights of entitlement to the territories. They framed their arguments in terms of historical and traditional ownership to resources, ritual sites as well as the political and legal aspects. Let us now look briefly at how these processes played out in the cases of the Borana and Garri.

## Traditional ownership rights: the Borana argument

### *(i) Contested borders and wells*

Borana livelihoods are based on cattle husbandry, while the Garri are mostly dependent on camel herding.[29] Cattle must be watered every three days as compared to the camels that need watering every 10 to 15 days. Wells or water holes are the foremost important resources for the Borana. Out of about 40 clusters of wells, nine deep wells (*tulla*) (see Figure 3) are the most reliable and form the base of the Borana pastoral economy. The position of these wells in the Borana's economy and social identity was evoked with ever more vigour as the politics of the referendum heightened.

Borana territorial claims and counter-claims focused on the wells. The Borana frame the connection with their wells in symbolic terms. They liken a well to a wife. The proverb, "*Eeli niitidha*" (a well is a wife), is used to express the social position of a well in the Borana's life. When an individual engages in a marriage, his close clan members contribute bridewealth. Among the Borana, thus, a wife belongs to the clan of her husband, and if the husband dies she would be inherited by a clan member, in most cases by a brother of the deceased. The children begotten by the new husband would be called after the dead husband. The first husband would never be forgotten. Similarly, even if a well is dug or at least the initial digging is done by an individual owner called *konfi*, after the name of the stick Borana use for digging the earth, clan members contribute to the expense of the digging of the well. In terms of ownership rights, a well is named after a clan – it is a clan well, even in the cases when an individual invested a larger proportion of the expense. However, the name of the *konfi* would be celebrated forever. Even after his death the *konfi* would not be replaced by another. The analogy is often drawn by informants. At least at a discourse level, the Borana said voting on their well during the referendum was tantamount to voting for the ownership of one's wife. The Borana *abba gadaa*, Liban Jaldessa, told me that:

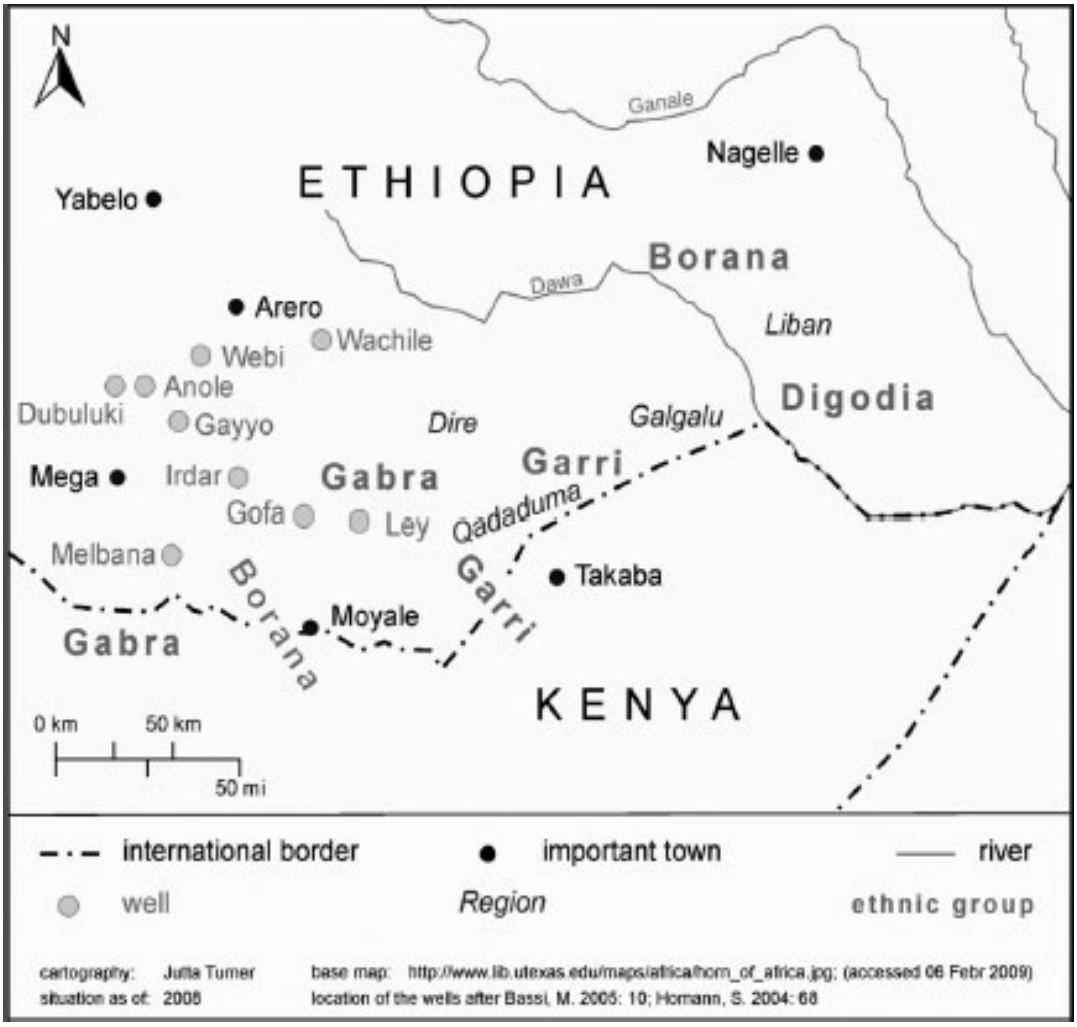


Figure 3. The nine well clusters and other important places.[30]

> On the side of the Borana *rifirendemii* would not be accepted. Borana will not vote. We say well is a wife (*eelli niitidha*). Should one vote to gain or lose his wife? This is a shame …. Borana will not vote.[31]

This cultural representation of the political process manifest the Borana's position from this influential traditional leader's point of view, though it was not shared by some Borana officials who were doing their best to convince the mass to participate in the referendum. The wells were also the focal point of articulation of opposition politics and inciting the Borana to stand against the ruling party during election. During the May 2005 election, a Borana elder countered the ruling party in a public election campaign in Mega town, Dirre district (100 kilometres north of Moyale) saying, "How can the Borana vote for the EPRDF looking at the Gofa wells across the border under the

Garri's control?"[32] The Gofa well cluster is one of the nine most reliable well clusters. It had been under the Borana's control until 1995, when two of these nine well clusters (Gofa and Leyi) were delimited to the Somali national regional state by the office of the Prime Minister (see Figure 3 for the location of the nine well clusters). It was not by coincidence that the opposition won overwhelmingly in the two districts of Moyale and Dirre, where the people felt victims of the border delimitation, notwithstanding considerable electoral constraints.

### *(ii) Ritual sites as contested spaces*

The Borana also refer to ritual sites (*ardha jilaa*) when contesting over territory. The majority of the Borana adhere to traditional religion and practice, an age and generation set called *gada*.[33] The Borana *gada* council makes a pilgrimage to perform ritual ceremonies. The *gada* leaders start their pilgrimages from Dirre, crossing the Dawa River to Liban to perform rituals at prescribed sites (see Figure 3 for the place names). They follow the same routes from Liban to Dirree, adopting customary practices (*aada*) at each ritual site. Bypassing or abandoning a site is considered an offence to the *aada*, and may result in adverse effects, yet two of the ritual sites (Siiru and Ejerssa Filtu) in this circuit were placed under the Somali national regional state from 1995.

In July 2003, the Borana *gada* leaders performing these rituals insisted on entering the Somali national regional states to reach Siiru and Ejerssa Filtu. Traditionally, such access would be permitted regardless of who controlled the territory around the ritual sites at any time. But with the referendum looming the politics of this were transformed. From the Somali side, it was interpreted that allowing the *gada* leaders to perform the ritual on the territory they consider their own was tantamount to approving that the land indeed belonged to the Borana. A Somali militia therefore denied the Borana elders access to the two contested sites. This forced the federal government of Ethiopia to interfere. After lengthy negotiations, the *gada* leaders were allowed to travel by truck and perform the rituals at both sites on the same day,slaughtering animals at the sites under the protection of the Ethiopian army. The Borana's notion of territoriality at these sites did not imply possession or effective occupation: it was enough to be recognized as the traditional owner in order to gain access. But the politics of ethnic

territory has led to these sites now being interpreted in terms of identity politics, and the previous mutual tolerance and accommodation of interests have diminished. By claiming a special relation with the wells and evoking the connection to the ritual sites, the Borana are now seen to be trying to make their case in terms of a powerful symbolic link to the land.

## Empowering the state: the Garri argument

The idea of a referendum was first discussed and agreed to by the Garri elders. The Garri Sultan also met the president of Oromia national regional state, and suggested that a referendum would be the only acceptable way of sharing the land.[34] The Garri political elite convinced their elders that the referendum would benefit them, as they expected it would legitimize their occupation of the two well clusters at Gof and Leyi. While discussing traditional ownership rights, a Garri elder presented his position as follows:

> We have met with the Borana elders in a number of meetings. They opposed *rifirendemii*. They say land has custom. They list names of places where they perform *falfala* [sorcery]. That is nonsense for us [the narrator is Muslim]. They also list names of wells. Let me tell you. I travelled to Somalia. I found places such as Garba Harre, Geedo, Boru Hache … They are Borana names …. They may indicate that the Borana have once settled there. On the other hand, in the Guji country you find a place name called Adola. Adola is a name of my apical ancestor; you get it in Garri genealogy. There is also a place called Gaara Garri [Garri's Mountain] in Guji country. Do you know Melbana around Mega? That is a Somali word that means a plain area. These may show that the Garri settled there in the past. Can we claim it back today? No. It is impossible. Borana should think the same way. Now, we are under the state law. This state is different from the previous one. There is a clear rule to divide our land from their land. In one of the meetings, I told them the proverb, "A man cannot marry his own sister just because she is beautiful". Everything has a rule. The Borana have to respect the law of the state.[35]

This Garri informant clearly undermines the rhetoric of traditional ownership rights, and is strongly in favour of using the constitutional provision of the referendum. The Borana are told that they must "respect the law of the state". Whereas the Garri informant lists names and places to confuse the basis of existing claims, the Borana do the opposite – seeing names of places as evidence of their historical and traditional ownership over them. The referendum and the associated legal aspects are considered by the Garri as instruments of emancipation from the Borana's argument for traditional rights of ownership. The Garri embrace of modern legalism is palpably pragmatic politics.

## The referendum

The referendum eventually took place in November 2004, organized and supervised by the National Election Board. The pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and towns people occupying the contested territories around the Oromo–Somali border cast ballots to decide their fate. Basically, the choice posed was to decide which administrativeregion (Oromia or Somali) each contested area would be assigned to. Inevitably, as "politics and ethnicity are interwoven",[36] the mobilization for the vote became essentially one of ethnic identity.[37]

The process was "successfully" undertaken in 422 *kebele*, according to official sources. The outcome was that the Oromia national regional state won 323 *kebele*, while the Somali national regional state won 99 of the contested *kebele*. The ballots of a few *kebele* were rejected for procedural reasons, and in Moyale the process was aborted (as we will discuss below).[38]

Beyond the numerical result of who won what, the referendum did not result in peaceful sharing of resources and co-existence of the neighbouring Oromo and Somali peoples. In some areas the referendum's result itself became part of the on-going conflict. If anything, the staging of the referendum led to an increase in conflicts. In many areas where the border was to be delimited by the referendum, previous good social relations between people of differing ethnic identity deteriorated. Conflicts over access to dry season grazing were especially acute. Garri and Borana herders fought two deadly wars during the long dry season of 2008, and another in February 2009 in which more than 300 people died and close to 70,000 people were displaced.[39] Violence of this kind was not usual in this region before the referendum was mooted, and must be viewed as the "results of the heightened intervention of the state in the local economic and legal affairs".[40] Nowhere was this more apparent than in the town of Moyale, where rivalries between Borana and Garri were particularly acute. Let us now consider the example of Moyale in greater detail.

## Moyale: a contested town[41]

> Two governments, two flags, two police forces … this is impossible! Mating is only possible when there is only one bull in the kraal. When there are two, they will fight it out.[42]

Located at the extreme south on the Kenyan border, the Ethiopian town of Moyale was initially a military post established to control the border of the Ethiopian empire against the British in Kenya. The Ethiopian Moyale town became the capital of Moyale district in the 1930s. This was changed to the Oromia Moyale district in 1991. In 1995, the Somali national regional state established its own Moyale district, inhabited by the Garri, and opened administrative offices in the same town, Moyale.[43] Since then, political control of Moyale has been contested between the Borana and Garri at the local level, and by the Oromia national regional state and Somali national regional state in the national political arena. Currently, there are two competing administrative structures based in the same town, one for Oromia and one for Somali. Each has a mayor, a police force, a custom office, its own Inland Revenue, prison houses and so on. In Moyale "everything is double", as the locals mockingly say. Some institutions are under the influence of both the Oromia and Somali administrations. A good example is the water service in the town. The office in charge of water distribution in Moyale town is under the Oromia national regional state, whereas the well at Gofa, which is the only water source that supplies the town, is controlled by the Somali national regional state. The two groups have used the water supply as a political weapon against one another, causing water shortages in the town.

The competing state structure is a real challenge for the residents of Moyale. The general trend has been for Borana to use the Oromia national regional state offices, and Garri to use the Somali national regional state offices. But what are those of other ethnic backgrounds supposed to do? Many Gabra residing in Moyale find themselves divided by this quarrel. Amanuel Gobe, a Burji elder, has been living in Moyale for more than half a century: he reflected on the practical meaning of the dual and competing administrative systems in Moyale by using the analogue of his own household:

> This is my house. I am the husband and head of the household. I give direction and lead the household members. But imagine what would happen if there were two husbands, that would mean two heads. Both will give two different and contradictory directions. In Moyale we are living under two husbands who give two different and conflicting directions.…There is no one to appeal to. When we appeal to the Oromo, they say "we do not have power over the Somali". When we plead to the Somali they also say "we do not have power over the Oromo". Both give protection to criminals. If an Oromo police arrests a criminal, the criminal says, "I am a Somali, thus you don't have the power to arrest me". And the Somali administration sides with and supports this criminal. The other way around is also true. The Oromo administration does the

same. Life in Moyale is so bitter. If your relative is imprisoned you do not know where he is imprisoned and who imprisoned him. There are many governments: the Oromo, the Somali, the federal government and all of them have prison houses. You do not know whom to appeal to … [44]

This typifies the problem of state rivalries: but why is Moyale so important in the drama of these rival claims? Moyale has a special significance in territorial negotiations between the Oromia and Somali national regional states, both before and during the preparation for the referendum. Perceived economic, political and symbolic resources might have made Moyale more important than other contested areas. It is a border town that connects Kenya and Ethiopia. From the point of view of the elite, there are very real economic and political advantages to be gained from controlling this border town. Besides the water points situated around the town, there are a number of Borana ritual sites around Moyale. Thus, the Borana claim Moyale as part of their history. But for the Garri, too, Moyale is their only major town in Ethiopia – sometimes referring to it as a "waterless port".[45] Second-hand goods are trafficked through Moyale, and plastic products such as water containers produced in Kenya are smuggled into Ethiopia through the town. Geo-politically, Moyale is a centre of activity for insurgents or other political dissidents. One could say that the Oromia national regional state and the Somali national regional state are fighting for a way to monopolize the opportunities presented in the border town of Moyale.

However, the contestation is more complex than this. It also involves party politics, nationalism (or fear of nationalists), and security concerns. According to Farah Ahmed, who held one of the top positions in the Somali national regional state, the special status of Moyale was recognized by both sides long before the referendum was held, and even at the initial meeting in Addis Ababa, when the referendum was first declared, the squabbling had begun. To quote Farah Ahmed:

In our meeting in Addis Ababa Oromia's president Juyinedin said, "Moyale is a lifeline of the Oromo. We can compromise on any of the contested places but not Moyale. We are already living under the pressure of Oromo nationalism being led by the OLF.If we lose Moyale, OPDO [the ruling party in Oromia] as a party will no longer exist. The OLF would evoke this case to undermine our party. No Oromo would accept the decision". Then, our president, Abdulahi, responded by saying "We are also under similar pressure [from the Somali rebel organizations] thus if we cancel the claim over Moyale, we would collapse as a party [SPDP] and as a state. Any Somali would not accept such a decision too". Thus, the meeting dispersed without agreement.[46]

This shows the multiple actors and interests involved in the contestation over Moyale. The struggle is intensely political. OPDO, the ruling party in Oromia national regional state, represents the Oromo in the EPRDF coalition. EPRDF is dominated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Similarly, the ruling parties in Somali national regional state, the Somali People Democratic Party (SPDP) was established by and is affiliated to EPRDF. Oromo and Somali nationalists often accuse these parties of serving the interest of the TPLF (and thus the EPRDF) rather than the people they represent. For OPDO and SPDP, the territorial disputes framed by the referendum were crucial in mobilizing support. This forced them to contest bitterly against one another over Moyale, even when their party programmes appear remarkably similar.

For the federal state, Moyale's importance lies in its strategic position on the Kenya border. Thus, the presence of the state, especially in security, has always been very high. All Ethiopian regimes have therefore been very active in what Will Kymlicka called the "securitization" of ethnic relations. According to Kymlicka, states see their minorities at their periphery in terms of security concern, especially when those minorities are related to the neighbouring state in terms of ethnicity or religion.[47] This happened in the 1960s and 1970s when the Somali clans, including the Garri, were labelled as "security threats" to Ethiopia because of their connection to the irredentist claim of the Republic of Somalia. The Ethiopian state has also been concerned about the affiliations of political groups with insurgency movements in this region. Since 1992, the presence of the military wing of the OLF in Moyale has estranged the Borana's relations with the Ethiopian state. Such concerns only serve to further complicate the local politics of identity.

## Conclusion

The contestation over identity and territoriality described in this paper reflects a complex interplay between ethno-nationalists and the state at a regional level, and pastoralist actors at a local level. Contestation over territory has its roots here in the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, but the post-1991 politico-administrative structure in Ethiopia has given a new and greater intensity to territorial claims and counterclaims. The "re-mapping" of Ethiopia's internal, domestic administrative borders has had particularly

adverse impacts in those areas where pastoralist mobility has worked against the notion of fixed and permanent boundaries. This is not an idea that the federal state of Ethiopia finds it easy to incorporate, and it is notable that the legalism of the constitutional approach to the problem of territorial affiliation has so readily impinged a pragmatic politics upon the accepted pattern of traditional access and use of resources. Struggles between pastoralists in this area may therefore have older roots, but the new forms these conflicts are now taking fully reflect the politics of the EPRDF since the early 1990s.

## Notes

1. Aguilar, "Writing Biographies of Borana," 351.
2. The idea of "Greater Somalia" was formulated in 1943 with the establishment of the Somali Youth League (SYL). See Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute*.
3. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Difference."
4. Ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia was a result of a century of political, economic and socio-cultural domination of the Amhara elite over others. See Getahun, "Emperor Menelik's Ethiopia."
5. Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*; Mohamed, "The Development of Oromo Nationalism."
6. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.
7. Taken from Adunga, 'Negotiating identity'.
8. Interview, Sheikh Isaq (a Garri member of the SALF), September 2, 2006, Moyale; Interview, Jibril Musa (an Arssi member of the SALF), September 24, 2006, Addis Ababa.
9. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somali*; Schlee, "Islam and the Gadaa System"; Zitelmann, "Oromo National Liberation."
10. Leenco, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads*.
11. Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, 263. The WSLF was established at the same time as SALF. The two were operating in the eastern and western part of their borderlands respectively.
12. Interviews with former members of SALF in Moyale and Addis Ababa, 2006.
13. The OLF was part of the legal political system from July 1991 until they resumed the guerrilla warfare again in June 1992.
14. Young, "Regionalism and Democracy"; Abbink, "Ethnicity and Constitutionalism."
15. The exception being Harari. See Vaughan, "Ethnicity and Power."
16. James et al., *Remapping Ethiopia*; Schlee, "Redrawing the Map of the Horn."
17. Abbink, "Ethnicity and Constitutionalism," 173.
18. Interview, official of the House of Federation, February 1, 2008, Addis Ababa.
19. Hagmann, "Pastoral Conflict and Resource Management"; Aalen, "Ethnic Federalism and Self-determination," 247.
20. These conflicts have been defined as conflicts triggered by drought and competition over scarce resources: Hussein, "Competition over Resources."
21. Interview, Jemal Aliyyi (senior official of the Oromia National Regional State), October 18, 2007, Addis Ababa.
22. Taken from Adunga, 'Negotiating identity'.
23. FDRE, "Constitution," 48 (1).
24. Ibid.
25. Interviews with traditional leaders, pastoralists and officials in Moyale and Jijiga, 2006 and 2007.

26. Interview, Mohamed Yasin (head, Bureau of Somali Region's Neighbours Affairs), October 23, 2007, Jijiga.
27. Interview with elders who participated in the conference. Many officials also refer to this meeting as point of departure to undertake the referendum.
28. For instance, the Gumi Gayyo assembly of the Borana that took place in July 2004 discussed and opposed the notion of solving the problem between the Oromo and Somali through a referendum. This assembly is held every eight years. It is associated to the Borana's *gada* system. Thousands of Borana meet and discuss their social problems and make new laws or revise the old ones (see Legesse, *Gada*, 94–9). The meeting usually lasts for several weeks. See Bassi, "The Politics of Space."
29. According to a survey conducted in the 1980s, more than 90% of Borana family's cash income is derived from livestock and nearly all from cattle: Cossins and Upton, "The Borana Pastoral System," 211.
30. Taken from Adunga, 'Negotiating identity'.
31. Interview, *abba gadaa* Liban Jaldessa, December 18, 2003, at Nuura.
32. Interview, Guyyo Malicha, the ruling party cadre, Mega town, September 9, 2007.
33. Legesse, *Gada*; Bassi, *Decisions in the Shade*.
34. Interview, Haji Mohamed Hassan (Sultan of Garri), August 24, 2006 and December 13, 2007, Moyale.
35. Interview, Haji Rashid Mohamed, November 19, 2007, Addis Ababa.
36. Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity."
37. For a full discussion of this point, see Bassi, "The Politics of Space," 221–45.
38. Report of the processes of the referendum by the National Election Board of Ethiopia to the House of Federation, November 11, 2004. According to the same document, a financial expense of the processes of the referendum was about 4 million Ethiopian Birr (US $470,000).
39. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7929104.stm, accessed on 13 March 2009.
40. Galaty, "States of Violence."
41. There are two towns by the name "Moyale," Ethiopian and Kenyan Moyale. They are situated on both sides of the international border, separated by a small river and a checkpoint.
42. Interview, Roba Boru (Borana elder), December 21, 2007, Moyale.
43. The Borana had initially attempted to resist the Garri incursion in Moyale, but were prevented by federal military forces. Group discussion, with Borana elders, May 29, 2006, Moyale. See also Bassi, "The Politics of Space."
44. Interview, Amanuel Gobe, a Burji elder, August 27, 2007, Moyale.
45. Interview, Ali Kemal (senior official in Somali NRS), October 22, 2007 Jijiga; Interview, Ayele Feyissa (an Oromo official), July 27, 2006, Moyale.
46. Interview, Farah Ahmed, a top Somali official who participated in the meeting, October 21, 2007, Jijiga.
47. Kymlicka, "Emerging Western Models of Multination Federalism," 39–40.

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# Aid negotiation: the uneasy “partnership” between EPRDF and the donors

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Ethiopia has become a major recipient of international development aid since the coming to power of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This is despite ideological differences between EPRDF and its donors. EPRDF champions the developmental state model that assigns to the state a key role in the development process within a dominant party political framework. Donors broadly fall within the liberalism continuum with the private sector as the driving force and the assumption of a democratic-pluralist politics. The paper examines the making of a robust aid relationship across this ideological boundary and the underlying tensions. It also analyses the “significant others” that have influenced the tone of the conversation between EPRDF and donors. The paper refers to the literature that considers aid relationship as a negotiation rather than the normative and politically loaded term “partnership”.

Post-1991 Ethiopia has been one of the largest recipients of international development aid from Western countries and a wide array of other donors. In the last two decades the EPRDF government has received some USD 26 billion in development aid from donors, notably the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union, Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID), GTZ (Germany), CIDA (Canada), Japan, the Netherlands and Italy.[1] In recent years Ethiopia received approximately USD 3 billion in funds annually – more than a third of its annual budget. This makes Ethiopia “the world’s second largest recipients of total external assistance after Indonesia and excluding wartime Iraq and Afghanistan”.[2] Although international development aid has precursors

during the imperial and the *Derg* period it has exponentially risen since 1991. Donors' increasing involvement in Ethiopia also has an organizational expression – the Development Assistance Group (DAG). Established in 2001 as a forum for donors to share information, the main objective of the DAG has become ensuring more effective aid delivery and utilization of development assistance to Ethiopia.[3] Since 2005 the DAG has served as a platform for donors to coordinate positions in the "policy dialogue" with the EPRDF. Today, the DAG comprises 26 bilateral and multilateral development agencies.

Despite steadily growing international development aid to Ethiopia the aid relationship between the donors and the EPRDF-led government has been fraught with tension that occasionally erupted into open confrontation. Although it has officially "disowned" socialism, EPRDF still vigorously champions the Marxist-Leninist inspired ideology of "revolutionary democracy",[4] with a Leviathan state presiding over the development process. The donors, albeit with some differences in nuances and strategies, fall within a liberal continuum with the private sector seen as the driving force of economic development and the assumption of a democratic-pluralist politics. Notwithstanding this contradiction Ethiopia under the EPRDF has received steadily growing amounts of international development aid. Unlike many African countries in which donor conditionality has significantly shaped development policies, "none of them have had much impact in terms of influencing Ethiopian policies".[5]

This paper analyses this apparent puzzle from a political economy perspective that goes beyond the rhetoric of development "partnership".[6] In their comparative study on aid politics in eight African countries including Ethiopia Whitfield and Fraser critique the notion of "partnership" in describing donor–recipient relations and instead propose to understand development aid as negotiation:

> We prefer to conceptualise relations between "donors" and "recipients" of foreign aid as a negotiation for two reasons. First, aid-giving countries have more than simply altruistic motivations […] donors give aid for many purposes: diplomatic; commercial; humanitarian relief, and cultural (promoting language and values). Second, aid receiving countries are not passive recipients. Despite dependence, African governments almost always have a degree of choice over whether or not to accept aid from a particular source at a particular time.[7]

Whitfield and Fraser call the leverage recipient countries have in the aid relationship negotiating capital. How much a recipient country manages to

build a negotiating capital in turn depends on the capacity of the political leadership to make use of enabling socio-economic and political structures. Drawing on Whitfield and Fraser's concept of negotiating capital this paper examines EPRDF's negotiating strategies with donors under changing political, economic and ideological contexts that have affected Ethiopia since 1991. Whitfield and Fraser have, however, a onesided accent on sovereignty, expressed in the form of African governments' policy space vis-à-vis donors, excluding other dimensions, particularly how governments seek to shield themselves in the language of sovereignty from the observational gaze of global civil society. More critically, governments of recipient countries define the terms of the debate as an "existential threat" that deflects domestic accountability.

The paper is organized in four sections. Section one analyses the underlying factors that have informed negotiating strategies between the EPRDF and the donors and how their overlapping interests have led to an exponential rise of development aid to Ethiopia. The favourable conditions that have contributed to the enhancement of international development aid to post-1991 Ethiopia are the initial strategic ideological softening of the EPRDF; the emergence of a new shared ideology ("poverty reduction"), and geo-political interests (anti-terrorism in the Horn of Africa). Section two examines the major contentious issues that constitute the fragility of the aid relationship, i.e. EPRDF's ideological assertiveness; differences in setting development priorities; differences in assessing governance issues, and the restriction of civil society. Section three probes into the collision course the EPRDFhas recently taken towards its donors in reference to three sets of important actors in the aid relationship and their respective political projects, i.e., the ideological resonance between opposition parties and the donors; the steadily growing criticism of the EPRDF by international human rights groups, and the ambivalent position the donors have taken with regard to the nexus between economic development and political freedom; and the emergence of new global players on the Ethiopian economic scene, particularly China, in influencing EPRDF's conversation with Western donors. The final part concludes with a reflection on recurrent patterns of the EPRDF-donors relationship and, polemics aside, poses the question whether what we observe in Ethiopia is also partly an enactment of a global debate on sequencing development – economic development before political freedom, or vice versa.

## The making of the “partnership” between EPRDF and the donors

Development aid to Ethiopia started immediately after the seizure of state power by the EPRDF in 1991 when the World Bank first approved a large “Emergency Recovery and Reconstruction Programme” (ERRP). The ERRP lasted until 1993 when it gradually lent itself into a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). In 1992 Ethiopia received a total of 1.2 billion USD in development assistance.[8] EPRDF had further concluded policy framework papers with the IMF and the World Bank known as the Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) in September 1992. These agreements enabled Ethiopia to participate in the joint support programme of the World Bank and the IMF known as the Special Programme of Assistance to Africa. The programme’s long-term objective was to facilitate the transition of the country from central planning to a market economy. Its immediate goals were to restore economic growth to an economy battered by a combination of civil war, draughts and mismanagement by the previous regime, and to contain imbalances in the public and external sectors.[9] The reform programme comprised a broad spectrum of macroeconomic and stabilization measures. Structural reforms all aimed at reducing internal and external imbalances, reducing economic rigidities and distortions, and improving the efficiency of resource use while creating an enabling environment for the development of the private sector. These included devaluation and freeing the exchange rate, tariff and tax cuts, removal of marketing restrictions and price controls, and privatization of state enterprises.[10] In mid-1996, the Ethiopian government adopted a medium-term adjustment programme for the period 1996/ 97–1998/99, which was supported by a three-year arrangement under the IMF’s Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF), by the World Bank in the form of new sector investment loans, and by other multilateral and bilateral donors.[11]

Ethiopia implemented a third generation donor development programme – the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme – known in Ethiopia as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP) (2001–2005) and the Plan for Accelerated Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2006–2010). As part of PASDEP donors launched joint mega development projects such as the Public Sector Capacity Building (PSCAP), the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and the Protection

of Basic Services (PBS). Launched in 2004 and worth 483 million USD, PSCAP was intended "to improve the scale, efficiency and responsiveness of public service delivery at the federal, regional and local level, to empower citizens to participate more effectively in shaping their own development, and to promote good governance and accountability in its public sector".[12] The PSNP, launched in2005, aimed "to provide, with an annual spending of about 350 million USD, predictable transfers of food or cash to food insecure households through a public works program, or direct transfers to those who cannot work".[13] Conceived in 2006, the PBS is "one of the largest and most complex development programmes in the world".[14] It transfers about one billion USD in a block grant to the federal government, which then disperses it to regional and district governments. The Ethiopian government covers 64% of the PBS, i.e., every *wereda* in Ethiopia gets 36% of its budget from the donors in the area of education, health, water, agricultural extension and roads. Development aid is likely to increase in the immediate future despite the marginal role donors have played in the design of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) (2011–2015). Donors regard the GTP as ambitious and have raised questions related to market signals, risk of overheating, financing gap, social welfare, private sector involvement, aid effectiveness and transaction. Yet they have pledged to scale up financial assistance during the period under question. In the following sections the factors, which have contributed to the evolution of EPRDF as a "donor's darling" are presented and discussed.

### *(i) EPRDF's initial strategic ideological softening (1991 to c. 2000)*

Long committed to a rigid variety of socialism in its armed insurgency (1975–1991), the TPLF/EPRDF recognized the days of socialism were numbered by the end of the 1980s and sought to reinvent its political outfit in a rapidly changing world.[15] Subsequently, EPRDF actively sought legitimacy in the eyes of the Western world, seemingly the winner of the Cold War, by generously adopting a rather classic liberal democratic constitution; first in the 1991 Transitional Charter and then in the 1995 Constitution. Regime insecurity in the early years of the 1990s in the context of national credibility gaps because of the way EPRDF handled the Eritrean question and formidable challenges from the ethno-national liberation movements might have made EPRDF more amenable to donors'

conditionality throughout the 1990s. The lack of a coherent alternative ideology was also a factor for EPRDF to embrace reforms proposed by donors. On its own admission, it was only after the 2001 TPLF split that EPRDF articulated the developmental state as an alternative model of economic development as part of the wider framework of revolutionary democracy.[16]

EPRDF's liberal gestures were at the time welcomed by the West. Unlike other rebel groups the TPLF/EPRDF was essentially a self-made organization that built its military capabilities through an effective grassroots base and capture of massive quantities of arms from the heavily militarized *Derg* army.[17] It was only when EPRDF was ever close to toppling the *Derg* that Western countries forged links so that it could shape the political process in post-*Derg* Ethiopia. The US was keen to regain political leverage in Ethiopia, which it had lost since the 1974 revolution and the *Derg*'s hostility towards the West. Consequently, the US played a key role in the negotiations on regime change at the London conference in May 1991, after a political pact was made by the three major armed groups, the EPRDF, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

EPRDF's instrumental relationship with the West translated into an influx of development aid at a scale hitherto unknown. The donor supported economic resources and army demobilization projects were very important in creating a semblance of political stability for EPRDF's new administration. In return, EPRDF grudgingly carried out the SAP prescribed by international financial institutions andbilateral donors.[18] Economic reforms such as the devaluation of the Ethiopian birr, privatization of public enterprises, liberalization of trade and the emergence of the private sector made Western donors confident that after all EPRDF's changes would be for real, despite some differences on major policy issues such as the retention of state ownership of land. Later on, donors declared the SAP as a success story.[19] The modest trend towards multi-party democracy, manifest in the mushrooming of opposition parties and more press freedom, further cemented EPRDF's relationship with the West. In this regard the EPRDF benefited from the Western referential system that made everything appear rosy in comparison with the politically repressive and economically stagnant *Derg* regime. EPRDF also benefited from governing a country surrounded by what Western countries perceived as "bad" neighbours, e.g.

Sudan, Somalia and, increasingly, Eritrea. So much so that EPRDF chairman and the country's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was hailed by the West as an illustrative example of the "new breed of African leaders",[20] capable of presiding over Ethiopia's transition to democracy.[21] The aid relationship between EPRDF and the donors throughout the 1990s appears to have been largely negotiated on the donors' term. Yet EPRDF had managed to contain donors' pressure on the privatization of land and liberalization of the financial sector.

### *(ii) The emergence of shared ideologies (ca. 2000 to 2010)*

The nature of the aid relationship between EPRDF and donors changed after 2000, when a new shared set of beliefs concerning development in Ethiopia emerged. This was preceded by the painful realization by the Bretton Woods institutions that in many instances the SAPs had not achieved their goals, but instead contributed to developing countries' marginal position in the global economy.[22] In its place a second generation of development plans known as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSP) was promoted by donors. As Zack-Williams and Mohan noted "the essence of PRSP is to give African governments a say in the choice of policies and a move away from what has been described as the one-size-fits-all approach of SAPs".[23] The PRSP primarily aimed at meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 to eradicate poverty worldwide by 2015. Striving to achieve the MDGs has entailed a number of changes in the aid relationship between recipient governments and donors. Above all it has meant "country ownership" of development programmes and a new obligation for donors to work within "government systems".[24] In that sense PRSP and the MDGs are qualitatively different from the top-down, donor-led SAPs. In reality, however, donors still wield substantial power in influencing development programmes in recipient countries while the language of partnership is used both by the donors and the recipients as a legitimizing discourse to maintain the flow of aid.[25] In this sense country ownership of programmes is not something that emanates from the PRSP but rather depends on the bargaining power recipient countries having vis-à-vis the donors. Another important dimension of the PRSP discourse was the performance indicator for developing countries. In the PRSP development paradigm governments

are classified as either “good” or “bad” in reference to whether they are doing well or not in poverty reduction. A government that spends a significant amount of its budget and of development aid in the poverty sector thus has higher chances of receiving more aid. According to the IMF and World Bank Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Ethiopia has one of the most pro-poor budgets in Africa. This earned the EPRDF high points on the donors’ new development scorecard. As CIDA noted, “with its improving financial management, relatively low level corruption and impressive progress towards the MDGs there is a general consensus that Ethiopia is a country of considerable potential and contributes to stability in the region plagued by conflict and deepening poverty”.[26] The donors’ perspective is vividly explained by the head of DFID-Ethiopia:

> The whole process of allotting development assistance is focused on two parameters. The first one is the output of assistance and the second in the value of every pound spent in these countries. It is all about the efficiency and effectiveness of the assistance. We have looked across the world with regard to a range of issues like health, education, water, sanitation and so on to figure out how UK’s taxpayers’ money should be spent in the most effective and efficient manner. When we looked at Ethiopia, a country with a large yet poor population, we noted that there is a good experience in the expansion of basic services in the past five to ten years. Though the quality of some of these services is still in question, which we will be helping to improve, our quantitative analysis has shown that for every pound that we spent we can buy better results. Hence it is good value for our money.[27]

The EPRDF regime has received similar generous compliments from other donors for achieving steady economic growth and for its good prospect in meeting the MDGs. According to a recent report released by the DAG, “Ethiopia has made impressive development progress in recent years. Since 2000, Ethiopia has recorded fastest improvement in human development in the world. Economic growth has accelerated on a sustained basis from around 2003, despite the global economic crises.”[28] Such signs of recognition have been effectively used by the EPRDF in its search for a new basis of political legitimacy, i.e., what one could call development-alism. According to EPRDF annual growth rate has been in double digits and a GDP per capita of 404 USD as of 2009. GDP figures are seriously disputed by opposition parties and many scholars consider the government figures are inflated.[29] Although donors also show some reservation they accept, by and large, government figures, or argue that a “true” figure is difficult to collect in all countries anyway. Their emphasis is on Ethiopia’s “impressive growth” as Howard Taylor noted: “Many people dispute the

official figures about the economic growth but it is similar in other countries as well. Official figures could be disputed. However, it is indisputable that tremendous growth has taken place in the Ethiopian economy".[30]

### *(iii) Shared geopolitical interests (2001 to today)*

A third factor in consolidating and scaling up international development assistance to Ethiopia relates to western geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular. The end of the Cold War appeared to have minimized the strategic significance the Horn of Africa once had. The region has regained this strategic significance with the replacement of communists by Islamic fundamentalists as the new ideological enemies and existential threats to western countries. In fact the Global War on Terror (GWOT) started in the Horn of Africa earlier than in the rest of the world. It began with the rise of political Islam in the Sudan, a country which hosted al-Qaeda and Bin Laden from 1991–1996.[31] From its base in the Sudan al-Qaeda struck against US establishments in the region, such as the bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salam in 1998, and poised to export politicalIslam in the neighbouring countries. The US took two measures to contain political Islam in the Horn in the 1990s. First, it launched a cruise missile attack on a factory inside Sudan that was suspected of producing chemicals that could be used in terror attacks. Politically, the US established what it called the Frontline States in its policy of encircling the Sudan. Ethiopia was one of these frontline states in the US' security architecture in the Horn in the 1990s.[32]

The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the GWOT that followed further enhanced the strategic significance of the Horn. Closely situated near the volatile Middle East, and neighbouring Somalia where political Islam's centre of gravity has shifted to in the 2000s, Ethiopia is now defined as an "anchor state" and a strategic ally to the west.[33] Although the discourse about Islamic terrorism in Ethiopia already began in the mid-1990s in reference to the *Al-Ittihad* Islamic insurgency in Ethiopia's Somali regional state, it is largely a post 9/11 phenomenon. Enthusiastically joining President Bush's "coalition of the willing", EPRDF positioned itself to gain a new strategic importance in the global order as conceived by the US. Responding to the new security challenges the US established counter-

terrorism programmes in East Africa. The Djibouti-based Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HoA) is part of US Africa Command in the GWOT.[34] Adapting to and making itself relevant to such a global discourse, the EPRDF has managed to extract tremendous economic resources as well as much needed political recognition from the West at a time when human rights organizations criticized Ethiopia's poor human rights record and the repression of the opposition since the contested May 2005 elections.[35]

The aid relationship between the EPRDF and the donors was greatly shaped by the GWOT, in as much as it has resulted in the securitization of development aid by western governments.[36] In the field of development the discourse of "global war on terror" has highlighted the strategic relevance of aid for the pursuit of global and national security interests. Securitization of development is "the conscious injection of security concepts as part of the broader policy package dealing with the perceived security risks inherent in underdevelopment".[37] Ethiopia has played a key role in the US government's GWOT after 2001. Militarily, the West counts on the Ethiopian army, which is among the largest and most effective in Africa to defend western interests when the need arises. EPRDF also closely cooperates with the US in intelligence gathering on Al-Qaeda cells and other radical organizations in the region. Ethiopia is also one of the US' "black sites", using the country as a base to secretly interrogate undeclared prisoners of GWOT.[38] Ethiopia's large Muslim population – 34% according to the 2007 census – and the western fear of its potential radicalization appears to be another factor that has augmented EPRDF's bargaining power.[39] For the US "Ethiopia's approximately 30 million Muslims tie it with Morocco for the eleventh most populous Muslim nation in the world and that means Ethiopia has more Muslims than Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, or Afghanistan".[40] The US's perception of the link between poverty, "failed states" and religious radicalization in the discourse of terrorism has also contributed to the scaling up of development aid by the donors to poor, thus "vulnerable countries"[41] such as Ethiopia. This is expressed, for instance, in the addition of "state building" components in most donors' programmes in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's role as an anchor state in a "turbulent" region and the enhancement of development aid are thus clearly interlocked. The United States is the largest donor to Ethiopia. In 2009, for instance, US aid

accounted for 30% of Ethiopia's total aid.[42] Caught in what is perceived to be an existential conflict the West appears to beonce again in search of a reliable and effective ally in the Horn of Africa, a historical parallel that echoes the search for the Prester John of the medieval period.[43]

## The contentious issues

Despite growing international development aid to Ethiopia and the donors' lavish statements of recognition of the country's "remarkable" economic growth and state effectiveness, the aid relationship between EPRDF and donors is fragile. Underneath the burgeoning aid relationship ideological skirmishes and occasional open confrontations have taken place. The 1997 conflict between EPRDF and IMF on issues related to the balance of payment, the peace conditionality the donors have put on Ethiopia during the 1998–2000 war with Eritrea, the political conditionality of the donors in the aftermath of the 2005 post-election violence, the diplomatic conflict with Norway in 2007, and the refusal of the World Bank and other western donors to fund the Gilgel Ghibe III hydroelectric dam project indicate that all is not well in EPRDF–donors relations. The latest row between the World Bank/IMF and the EPRDF government on the sustainability of the GTP reveals this latent tension.[44] As the World Bank's Ethiopia country director noted, he does not see "how EPRDF can sustain such an aggressive investment plan without getting into serious problem".[45] In a parliamentary discussion on current economic affairs in July 2011, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi severely criticized the Bretton Woods institutions stating that "the country's economic performance is being called into question by the two groups because Ethiopia refuses to let outsiders dictate to them what economic policies should be put in place".[46] Underneath the rhetoric we find many contentious issues that reflect as much ideological differences as the EPRDF's implementation modalities of own development programmes. In the following these major contentious issues are outlined and discussed.

### *(i) Competing models of economic development?*

Differences appear between EPRDF and donors on the concept of development and the mechanism through which economic development occurs. EPRDF calls its approach to development "the developmental state"

based on revolutionary democracy, and it has identified donors' development model as "neoliberalism" based on the conviction that individuals, and the free market they create, are the agents of economic transformation. EPRDF's ideology sees a fundamental difference and opposition between the developmental state and neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is rather part of the wider liberal tradition which includes liberal democracy and greater freedom to society to which EPRDF is constitutionally committed. It specifically "describes a market-driven approach to economic and social policy based on neoclassical theories of economics that stresses the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalized trade and relatively open markets, and therefore seeks to maximize the role of the private sector in determining the political and economic priorities of the state".[47] The failure of SAP and the top-down prescription of development plans in the 1980s have induced an internal debate within the donors' community. The reflexive moment that followed the internal debate has contributed to the emergence of a more participatory development approach, at least among the bilateral donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). EPRDF on the other hand categorically puts all donors into one box and still refers to the stronger version ofneoliberalism that was adopted by the multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and IMF in the 1980s and 1990s. Short-handedly called the "Washington Consensus", this form of neoliberalism include a list of policy proposals by the international financial institutions such as fiscal policy, reduction of public spending, tax reform, interest rates, floating foreign exchanges, trade liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, and legal security of the property rights.[48]

EPRDF's understanding of neoliberalism is shaped by Joseph Stieglitz, a former chief economist at the World Bank and mentor of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi who turned into a major critic of the World Bank's neoliberal policies after his tenure. Stieglitz defines neoliberalism as "grab-bag of ideas based on the fundamentalist notion that markets are self-correcting, allocate resources efficiently, and serve the public interest well. It was this market fundamentalism that underlay Thatcherism, Reaganomics, and the so-called 'Washington Consensus' in favour of privatization, liberalization, and independent central banks focusing single-mindedly on inflation."[49] On its own admission EPRDF lacked ideological coherence and clarity throughout the 1990s:

> While I cannot say that we had an alternative to the neo-liberal reforms that the IMF and World Bank wanted us to introduce, we have never been comfortable with it from the very beginning. Our initial reaction was in effect to conduct a rear-guard battle of delaying and preventing the introduction of reforms that would reduce the state to the proverbial night watchman without presenting an adequately articulated alternative. […] By the late 90s, our thinking as a ruling party was evolving in the direction of elaborating an alternative development paradigm that we have called democratic developmentalism. This was a rather slow and painful process. Painful because the full articulation of the paradigm with all its policy implications was one of the key causes of the most serious split in the history of the ruling party that took place in 2000–2001.[50]

Although cues to EPRDF's conception of development can be found in various policy documents two texts are key in understanding its cognitive framework. The first is a booklet entitled *Revolutionary Democracy: Development Routes and Strategies*. This 239 pages long booklet was published by EPRDF's party organ Abiyotawi Democracy. It has been widely circulated and discussed among EPRDF cadres, the political leadership of the regional states and the civil servants in order to enhance ideological clarity. The second text is an extract from a forthcoming book by Meles Zenawi entitled *African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings*. Presented during a development forum organized by Initiative for Policy Dialogue (IPD) at Columbia University in 2006, *Dead Ends and New Beginnings* was first posted on a website, which is maintained by the IPD, the Graduate School of Business, Columbia University. The Prime Minister also presented the gist of *Dead Ends and New Beginnings* to a panel convened by the Ethiopian Economic Association and the Ethiopian Development Research Institute in 2008 where donors were also invited.

As evident from these papers, the main thrust of EPRDF's development policy is a non-liberal, state-driven path to capitalist development. According to the revolutionary democratic conception of development this is the strategy pursued by countries where the market is not well developed and/or where there are chronic market failures, and where liberalism and self-interest can't bring about a "broad-based" and sustainable development. According to this viewpoint under such circumstances the state should take the leading and supervisory role in the economy. This dominant economic role of the state continues until the private sector becomes "ready" and "responsible enough" to assume a leading role. Otherwise, the application of neoliberal economic policies in the developing countries could serve only the interests of rent-seeking individuals who are devoid of any sense of social justice. Whereas individuals presided over the liberal path to development in the Western

countries (the trickle-down effect), so goes EPRDF's argument, it is only a strong state imbued with a sense of mission that can midwife the transformation to capitalist development in developing countries by mobilizing the relatively more available resources, such as land and labour in the case of Ethiopia. This conceptual opposition between "neoliberalism" and "revolutionary democracy" is thoroughly summarized in *Revolutionary Democracy: Development Routes and Strategies* as follows:

> The starting point for a liberal economic vision is that the state should not interfere in all sectors which are profitable. It espouses the idea of limiting the role of the state in the economy and assuming a neutral position in the economy. On the contrary revolutionary democracy advocates for a stronger role of the state in all sectors of the economy where it could ensure a better and accelerated development. The limit should only be the state's financial and managing capacity. Contesting the liberal notion of state neutrality, revolutionary democracy promotes the idea of an activist state that is openly allied with developmental forces. The liberal notion of a limited government and a neutral state works well in the developed countries with lower incidence of market failures. But in countries where the market is not efficient liberalism can only serve the interests of self-aggrandizing individuals with a rent-seeking behaviour.[51]

In *Dead Ends and New Beginnings* Meles Zenawi has further articulated EPRDF's development policy as focused on a developmental state and formulated in conceptual opposition to neoliberalism. Accordingly, market failures are deep and pervasive in developing countries and market mechanisms alone cannot bring about accelerated development. He further notes that market failures are particularly chronic in the technological and agricultural sector, where a strong and activist state is needed. Neoliberalism certainly espouses a limited role of the state in organizing the economy and favours a private sector-led economic development. But at times EPRDF's position reflects not only an economic conviction but also a rhetorical position in the spirit of a straw-man's argument, as if neoliberalism only assigns a watch-man role to the state. Neoliberalism does not prescribe a mere "watch-man" role for the state in the economy, as revolutionary democracy emphatically puts it, but instead credits it with an essential supportive role, not least in minimizing transaction costs through the legal enforcement of contracts.[52]

Aware of the political anachronism of socialism, EPRDF legitimates its search for alternative and popular development with reference to the growing scepticism within donors who have pursued market-based policies in the last two decades. It is not a mere coincidence that the Prime Minister's intellectual mentor is none other than Joseph Stieglitz. Stieglitz

has made several visits to Ethiopia and has applauded Ethiopia's economic growth, which in effect endorses EPRDF's *modus operandi* when it comes to economic development:

> It has been impressive to see Ethiopia's growth being sustained for the last four years by some ten per cent. Most of the rest of the East African Countries and other developing nations have also been doing well. What is striking about Ethiopia's growth seemed the source of it. Some of the growth these developing countries registered over the lastseveral years is a result of increase in commodity prices […]. The success in Ethiopia is clearly far more than that. It has got to do with an increase in production output, diversification, and going into new areas. More notably, Ethiopia has one of the most egalitarian distributions of income in the world. There are a number of ways and means that Ethiopia and other African countries could do in order to help keep up their growth. One important aspect is an effective role of the state in the developmental processes of African countries.[53]

EPRDF officials have introduced Stieglitz, the founder of the Initiative for Policy Dialogue (IPD), to the Ethiopian public in the run up to the 2010 election as a "friend of the organization". They draw on his anti-neoliberal corpus in defending the alternative developmental state that they pursue:

> What we have faced, on economic and political scores, has been lack of tolerance to diversity, to policy-space experimentation and to independent thinking. Unjustified conditionality abounded, both for economic and political reasons, either because of objectives growing out of *market fundamentalism* or because we dared to defend ourselves against unjustified aggression. Ethiopia's first real attempt at economic development coincided with the period when market orthodoxy made the role of the state anathema. (emphasis mine)[54]

EPRDF also takes comfort from and feels vindicated by the current financial crisis in developed countries seen as evidence of the ultimate "vice" of the neoliberal vision of the world. In the words of the Prime Minister: "We know that the neo-liberal paradigm imposed on the continent had not delivered the goods. It could not bring about economic transformation even when the going was good. It would be madness to expect it to deliver the goods when the going is likely to be very bad indeed."[55]

Donors do not have a uniform position on EPRDF's development policy. Differences range from a neoliberal critique of the developmental state, to criticism of the way EPRDF is implementing the developmental state model. Some donors reject the viability of state-led development and put their faith in private sector-led development. As a result they have put demands on the EPRDF to liberalize sectors of the economy where the state still exercises monopoly, i.e., land, the financial sector (banking),

telecommunication and the energy sectors. EPRDF has spoken in no uncertain terms against liberalization of these sectors of the economy even in the 1990s when it had a weaker political agency vis-à-vis the donors. According to EPRDF these sectors are not negotiable for reform, considering them as *yefenji wereda* ("mined zones"). State ownership of land, for instance, is justified by the EPRDF as a mechanism of social protection of the farming majority and held to ensure a "broad-based" development through a fair redistribution of national wealth.[56] EPRDF also refers to "empirical evidence" to justify its position, e.g. that there is no country other than the UK, which has developed through neoliberalism and claims that those who gave in to the "neoliberal pressure" have only brought misery to their people, especially to the poor.

Emboldened by the current global economic crisis and confident of the viability of the developmental state, EPRDF has triumphantly pronounced that the "Washington consensus" is over in the sense of the "end of neoliberalism". Donors of a strong neoliberal persuasion, such as the IMF and the World Bank, contest EPRDF's definition of the neoliberal situation; that what is dead is not the consensus per se but "Washington", the metaphor for the top-down, donors-led development programmes. Santa Devarajan, the chief economist of the World Bank's AfricaRegion, still defends structural adjustment arguing that "policies followed by the better-performing African countries over the last fifteen years were quite similar to those of the Washington consensus, but the difference was that these policies emerged from a domestic political consensus rather than being imposed from abroad".[57]

Most of the donors, however, have come to terms with EPRDF's model of development and appreciate the steady economic growth it has generated. Towards that end they make only confidential criticism of EPRDF's developmental state in a technocratic, non-political manner. In a developmental state model, whether in the case of the "Asian Tigers" or currently applied in China, the state plays the key role in guiding and supervising the economic process. But in reality it also allows and enables the emergence of a vibrant private sector.[58] Competitiveness within government institutions that are involved in the economy and within the private sector was a key factor in the economic transformation of all successful developmental states.[59] From the donors' perspective, there appears to be a "translation error" in the definition of the role of the private

sector within the developmental state model as applied by the EPRDF in the Ethiopian context. Or else there is a deliberate twist or slippage, despite EPRDF's official narrative of the constructive role the private sector could play that is inscribed in its policy texts. In the successful developmental state countries the role of the state in the economy was limited to sectors where it has a comparative advantage in mobilizing resources. As experience shows the influence of the EPRDF government is felt everywhere even where it is least needed, such as the provision of agricultural input to the farmers. EPRDF argues that private sector development should be phased, and given the infancy of the private sector the government is bound to play a major role. It also argues that the state does not crowd out the private sector but rather helps it grow in line with comparative advantages. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank have stated that EPRDF's private sector development strategy has to be supported by concrete actions, which are lacking at the moment. Such actions would include the establishment of market-oriented institutions, financial sector reform, and a sectoral growth strategy building on the experience of self-discovery, such as that of the flower exporting sector and the strengthening of economic governance.[60]

More contentious is the dubious role the party-affiliated business organizations play in Ethiopia's economic transformation.[61] EPRDF calls them foundations or endowments. According to EPRDF, the seed capital of these endowments originates from capital the party had accumulated during the armed struggle. The continued existence of these parastatals is justified by pointing out that they fill economic gaps, which neither the state nor the private sector covers.[62] By EPRDF's own acknowledgement, these parastatals have not yet become profitable, despite or because of the unavoidable preferential treatment they have received from the government. This preferential treatment of the parastatals undermines EPRDF's own major contention with neoliberalism and its critique of "rent seeking individuals".[63] On this issue the donors' position seems to be limited to discrete criticism of the EPRDF by the standard of the model it claims to follow. In a major study on constraints on private sector development in Ethiopia the World Bank criticized the parastatals indirectly:

> Ethiopia has allowed foundations which are controlled by political parties to own enterprises that compete with the private sector. The endowments helped to establish industries in neglected regions when Ethiopia was not at all attractive to investors. Some projects may not

have received funding without the role of the endowments, given the absence of formal sources of funding. However, as the private sector grows and is in a position to contest all business areas operated by endowments, the early rationale for endowment-owned businesses has eroded.[64]

### *(ii) Donors' conditionality and EPRDF's quest for policy space*

EPRDF bitterly resents what it calls donors' neoliberal conditionality. This has to be qualified in two ways. For one, post-1991 Ethiopia has never faced stringent donors' conditionality as other African countries have. According to Furtado and Smith "there is a core domestic agenda, which in Ethiopia is quite comprehensive and strongly owned [This] includes the government's approaches to agriculture, economic management, the pace of liberalization and its commitment to improving basic social services, especially in rural areas".[65] Even the SAP, the quintessential of donor ideology, was qualified in Ethiopia to the extent that it did not go as far as international financial institutions would have liked it to go, particularly the liberalization of the financial market, privatization of land and telecommunications which are still state-owned. EPRDF's resistance to pressures to liberalize the economy in the early 1990s was partly aided by the lower level of Ethiopia's debt in the 1980s. In that sense the EPRDF owes the *Derg* regime a lot in leaving behind a strong negotiating capital. As Whitfield noted, "the Derg kept the balance of payments in check (for it was excluded from the western lending) and the currency remained close to its international exchange value. Thus, massive debt relief was not part of the equation in the negotiation between the donors and the EPRDF."[66] Donors have also been mindful of Ethiopia's historical sensibility as the only African country which was not colonized, a history which is enshrined in the collective memory of the nation and strongly informs the country's international relations. The EPRDF leadership, like its predecessors, is adept in picking up the "sovereignty card" as a negotiating strategy and buffering external influences. The stature of Meles Zenawi in the international arena – such as his leadership in the UK's Commission for Africa, in Africa's voice in the global climate summits, his championing of the developmental state, in the Global War on Terror, and his membership in the Network of Social Democratic Parties – have all contributed to shielding Ethiopia from the "neoliberal pressure" which EPRDF is keen to

highlight. Facing a country with a growing international recognition, the donors, particularly multilateral institutions, do not want to run reputation risks by pressing too much.[67] Interestingly, the donors also secretly admire the EPRDF for its insistence on a policy space and its ideological rigour. As an aid worker noted during a PBS working visit to Gambella in December 2009, “better EPRDF with its red lines than other African governments, which readily accept reform packages but pay lip service”.

Whitfield and Fraser identified ideological factors as one of the main contributing factors in building the negotiating capital of a recipient country. Ideological factors include not only resonance between the political orientation of donors and recipients but also “the ability of the recipient governments to express a clear vision about where the country is going and the contribution of public policy to achieving that outcome. Resisting donor preferences and defending individual policy preferences is likely to be easier in situation where recipients can situate choices in a wider frame of reference, particularly a national or party political ‘projects’ understood as key source of legitimacy for the regime.”[68] EPRDF’s articulation of the developmental state since2000, or at least a persistent claim to have done so, has thus augmented its negotiating capital vis-à-vis the donors.

This does not mean, however, that donor conditionality is non-existent in Ethiopia. In 1997 EPRDF was engaged in a bitter controversy with the IMF, which had suspended its loans because of high government spending that affected the country’s balance of payment. At stake was the 127 million USD that came within the framework of SAP as well as World Bank financing. The IMF demanded spending cuts as a condition for the loan.[69] During the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998–2000) donors practised “negative peace conditionality” by reducing aid to influence the warring parties.[70] The war had raised concern among international donors, and several had reacted by reducing aid levels by not entering into any new contracts or by shifting aid from long term development cooperation towards emergency assistance. Norway went the furthest, the first and the only country to make an explicit decision to halt all bilateral cooperation with Ethiopia.[71] EPRDF deeply resented aid as a “sanction” to enforce a peace agreement against a country which was in a “legitimate war” to defend its sovereignty. Immediately after the peace agreement, however, aid was not only restored but also scaled up, from the 634 million USD of the pre-war period to 981 million USD in 2001.[72]

However mild it might be, there seems to be also some aspects of new economic conditionality that resulted in at least lowering Ethiopia's aid per capita. The Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) is a case in point. The CPIA is "a system designed by the donors to assess the quality of a country's present policy and institutional framework, in terms of how conducive such a framework is to ensuring the efficient utilization of scarce development resources in the pursuit of sustainable and poverty reducing development".[73] These include economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion/equity, and governance rating including public sector management and institutions. In effect the CPIA is a kind of ex-ante conditionality as it helps ensure that aid is provided on the basis of performance. Unlike the PRSP scorecard Ethiopia was rated low in 2009 by the CPIA (3.5 in a 6 grade scale) and this is the reason why it gets low aid per capita despite donors' acclaimed sustained economic growth and in comparison with other African countries. EPRDF argues that it has performed well in poverty reduction and deserves more aid than the new caveat the CPIA has put on the country's eligibility for higher grants. In an aid discussion forum moderated by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 21 September 2010, Meles Zenawi debated with Robert Zoellick, World Bank president, characterizing the CPIA as a new form of conditionality and the need for more "policy space" for developing countries. In this forum Meles remarked that Ethiopia is rated low by the Bretton Woods institutions and thus has to pay higher interest for foreign loans:

> This lower rating is because of some of the policy choices we have made, although they are not less effective. Sometimes such differences of opinion can be negotiated such as the talks with Germany. Although the MDGs look at primary education, Ethiopia asked to spend part of its aid from Germany in technical education, because without that, no country can industrialize. Germany apparently agreed with this Ethiopian preference, but the World Bank is *less reasonable*. The CPIA wants us to liberalize the financial sector. We don't do that and are penalized for that. (emphasis is mine)[74]

By comparing Germany and the World Bank as, respectively, more or less "reasonable" Meles invoked what donors dread most in an aid relationship – reputationrisk. In donors language a reputation risk is "that may constrain donors' capacity to provide future aid, due to events that have an impact on current interventions".[75] The World Bank president acknowledged the CPIA as a type of conditionality but shifted the blame to the donor countries, because they together designed the rating system. He

also pointed out that “governance issues” were factored in Ethiopia’s low CPIA rating.

Agreeing on development priorities is another major contentious issue between EPRDF and donors, particularly in the energy sector. EPRDF has embarked on an ambitious mega hydroelectric power projects in recent years. Donors have put conditions on financing these projects. Firstly, they demand financial transparency particularly regarding the construction bidding. Most of the bidding does not follow international standards and they are allocated either to an Italian private company (Salini) or state-owned Chinese companies without competition. Donors have also expressed concerns for the poor and inadequate environmental and social safeguard measures taken by the Ethiopian government. The fact that most of the hydroelectric projects are located in the country’s peripheral regions has brought the issue of Ethiopia’s de facto hierarchical citizenship into the realm of notice. In most developmental state countries peripheral peoples are often considered as, what Mamdani calls “disposable citizens”[76] in the drive towards a fast track development at any cost. As most of Ethiopia’s rivers are trans-border, international law is also invoked by donors to determine whether the projects do not do harm to neighbouring countries. EPRDF is furious towards donors’ scepticism and reduces the discourse of environmental and social concerns into a mere interest in a “photo-op” for Western tourists who prefer to watch “a human zoo” in Ethiopia’s tribal zone than funding the government’s projects that enable energize the country’s steady economic growth.[77] The discourse of international law is also interpreted by EPRDF as a manifestation of the age-old hydro-politics – the contested use of the Nile River and the international lobby Ethiopia’s neighbours, particularly Egypt, has against the use of its waters for developmental purposes.

### *(iii) The narrowing of political space or absolute power transforming a country absolutely?*

EPRDF’s turn to authoritarianism has been noted by several scholars especially since the contested 2005 national election.[78] Donors have described this political process somewhat euphemistically as a “narrowing of the political space” that culminated in EPRDF’s “land slide” victory in the 2010 election.[79] Initially, donors took some measures that appeared to be

in line with a new political conditionality to development aid. The genesis of the PBS in 2006, one of the major multi-donors development programmes in Ethiopia, is a case in point. The donors' shift from direct budget support to a block grant is an illustration of how donors manage ambivalences in their aid relationship with the EPRDF and Ethiopia at large. Donors continued development aid and humanitarian assistance after 2005 while minimizing the capture of aid by the EPRDF through tightly tagged development projects. In fact, the very name "protection" in the PBS signals donors' decline of confidence in EPRDF's democratic credibility. In the course of time, however, donors watered down their conditionality, save some of the Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Sweden who have strongly criticized what they consider EPRDF's deteriorating human rights.EPRDF retaliated by expelling six Norwegian diplomats in 2007, and closing the Ethiopian embassy in Sweden in 2010.[80]

Donors' political concerns resurfaced in the run-up to the 2010 election and their assessment of the election outcome. EU noted that "the electoral process fell short of international commitments for elections, notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of a level playing field for all contesting parties. Insufficient efforts were taken to ensure a more equitable and representative electoral process."[81] On its part, the World Bank has noted that "the national elections in 2005 and the largely uncontested local elections in April 2008, illustrated the fragility of the democratic transition, the dominance of the EPRDF, and the weakened state of the opposition".[82]

EPRDF contests the donors' definition of the political situation as a "narrowing of the political space" through a reference to the tenability of the dominant party phenomena within a democratic political order:

> The fact that EPRDF has won by sweeping victory must not be confused with the dominance of a single party. EPRDF is not exception to winning successive elections and stays in power for a long time. The Social Democratic Labour Party of Sweden, the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and some others are the longest serving political parties. So, the sweeping victory of the EPRDF, being the dominant party in Ethiopia should not be a surprise. And it must be clear that what is evolving in Ethiopia is a dominant party, not a single party.[83]

In response to criticism of its monopolization of representation EPRDF has coined a new term, *awra* party, to describe its new political posture as the dominant party. From the donors' perspective these are instances of

democratic backsliding. The standard against which democratic performance is judged is of course EPRDF's constitutional commitment to political pluralism. Here there seems to be a fundamental misreading of EPRDF's behaviour by the donors. Unlike the explicit ideological defence of its development model EPRDF is not transparent about the political closure, which the model it vigorously follows entails. EPRDF's own understanding of political stability presupposes a longer tenure, so that it could carry out "the transformational agenda". It at least aspires to stay in power until 2025 when Ethiopia is projected to join Middle Income Countries.[84] EPRDF's transformational agenda is not properly wedded to political pluralism. This is evident in its conflation of the term opposition with enmity, understanding of the opposition parties as "enemies of the constitutional order". This coupled with Ethiopia's vanguardist political culture that ranges from imperial "bigmanship" to the "democratic centralism" of the leftist political parties, which includes the TPLF/EPRDF, has inherently militated against multi-party democracy.[85] Despite its confrontational stance in claiming a policy space for its development policy vis-à-vis the donors, EPRDF has indeed lacked the political courage of the likes of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) of Uganda that openly contested multi-party democracy as irrelevant and even dangerous for Africa.[86] EPRDF's official narrative is rather premised on the democratic developmental state: "While there has been development without democracy, democratization has been an essential element of the vision of the African renaissance. A developmental state can be a democratic state, and indeed that a democratic developmental state is likely to be more successful in its development efforts than other."[87]

However, neither of EPRDF's role models Taiwan and Korea or China have achieved economic development through political pluralism. In practice, the EPRDF regime is no different than these countries in its political modus operandi. What the donors dub "the narrowing of political space" and scholars' characterization of EPRDF's "turn towards authoritarianism" is a constitutive part of EPRDF's development strategy, which produced political closure. The gap between constitutional theory and political practice can also be seen through the prism of an entanglement situation. Unlike its role models, the political context within which EPRDF is applying the developmental state is different. Neither Korean nor Chinese leaderships had to worry about the consequences of a situation-dictated

political pluralism. In fact, economic transformation in these counties has been presided over by a dominant single party. This sense of political security, unfettered by electoral instability, enabled the leadership of these countries to inject competitiveness into the economic system,[88] for there was no fear of an economic power that could potentially be translated into political power. Even in a superficially multi-party democracy, there is always a risk that the rise of a middle class and the creation of an autonomous economic space could be translated into political power that can contend with the ruling party. After all many in the leadership of the opposition parties, particularly the former Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), were hailed from the upper middle class who presented a formidable political challenge to the EPRDF in the contested 2005 election. EPRDF's projects of control need to be situated within this emerging political economy and the transformational agenda within which absolute power is not perceived as "corrupting absolutely" as in the perspective of the donors but an absolute power which is desired to transform the country absolutely.

### *(iv) The CSP – a restrictive legislation to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)*

In January 2009 the Ethiopian Parliament passed the "Charities and Societies Proclamation" and after a one-year grace period this legislation began to be fully enforced by a new organization known as the Charities and Societies Agency. The Law distinguishes between organizations based on their sources of funding. Those that receive 90% or more of their funds from Ethiopian citizens are called "local" organizations. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in Ethiopia but receiving more than 10% of their funding from international sources (including citizens living overseas who donate funds back to organizations in their homeland) are termed "resident" organizations. Organizations based outside of the country and funded outside are called "international" organizations. Among these, only local Ethiopian charities and societies can work on activities that fall in the following categories: the advancement of human and democratic rights, the promotion of equality of nations and nationalities and that of gender and religion, the promotion of the rights of the disabled and children's rights,

the promotion of conflict resolution or reconciliation, and promotion of the efficiency of the justice and law enforcement services.[89]

The rationale of this legislation is allegedly to ensure that non-governmental organizations are "Ethiopian in character", not to cut their funding. According to the Agency, "if you provide a huge amount of money in this area and that money comes from outside, their work will not be for the government and the people, it will be for foreigners".[90] One of the official narratives is the need to introduce financialaccountability to the works of the CSOs. EPRDF considers the free flow of foreign funding to CSOs as a means for perpetuating "parasitism" and "rent-seeking", terms which EPRDF is using to critic neoliberalism to which the NGOs are linked. These terms are ultimately derived from EPRDF's developmental state paradigm. EPRDF further expounds on the fact that a CSO is wholly established and managed by Ethiopians is not enough to make it an Ethiopian CSO unless it also generates its funding from local sources. Accordingly, a CSO receiving a substantial portion of funding from foreign sources could be an instrument for the illicit advancement of the interests of foreign powers. This means that the sources of funding of a CSO should determine its identity and legal standing in the Ethiopian legal system. Therefore, EPRDF considers it appropriate to impose restrictions on the level of foreign funding on those CSOs that engage in such "sensitive areas" as human rights, good governance, gender equality, conflict resolution, and the efficiency of the justice sector.

The most revealing indicator underlying the enactment of the CSP is the generally sceptical attitude adopted by the government regarding the role and participation of CSOs in the national political space. EPRDF displays a hostile attitude towards human rights organizations, which it brands as funnels for civil and political discontent and mouthpieces of the opposition.[91] The Ethiopian government appears to equate NGO activity with intelligence work, viewing NGOs as subversives rather than allies in the struggle to improve the lives of all Ethiopians.[92] The NGOs are regarded as a bastion of opposition sympathizers – first ex-*Derg* officials and bureaucrats, and now members of opposition parties who operate under the cover of "civil society". Since the contested May 2005 election EPRDF has framed the tension between government and NGOs in reference to the "colour revolution" (explain, not everyone will understand what you refer to here). The Government began denying not only the role and contribution

of CSOs in the economic and democratic process but also the foundational principles of the sector.

EPRDF officials repeatedly asserted that only mass-based organizations such as women, youth and trade unions can play roles both in the democratization and economic development of the country. In its policy document, the EPRDF questions the role of NGOs in the development process, and describes NGOs as patronage networks distributing policy rents, receiving big salaries and benefits without bringing concrete results, spending 60% of their budgets on administrative matters, strengthening a rent-seeking political economy, and thereby negatively affecting the development of the country.[93] In the run-up to the May 2010 election *Addis Raey*, EPRDF's organ, featured an article under the title "Colour Revolution and the Fourth National Election" in which CSOs were branded as agents of importing the East European variant of regime change through the political advocacy of CSOs popularly known as the colour-coded revolutions:

> International NGOs well known for decorating themselves with attractive human rights adjectives have been conducting extensive campaign since February. That is why we said we are under the volley of fire of the colour revolutionaries, for they have been issuing a new statement before we even finish reading the first. Fortunately their barrages have thus far been in vain as the objective and subjective conditions in Ethiopia do not support colour revolution.[94]

The Charities and Societies Proclamation is one of the sticking points between EPRDF and donors. Apart from being a linchpin in the western notion ofdemocracy, civil society organizations are sought by the donors as alternative conduits to social service delivery and accountability of local governments. In the PBS, for instance, CSOs are conceived to play an important role in social accountability. EPRDF is very suspicious of the donors' faith in NGOs as an effective channel of aid delivery while they are sceptical of EPRDF's commitment and capacity to deliver. Donors were in fact alleged to have sought to mobilize CSOs to put pressure on the EPRDF to concede to the opposition parties' call for national reconciliation and a transitional government in the run-up to the 2005 election.[95]

## EPRDF, donors and the "relevant others"

The relational dynamics between EPRDF and donors is not merely dyadic. There are other major players in Ethiopia's political economy. The first set

of actors is a wide variety of opposition parties. There is a high degree of differentiation among opposition parties in their development policies such as whether land should be privatized or state-owned, or which should be the engine of economic transformation, agriculture or industry. Nonetheless there is strong liberal-democratic thinking among the major opposition parties. Despite all the dullness of the 2010 electoral debates as compared with the highly contested 2005 election, at least some major ideological fault lines between EPRDF and opposition parties were communicated to the public. In fact, EPRDF was on the ideological offensive while defending revolutionary democracy and relentlessly sought to deconstruct what it saw as a neoliberal paradigm. It described the opposition as "those who uncritically and lavishly endorse the neoliberal position" (*neoliberalisimin sayalamitu yemiwitu*).[96] Although some opposition parties contested EPRDF's understanding of neoliber-alism as outdated and rhetorical, they nevertheless often uncritically defended the "Washington consensus" at a time when even donors would not be enthusiastic in doing so. This not only made EPRDF's straw-man argument against neoliberalism attainable, but also enabled it to produce an "evidence" for what it considered to be an overarching conspiracy against EPRDF's developmental state that put opposition parties, donors and Western governments in one league. In so doing, EPRDF generated an important discursive resource in renegotiating its image among many Ethiopians who espouse the idea that EPRDF does not represent national interest. Virulently presenting itself in the language of sovereignty, and accusing the opposition parties of being "traitors" under the service of foreign interests, EPRDF has sought to create a new national constituency in the run-up to the 2010 election. This is an important discursive shift for a party which had been mainly engaged in deconstructing Ethiopian nationalism and its "imperial past".

The steadily growing discontent among donors towards the emerging de facto one-party system (or dominant-party democracy in EPRDF's parlance) has reinforced EPRDF's perception that there is a red thread that connects these seemingly disparate actors. Donors also agree with opposition parties on the dire state of the private sector. Like donors, opposition parties also criticized EPRDF's economic governance, particularly the preferential treatment of the "endowments" and the suppression of an autonomous political space as part of a project of total

control over society. Perhaps with the single exception of the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) none of the opposition parties recognizes EPRDF's claim of continued annual "double-digit" economic growth. Yet, in the fight over the GDP figuresopposition parties reject donors' de facto endorsement of EPRDF's claims, although the two still differ on the verification of the indicators and the actual figure.[97] Either way, the passionate contestation of GDP figures between EPRDF and opposition parties on the one hand, or EPRDF and donors on the other hand, indicates how important the language of development has become as a new source of political legitimacy. Since 2005 EPRDF's core ideology is no longer about "liberation" and "ethnicity" but focuses on the claim that the ruling party brought about double-digit economic growth.

A second set of actors is the international Human Right Groups (HRGs), which operate with an implicit mandate to monitor governments' human rights record in what appears as an emerging global "moral order". For HRGs Ethiopia has become a prominent case for human right violations, a setting of crimes against humanity, the politicization of aid, and an instance of a failed transition to democracy. Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, the US State Department, and Genocide Watch have produced a number of reports evidencing "the bad human right track record" of EPRDF. In 2007 and 2008 HRW produced reports on how EPRDF committed crimes against humanity, respectively, in Gambella and the Ogaden regions in its counter insurgency campaigns against rebel groups.[98] Genocide Watch has accused EPRDF for acts of genocide against the Anywaa in the Gambella region.[99] HRW's two reports on Ethiopian politics and the abuse of development aid[100] have enraged EPRDF, which called the organization a threat to national security and an agent of destabilization of the country.[101]

Donors appear to have a double bind vis-à-vis the EPRDF and the human right groups. If they acknowledge and hail EPRDF's pro-poor policies "remarkable" economic growth and greater service delivery to the public, they also sympathize with HRGs' concern for the deteriorating human right situation in the country and related political closure. Donors and HRGs, however, differ in the strategies they adopt to push for political reform. Operating in the country and directly engaging with the government donors prefer a "constructive dialogue" or "quite diplomacy", combined with occasional "sending of tough messages". By and large they give

EPRDF the benefit of the doubt even if the alternative development policy it claims to be following will work in transforming the country at the expense of democratic rights. In the debate over democracy and development, donors put the accent more on the latter than the former. Far removed from the consequences of their own actions, and with a self-made mandate to "watch" the donors, HRGs on the other hand privilege democracy as a condition for aid and development. The difference in perspective between donors and HRGs on the issue of economic development has received a global attention since the publication of an article by Helen Epstein in *The New York Review of Books*, entitled "Cruel Ethiopia", where it says:

> Meles's Ethiopia is now the subject of an informal experiment to see whether "the big push" approach to African development will work. Its foreign aid receipts, which have tripled since 2000, amounted to some $3 billion in 2008, more than any other nation in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, this aid is also subsidizing a regime that is rapidly becoming one of the most repressive and dictatorial on the continent. Foreign aid is important. It helps needy people; it creates allies for our causes and markets for our products, and redeems some of the damage inflicted on the third world during the cold war. But aid agencies need to ensure that their programs don't exacerbate the political problems that are keeping people poor in the first place.[102]

The World Bank-Ethiopia has responded to HRG's criticisms against donors "complacency" towards EPRDF's human right violations and they being accused of "funding" authoritarianism in the following manner:

> We start, however, with a belief that in every country people want to be self-reliant and prosperous, and to develop a transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient governance system. Ethiopia is no exception. Our task, as an external development partner, is to support that innate tendency. However, building institutions, public and private, that assure every citizen's right to and effective delivery of public services takes a long time; indeed, it never ends, as we can see even in the most industrialized countries. Changes are incremental, and at times they may suffer serious setbacks. It is, therefore, crucial that development partners work with the long-term process of change, always in support of it, not in control of it, which is impossible in any case.[103]

The World Bank's Chief Economist for the African region remarks on the debate aptly and captures donors' ambivalence on the link between democracy and economic development: "The exchanges about the role of donors in "subsidizing" […] a politically repressive regime highlights the difficulty in linking politics at the top with poverty alleviation on the ground […] Even politically open regimes, such as India, have difficulty

delivering basic services to poor people … Conversely, poverty and disease have fallen sharply in some repressive societies, from Cuba to China."[104] EPRDF supporters on their part have dismissed the term of the debate as polemics coming from a "ruthless NGO tribe",[105] while others expressed astonishment about Epstein's "harsh" treatment of the EPRDF "after impressive accomplishments in the socio-economic field, and just before national elections".[106]

The third set of actors that affected EPRDF's negotiation with donors and the West at large are the new global players in the Ethiopian economy, particularly China. Reminiscent of the political latitude developing countries had during the Cold War, African leaders have sought to enhance their elbow room by securing an autonomous policy space and extract politically motivated economic resources by playing off the newly emerging global economic powers (China being the front runner) and the US-led Western economic block.[107] Cognizant of China's keen interest to tap into Africa's natural resources and markets, as well as inspired by the success of its alternative development model, EPRDF has intensified its economic and political links with China. Consequently, Ethiopia had attracted about 500 million dollars in concessional loans from China, along with 1.5 billion dollars in investment for telecoms infrastructure, and an extra 1.5 billion dollars in short-term trade credits in 2007.[108] In 2009 China signed a 349 million US dollar loan agreement with Ethiopia to help build the country's first expressway that connects Addis Ababa with Nazareth. China lent Ethiopia an additional 500 million US dollars during Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's state visit to China in August 2011.[109] Over a thousand Chinese companies now operate in Ethiopia with more than 20,000 Chinese workers. Chinese growing economic presence in Ethiopia has also a cultural expression, as "the sprawling Chinese restaurants are putting a mark in Addis Ababa's cultural landscape".[110] China has also become Ethiopia's biggest trading partner. More importantly, China is readily financing Ethiopia's mega hydraulic projects at a time when they are shunned by Western donors. The completion of the Chinese financed Gilgel Ghibe III is likely to be a defining moment in EPRDF's relationship with its Western donors who have expressed reservations about the country's strategy of energy sector development while at the same time being keen to be part of the ongoing economic transformation of thecountry. Ethiopia has also secured funding from Export Import bank of China for the ambitious

5000 km railway network, which is one of the key components of the GTP.[111] India and Turkey are also emerging as new players in the Ethiopian economy, respectively, investing 5 billion and 1.5 billion US dollars.[112]

By downsizing its embassy in Sweden, cutting of links with SIDA, while at the same time keen in opening an embassy in Brazil and appointing one of its senior officials – Seyoum Mesfin – as Ethiopia's ambassador to China, EPRDF clearly sent a signal in August 2010 regarding who EPRDF's own "darling donors" are: the "unconditional" Asian partners rather than the "strings attached" Western donors. As Tekeda Alemu, State Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, one of EPRDF's main preferences for China is its aid policy: "what China has made available to Africa, and to the developing world in general, are possibilities for consolidating sovereign choices and their independently chosen path of development".[113] Chinese aid was praised as "generous" and "dependable" at EPRDF's eighth party Congress in September 2010 where the Communist Party of China was also the main guest of honour. An anchor state in the GWOT, the West would not once again let Ethiopia go, though, and EPRDF knows that well. It is for this reason that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi described EPRDF's relation with the west as *'deldala'* or firm despite the ideological skirmishes between the two.[114] As is the case elsewhere in Africa and given Ethiopia's demographic size and geopolitical significance the West is likely to be in a "patron contest" with China in the years ahead.

## Conclusion

A recurrent pattern in the aid relationship between EPRDF and donor countries has existed in the past two decades; growing western criticism of the Ethiopian government has been paralleled with a steadily growing development aid. Aid has increased despite the contentious issues between donors and EPRDF and the simmering tension between EPRDF and international human right organizations. This article has argued that this is the case because EPRDF has effectively used its negotiating capital to ensure the sustainability and enhancement of development aid. These are comprised of the humanitarian card (the eligibility of Ethiopia to aid with a 40% population below the poverty line); the historical card (Ethiopia's non-colonial past); the relatively lower debt from the major international

financial institutions in the 1990s; state effectiveness; the geopolitical card (Ethiopia as a key ally in the war on terror); donors' reputation risk by pressing a leadership which has gained a high stature in the international arena; and the "Chinese card" (the leverage EPRDF has got from the new players in the Ethiopian economy).

EPRDF's rhetoric against neoliberalism might give the false impression that donors are putting strong conditionality on aid to Ethiopia. After all, EPRDF has already carried out most of the neoliberal package in the 1990s and donors have softened their pressure on the remaining sectors such as privatization of land and liberalization of the banking sector. EPRDF's recent move towards land certification and farmers' tenure security through users' right has gone a long way in satisfying donors. As donors are even showing interest to fund EPRDF's GTP, the anti-neoliberal rhetoric is fast losing its empirical moments. What EPRDF is really against is liberal democracy, of which neoliberalism is only one manifestation, which crowns individuals as right-bearing subjects whereas in EPRDF's revolutionary democracy political sovereignty resides in collectivities, in the famous "nations,nationalities and peoples". The debate on the political economy of Ethiopia's development process should therefore be reframed along the sequencing of two interrelated but contested issues: individual and groups rights, and economic development and political freedom. These are also the real contentious issues which underlie the tension and fragility of EPRDF–donors relations, though superseded by ideological and security concerns of the latter.

Donors' sense of bewilderment regarding what they consider EPRDF's democratic "backsliding" is less of a surprise if it is linked with the model of development the latter follows. If donors doubt the sustainability of current economic growth in Ethiopia it is not necessarily because of EPRDF's model of the developmental state, but because of the unique political context within which it is embedded. Unlike other countries which combined economic growth and political authoritarianism, EPRDF has faced an in-built structural insecurity exactly because it has committed itself to political pluralism. This deep sense of insecurity has been translated into a drive towards total control over society lest an alternative economic space could be translated into a political power. EPRDF's developmental state, therefore, is devoid of the competitive spirit of the national economies of other successful developmental states such as South Korea and China. This,

coupled with the lack of contestation of ideas, thus creativity, is likely to stifle whatever is driving the current economic growth in Ethiopia.

Contrary to public perception, opposition parties and even donors who assign an unrestrained political agency to the EPRDF, the predicament is better explained as a situation of entanglement. Like any other actor EPRDF made a political choice – political pluralism – but this was a constrained choice under the circumstances in which it came to power and the strong need to gain recognition/support from Western countries. If one picks up a certain political discourse to make ends meet under certain circumstances the same discourse could have a life of its own well beyond the interests of the actor which appropriated it in the first place. Although EPRDF is seeking an ideological exit strategy as an *awra* party, banning the trappings of democracy, such as electoral politics, is well beyond its reach. After all assumption and maintenance of power have been justified by the EPRDF for two decades to build and nurture democracy in a country long steeped into an authoritarian political culture.

EPRDF–donor relationship is also compounded by EPRDF's essentialist understanding of neoliberalism and exaggerated sensitivity to donors' conditionality: the pragmatism of the 1990s has given way to a more ideological stance in the 2000s. Ironically, EPRDF's rhetoric against donors' conditionality has hardened at a time when donors have softened their demands and are giving EPRDF the benefit of the doubt whether its state-driven model of economic development delivers more than their private-sector driven economic development.

In the simmering tension between EPRDF and the HRGs on the issue of economic development and political freedom, EPRDF represents the actions of the latter as if it were driven by the desire to "arrest" the country's march towards progress. Explanations for greater involvement of the HRGs in Ethiopian politics can be found elsewhere. It is rather a manifestation of a global debate (public safety versus civil liberty in the context of the war on terror) in a certain locale, further exhibiting how national politics is inextricably produced and reproduced through global processes and vice versa. The reason why Ethiopia has received greater attention from global human rights organizations is not only what they call the deterioration ofthe human rights situation but also because it is a convenient site where contemporary Western political issues are fought out. The war on terror has resulted in Western governments' substantial

encroachment on civil liberties, including supporting authoritarian governments in developing countries to buy their political support and military alliance against a not yet fully and properly defined enemy (so-called Islamic fundamentalism). The irony is that EPRDF has become a victim of its success. More than any other Ethiopian government it is EPRDF which has managed to extract tremendous economic resources from the international community. As a result it has been subjected to stronger scrutiny. EPRDF has perceived the international observational gaze and the reports produced on the human rights situation of Ethiopia in conspiratorial terms: that the neoliberal establishment represented by donors and HRGs would not tolerate an independent government, and thus seek to replace it with a more "user friendly" regime. This adversarial stance has greatly shaped EPRDF's self-understanding as a champion of an alternative model of economic development, a political identity which is legitimated by some powerful players such as Joseph Stieglitz in international politics. EPRDF's collusion and collision with donors and escalating confrontation with the international human rights groups testify how Ethiopian politics is being produced and reproduced through new global referents.

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## Notes

1. Epstein, "Cruel Ethiopia."
2. Human Rights Watch, "Development without Freedom," 4.
3. See: http://www.dagethiopia.org
4. See Bach, "*Abyotawi* Democracy," in this issue.
5. Borchgrevink, "Limits to Donor Influence," 195.
6. Gibson et al., *The Samaritan's Dilemma*; Whitfield, *The Politics of Aid*.
7. Whitfield and Fraser, "Negotiating Aid," 27–8.
8. Borchgrevink and Hansen, "Cutting Aid to Promote Peace."
9. African Development Bank, "Ethiopia: Structural Adjustment Programme Project Performance Evaluation Report."
10. Borchgrevink and Hansen, "Cutting Aid to Promote Peace."
11. International Monetary Fund, "Ethiopia: Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility."
12. World Bank, "PSCAP: Project Appraisal Document."
13. ODI, "PSNP: Policy, Programme and Institutional Linkages."
14. Borchgrevink and Hansen, "Cutting Aid to Promote Peace."
15. Aregawi Berhe, *A Political History of TPLF*.

16. Medhane and Young, “TPLF: Reform or Decline?,” 392.
17. Young, *Peasant Revolt in Ethiopia;* Aregawi, *A Political History of TPLF*.
18. Meles Zenawi, “Speech at the Africa Task Force,” Manchester University.
19. African Development Bank Group, “Ethiopia: Structural Adjustment Programme Project Performance Evaluation Report”
20. Ottaway, “The Ethiopian Transition.”
21. Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
22. Stewart, *Adjustment and Poverty*.
23. Zack-Williams and Mohan, “Africa: From SAP to PRSP,” 501.
24. Buiter, “Country Ownership.”
25. Whitfield and Fraser, “Negotiating Aid.”
26. CIDA, “Ethiopia Country Programme Evaluation.”
27. Dr Howard Taylor, head of DFID-Ethiopia, *Ethiopian Reporter*, March 5, 2011.
28. DAG, “Aid Management and Utilisation in Ethiopia,” iii.
29. Dercon et al., “The Impact of Agricultural Extension and Roads.”
30. Asrat Seyoum, “Transformational Aid,” 12.
31. Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn*.
32. Keller and Iyob, “The Horn of Africa.”
33. Shinn, “Ethiopia: Governance and Terrorism.”
34. Rabasa, “Radical Islam in East Africa.”
35. HRW, “Collective Punishment”; HRW, “World Report: Events of 2008.”
36. Anderson and Williams, “The Securitization of Development Policy or the Devel-opmentization of Security Policy.”
37. Hadfield, “Janus Advances?,” 54.
38. In military terminology, a black site is a location at which an unacknowledged black project is conducted. Recently, the term has gained notoriety in describing secret prisons operated by the United States (US). See, Democracy Now, “Outsourced Guantanamo.”
39. Dereje Feyissa, “Potential for and Signs of Religious Radicalization in Ethiopia.”
40. USIP, “Terrorism in the Horn,” 5.
41. Pureza et al., “Peace Building and Failed States.”
42. Whitfield and Fraser, “Negotiation Aid,” 337.
43. Prester John is a name given to a mythical medieval Christian priest-king of a vast empire in central Asia, and later in Ethiopia. It was hoped that Prester John might become an ally of the European Princes fighting to stop the Muslim advance in Mediterranean areas during the crusades; see Waters, “Ethiopia: The Land of the Prester John.”
44. The government plans to borrow at least 398.4 billion Ethiopian birr ($23.6 billion) from home and abroad to fund the five-year growth plan, with an additional 75.4 billion birr to finance fiscal deficits over the same period. See Davison, “Ethiopia’s Investment Plan May Be Unsustainable, World Bank Official Says.”
45. Davison, “Ethiopia’s Investment Plan May Be Unsustainable, World Bank Official Says.”
46. Meles Zenawi, “House of Peoples Representatives Meeting.”
47. Stieglitz, “The End of Neoliberalism.”
48. Williamson, *Latin American Readjustment*.
49. Stieglitz, “The End of Neoliberalism.”
50. Meles Zenawi, “Speech at the Africa Task Force.”
51. EPRDF, *Revolutionary Democracy*, 31–2.
52. Kelly, “No Return to the State.”
53. International Political Economy Zone, “Stieglitz Lauds Ethiopia’s Growth, Too.”
54. Seyoum Mesfin, “Statement at the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.”

55. Meles Zenawi, “Speech at the Fourth African Economic Conference.” http://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/article/fourth-africaneconomic-conference-imperative-of-re-designing-africasdevelopment-trajectory-5336/
56. The Reporter, “Meles Zenawi’s Response to Questions by a Panel of Distinguished Ethiopians.”
57. Devarajan, “Natural Recourses and the Washington Consensus.”
58. Edigheji, *Constructing a Democratic Developmental State in South Africa*.
59. Wong, “The Adaptive Developmental State.”
60. World Bank, “Towards the Competitive Frontier.”
61. Schröder, “From Bullets to the Bank Account.”
62. EPRDF, *Revolutionary Democracy*, 32–9.
63. As Paulos Milkias noted, “many of the successful business men in Addis Ababa have financial connections with the TPLF. If we take EFFORT, we see that it owns 51% shares in the Addis pharmaceutical factory, and STAR pharmaceutical and medical supplies,” “Ethiopia, the TPLF and the Roots of the 2001 Political Tremor,” 28.
64. World Bank, “Towards the Competitive Frontier,” 54.
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66. Whitfield, “Aid and Power,” 337.
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