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**Discourses on Liberation and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa:
The Cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia**

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Graduate School of Politics and International Relations
Rutherford College**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in International Relations
Department of Politics and International Relations
University of Kent at Canterbury**

September 1997

**For the Souls Who Have Died that People
May be Free in Eritrea, Ethiopia and
My Beloved South Sudan.**

ABSTRACT

In the last four decades, most of Africa's indigenous non-colonial governments have been confronted by internal wars of liberation either in the form of revolutions or of military uprisings and coup de'tats. Since independence, these regimes have faced the most lucid and trenchant criticism from intellectuals, from writers, playwrights and poets such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, and, especially in the 1990s, from renowned academics such as Ali A. Mazrui, A.M. Babu, Peter Anyang Nyong'o, Issa Shivji, Korwa G. Adar, Samuel Decalo, Julius Nyang'oro and many others. In the view of these critics, the past years of Africa's independence appear as the lost decades. Such criticism helped to reveal the reality of the changing political situation in post-colonial Africa.

Discourses on Liberation and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa is a theoretical, historical and political analysis of liberation movements in post-colonial countries in the sub-continental region of Africa. It examines the confrontation between liberation movements and indigenous, that is non-colonial, non-white-minority-rule governments in the region. It attempts to clarify the role played by liberation movements in the shaping of post-colonial African political order. The main aim of the study is threefold: (i) to contribute to the theories of liberation by looking at the specific problems faced by liberation from indigenous post-colonial non-white-minority-regimes in Africa; (ii) to link the theories to empirical cases by looking at the self-views of the actors involved in the liberation struggle itself; and finally, (iii) to assess current problems faced in African societies during the process of democratisation.

The study looks at the two cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia in order to illuminate and inform the theoretical discussion. The two cases are particularly interesting because they are clearly linked and still provide two different narratives on liberation. As will be shown in the course of the investigation, Eritrean self-views centre more around self-determination/secession and/or independence, while Ethiopian self-views refer more to democratic principles. The investigation of the liberation movements in Eritrea and Ethiopia allows us to study the relationship between two different narratives on liberation (self-determination and democracy) in one concrete historical setting. Eritrea and Ethiopia are a unique experience because their fighters of liberation have defeated a powerful army of a *status quo* regime backed, at one moment, by both world powers. They form a challenge to much received thought and suggest the need for an incorporation into discourse of the unusual, often autochthonous struggles of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Writing an acknowledgement is as difficult as writing a Ph.D. itself. One does not know who to include or to leave out given the range of the people involved in the whole programme. In my case, the parents, the relatives, friends, the staff from primary to university level, and the Church, all have had a hand in my academic up-bringing. Although I generally thank them without discrimination, I would like to thank the Department of Politics and International Relations and, in particular, its Head, Prof. A.J.R. Groom, who during the MA programme triggered the idea of continuing a doctorate. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Andrew J. Williams for the most often very encouraging and comforting advice and guidance. He undoubtedly provided a carriage that has brought me to the expected destination. Many thanks to Prof. Stephen Chan for the continued offer of assistance even when distance dictated that regular meetings would not be possible after moving to Nottingham-Trent, Dr. Keith Webb for having always provided a critical view as a member of my supervisory committee, and Stefan Rossbach, a devoted doctoral agent and generous individual, deserves mention. He knows the pain which he subjected himself to when he had the luxury to say NO! Whenever I would ask for help. There is no really effective way to thank so many people who in troubled and uncertain times were able to help an academic on the tread.

I would like to give a very big 'Thank You!' to all those who generously aided me with their limited resources and continued to offer me their comfort through constant correspondence. They are all responsible for nothing but whatever virtues this thesis may have; all the egregious errors, however, remain my own. The Catholic Diocese of Torit-Sudan, the Very Reverend Fr. Joseph Yala Ukello MCCJ, Michael Folley, a Xaverian Brother, the Comboni Missionaries, Fr. Thomas Oliha Attiyah and the Apostles of Jesus, Fr. John Baptist Lohitu, and other close friends and relatives who know their inclusion when they read this particular sentence. They all played a crucial role, each, in a special way during this exciting and exasperating journey.

Yet it is a comfort to know that in far places the vocation of the researcher, the chronicler of events, in a prismatic world still has some validity for many very different men and women. And there were many whose kindness will have no reward in this thesis, those who bought me too much beer or took me home to dinner or accommodated me for nights. I thank Russ and Lyn Noble for having introduced me to the community of the Baptist Church in Gillingham. In particular Chris and Margaret Voke, Roy and Jane Jones, Allan and Anne Newman, Bernie and Chris Pinner and all the sympathetic friends in that equidistant town between London and Canterbury. In Canterbury itself, Rev. Samuel Reading and Mr. Andrew Way have been very helpful both spiritually and materially. In London, Patrick Billy Obillais, the families of Ben and Lily Loky, Tulio and Grace Odong; in Leeds, the families of Daniel and Catherine Wani and that of a friend and colleague in the field, Efuk and Rose Oniama. Special thanks too must go to a close brother in Dorset, Andrew Allam Ray and family. All of them provided a relaxing atmosphere an anxious researcher needs.

Many far away too deserve a big 'Thank You!': in Nairobi, in Asmara, in Addis Ababa, and of course in the Sudan. The families of Martin Ohuro Okerruk, Dominic Olluru Ocholia, Dr. Lawrence and Susan Wongo, Maggie Mathew, Beda Auselio Otwari, Valentino Otimoi Nazarino and the family of the most lovely uncle, late Adelyo Amaring Lorya in the United States, all kept their hearts and minds with me. In Asmara, I would like to thank all those who

accepted to be interviewed. In the PFDJ Headquarters, I thank the Political Secretary, Ato Yemane Ghebreab for his generosity and the connections he made for me to collect data from the various Governmental Ministries and Departments. The University of Asmara for the place they gave me on Campus while in Eritrea for five months. Many thanks to Edna Yohannes, my very able Tigrigna translator and another close friend of great comfort Hannah Gebre-Berhan in Eritrea. In Addis Ababa, Counsellor Afeworki Abraha, then No. 2 in the Eritrean Embassy, and family did offer me enormous assistance. Many thanks must also go to the people I interviewed in Ethiopia, in particular, Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse of the EPRDF Foreign Relations, Woizero Netsanet Asfaw, Public Relations Director in the Office of the Prime Minister, Woizero Mebrat Bayene of the Information Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Col. Assaminew Bedane of the Ministry of Defence Foreign Relations, Col. Halefom Alemu, Head of the Ministry of Defence Secretariat, Dr. John Young and colleagues in the PSIR Department in Addis Ababa University, and all the anonymous interviewees who denied mention. The family of Dr. Luka Tombe Monoja in Addis Abba too were very welcoming. I say to them all '*humo tina dang bebe bebe!*'.

Several institutions, with their, alas, anonymous staffs, deserve more than simple mention SOAS, LSE, and of course the Templeman Library and computing staff at UKC! They often get stressed because of the tedious queries students incur on them. In Rutherford College, many thanks go to our Departmental and Administrative Secretaries, Maryline Spice, Nicola Cooper and Jean Hudson. They may not detect that the warmth and smile research students receive from them is a big weight in the whole process. In my case they wrote and faxed circuitously when there were requests to verify my status to be issued visas as a *bona fide* student of the department.

Finally, lovely thanks go to my parents, my late father Angelo Ofuho Otimo and my mother Maria Madal Ofuho and their three daughters: Philomena Itoho, Avelina Ijasi and Matilde Ihiju, and their children. They remember those days when they would beg their only son and brother not to give up the daily eighteen miles shuttle between Ilieu and Hiyala in 1980 during the primary school days. I hope they will now get satisfied that their relentless efforts have finally bore fruits. I too hope that Helen Elizabeth Spink will find happiness in the success of this work because she, in the last two years, rendered greater warmth and support. Last but not the least, I thank all my colleagues in the doctoral adventure in the department. There were also others who were at times a nuisance because of their 'Woodys Alternative' agenda, however, when the time came for them to vamoose, only emotions proved a better expression of a future without the same friends. Dr. Matsheka, Dr. Dhiliwayo, Dr. Alexander Maria Maphosa and Kgosi, '*kwaherini sana!*'. In life, cynics too, have their place and I have forgiven those who wished to find joy had I been discontinued because of financial problems. Since I dedicated this thesis to all those who have died for freedom, my late brother A/Cdr. Patrick Atara Akirikmoi who fell in the SPLM/A frontline at the time of writing up this work deserves a special mention. And as the EPLF Liberation Slogan stands, '*Awet Neh'fash!*'

Canterbury, UK
November 1997
All Souls Day.

ACRONYMS

AAPO: All Amhara People's Organisation
 AAU: Addis Ababa University
 ACP: African Caribbean Pacific countries
 AESNA: Association of Eritrean Students in North America
 ALF: Afar Liberation Front
 ANC: African National Congress
 ANDM: Amhara National Democratic Movement (formerly EPDM)
 APDO: Afar Peoples's Liberation Democratic Organisation
 ASEAN: Association of South East Asian Nations
 AU: Asmara University
 BPLM: Beni Shangul People's Liberation Movement
 CELU: Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
 CERA: Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs
 CFM: Council of Foreign Ministers
 COEDF: Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces
 CCE: Constitutional Commission of Eritrea
 COPWE: Committee to establish the Workers Party of Ethiopia
 CRMG: Citizens' Referendum Monitoring Group
 DATW: Democratic Association of Tigrayan Women
 DOP: Declaration of Principles
 DUP: Democratic Unionist Party
 ECA: UN Economic Commission for Africa
 EC: Election Commission
 EDAG: Ethiopian Democratic Active Group
 EDC: Ethiopian Democratic Coalition
 EDF: Eritrean Democratic Front
 EDM: Eritrean Democratic Movement
 EDMLE: Eritrean Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrea
 EDORM: Ethiopian Officers Revolutionary Democratic Movement
 EDU: Ethiopian Democratic Union
 EDUP: Ethiopia Democratic Unity Party (formerly EDU)
 EEC: European Economic Community
 EFLNA: Eritreans for Liberation in North America
 EIC: Eritrean Investment Centre
 ELA: Eritrean Liberation Army
 ELC: Eritrean Land Commission
 ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front
 ELF-GC: Eritrean Liberation Front-General Command
 ELF-RC: Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council
 ELF-PLF: Eritrean Liberation Front - People's Liberation Front
 ELM: Eritrean Liberation Movement
 EMLF: Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force
 ENDO: Ethiopian National Democratic Organisation
 ENDP: Ethiopian National Democratic Party
 EPLO: Ethiopian People's Liberation Organisation
 EPDM: Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
 EPLA: Eritrean People's Liberation Army
 EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front
 EPRA: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army
 EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ERRA: Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
ESDL: Ethiopia Somali Democratic League
ESM: Ethiopian Student Movement
ESUNA: Ethiopian Student Union of North America
ETA: Ethiopian Teachers Association
ET: Eritrean Television
EU: European Union
EWDF: Eritrean War Disabled Fighters Association
EWVA: Eritrean War veterans Association
FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FPC: Four Power Commission
FRELIMO: Fronte de Libertacao de Mozambique
GC: General Command
GOE: Government of Eritrea
GPDF: Gurage People's Democratic Front
GPLM: Gambella People's Liberation Movement
HSIU: Haile Selassie I University
HNDO: Hadiya National Democratic Organisation
ICRC: International Committee for Red Cross
IFLO: Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IGAD: Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IMF: International Monetary Fund
JIOG: Joint International Observer Group
KPC: Kembata People's Congress
LCIR: London Center of International Relations of UKC
LSE: London School of Economics and Political Science
MEISON: All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Amharic acronym)
MLLT: Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (also Malalit in Tigrigna)
MPLA: Movimiento Popular de Libertacao de Angola
MOND: Ministry of National Defence
NAM: Non-Aligned Movement
NCEW: National Confederation of Eritrean Workers
NCOs: Non-Commissioned Officers
NDA: National Democratic Alliance
NDP: National Democratic Programme
NDR: National Democratic Revolution
NEC: National Election Commission
NICS: Newly Industrialised Countries
NIF: National Islamic Front
NIHR: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NOG: Norwegian Observer Group
NRA: National Resistance Army of Uganda
NRM: National Resistance Movement of Uganda
NUEW: National Union of Eritrean Women
NUEY: National Union of Eritrean Youth
OALF: Oromo Abo Liberation Front
OAU: Organisation of African Unity
OAU-LC: Organisation of African Unity Liberation Council
OLF: Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF: Ogadeni National Liberation Front

OPDM: Oromic People's Democratic Movement
 OPDO: Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
 OPEC: Organisation of Petroleum Economic Countries
 OPLF: Oromo People's Liberation Front
 PAIGC: Partido Africano da Independencia da Guiene e Cabo Verde
 PFDJ: People's Front for Democracy and Justice
 PDRE: People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
 PGE: Provisional Government of Eritrea
 PLF: People's Liberation Front
 PLF2: the result of the PLF and the ELF-PLF merger
 MAC: Provisional Military Administrative Council
 POWs: Prisoners of War
 PPG: Provisional People's Government
 POLISARIO: Frente Popular para la Libertacao de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro
 PRIO: Peace Research Institute Oslo
 PSIR: Political Science and International Relations of AAU
 RE: Radio Eritrea
 RC: Referendum Commission of Eritrea
 RENAMO: Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana
 REST: Relief Society of Tigray
 RICE: Research and Information Center on Eritrea
 RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front
 RSC: Revolutionary and Supreme Council
 RRC: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
 SAPEM: Southern Africa Political and Economic Magazine
 SCP: Sudanese Communist Party
 SIAS: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies
 SLM: Sidamo Liberation Movement
 SNM: Somali Liberation Movement
 SOAS: School of Oriental and African Studies
 SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army
 SPLM: Sudan People's Liberation Movement
 SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa
 SSF: Somali Salvation Front
 SWAPO: South West Africa People's Organisation
 TGE: Transitional Government of Ethiopia
 TLF: Tigray Liberation Front
 TNO: Tigray National Organisation
 TPDM: Tigray People's Democratic Movement
 TPC: Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia
 TPLF: Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
 UKC: University of Kent at Canterbury
 UN: United Nations
 UN-DC: United Nations Decolonisation Committee
 UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
 UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugee
 UNITA: Uniao Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola
 UNOVER: United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea
 UP: Unionist Party
 USA: United States of America
 USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
 VSO: Voluntary Service Organisation

WB: World Bank
WPDF: Wolyata People's Democratic Front
WPE: Workers Party of Ethiopia
WSLF: Western Somali Liberation Front
ZANU: Zimbabwe African National Union

GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

- aklie: term for patience
- al-tahrir: liberation
- Ato: is word for 'Mr.' mainly in Ethiopia and not very commonly used in Eritrea
- awet neh'fash: victory to the masses
- awraja: administrative division (in Eritrea an *awraja* is a province)
- baito: Tigrigna term for parliament or some kind of legislature/assembly
- baito adi: village assembly (in Eritrea)
- baria: despised ethnic group (associated in Eritrea with dark skin people such as the Nara and the Kunama)
- beta israel: Ethiopian jews often considered a different ethnic group
- birr: Ethiopian currency, ten of its equivalent per a sterling pound (or five per U.S. dollar)
- buda: the evil eye also used for persons believed to posses the buda
- dergue: Amhara term for council or committee after the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia
- desa (diessa): village based land distribution system in Eritrea (also shehena)
- deyanus/dagna: judges/judge
- ehadeg: Amharic acronym for EPRDF
- enda: familiy based land distribution system (also tselmi)
- eslah: reform
- felasha: pejorative for the Ethiopian jews (also beta israel)
- gelafo: a committe responsible for those who do not have the right to own land (because of age or in the case of immigrants)
- gim gema: tigrigna term for debate or assembly (mainly among the Tigrayans, TPLF)
- girmawi: greatest of the great
- gult: land granted as fief
- harakat al-tahrir Ertrya: arabic term for 'front for the liberation of Eritrea'
- hdreb: serfs (members of the Beni-Amer confederation of tribes)
- highi-endaba: laws of the natives
- hisbawi ginbar harnet Ertra: Tigrigna's name for the EPLF
- hiyadat al ama: military headquarters
- jabhat atahrir al Ertrya qiyada al ama: arabic name for the ELF
- kebelles: urban-dwellers association (in Amharic the term means neighbourhood)
- Kidamawai: first amongst the first
- mahber showate: Tigrigna for 'group of five'
- makelai aliet: outsiders or immigrants from Ethiopia to the highlands of Eritrea who were mainly Tigrigna speaking Coptic Christians
- mareb mellash: land beyond the river
- medri geez: the land of the free
- medri bahri: the land of the sea
- menkae: Tigrigna's dual term for a bat or left-handed
- meret le arrashu: land to the tiller (a political slogan used by students under Haile Selassie's final days in power)
- metaro: land dividers
- mitias: a Tigrigna term for 'to help community members start a new life'
- nabtab: aristocrats (a member of the Beni-Amer confederation of tribes)
- negus negussie (neguste negast): king of kings, a title used for the Ethiopian emperors
- ras: from Ras Teferi Mekonnen crown negus of Ethiopia by Empress Zawditu, and later became widely known as Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia
- Restinya: a secret right over land (rest hereditary powers)
- rist: private property with a right of inheritance (often used in land distribution)

sha'abia: arabic name for the EPLF
shehena: village based land tenure system in Eritrea (also diesa)
sheria: arabid term for 'islamic law'
shifita: Amharic term for bandit (used to describe the EPLF and other fronts in Ethiopia during both the imperial and military rule)
tahrir: arabic term for liberation
tegadelti: fighters, heroes (title used to describe the EPLF liberation fighters). Singular: tegadelei, feminine: tegadalti
tegadla harnet Ertra: Tigrigna name for the ELF
tesfa: hope
tetswarnet: perseverance
tsanet: steadfastness
tselmi: family based land distribution system (also enda)
wedati: advocates
Woizero: is word for 'Mrs.' In both Ethiopia and Eritrea
woreda: district
woyene: connotes "solidarity" in Tigrigna

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses the influence liberation movements have exerted in shaping African societies. It argues that liberation movements and democratisation processes were linked in the history of some post-colonial African countries. The precise nature of this link is elucidated by the two selected cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia where post-liberation restructuring has provided a fertile ground for the emergence of public debate. For the first time democracy has become a common terminology in Ethiopia's political history. This chapter introduces the theme, scope, and methodology of this study.

1.1. Sub-Saharan Africa: a general background

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is that sub-continental region of Africa lying within the Equator south of the Sahara Desert. It extends from 15° north to 35° south latitude. It is almost as large as the size of western Europe, the United States and Canada combined. The region is dominantly African in culture and history as opposed to its northern counterpart-the Maghreb region-which is mainly Caucasian and Arab in race. With the exception of Ethiopia, Liberia, and a few big countries occupied by Belgium, Germany and Portugal, the whole region fell under British and the French colonial rule¹. That in turn explains why the region has largely, politically and socially, remained both Anglophone and Francophone in influence. This external connection has also played a role in the on-going transition to democracy. For example, in Francophone Africa, the changes mainly took place in the form of the 'National Conferences'², and in Anglophone countries the transition followed the line of either mass

¹For a history of the 'Scramble for Africa' see Chapter 3.

²See the phenomenon of the national conference in Samuel Decalo, "The Process, Prospects and Constraints of Democratization in Africa", *African Affairs* (1992), pp. 7-35; Julius E. Nyang'oro, "Reform Politics and the Democratization Process in Africa", *African Studies Review*, vol. 37, no. 1 (April 1994), pp. 133-149; Naomi Chazan, "Africa's Democratic Challenge", *World Policy Journal*, vol. ix, no. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 279-307; Catherine Newbury, "Introduction: Paradoxes of Democratization in Africa", *African Studies Review*, vol. 37, no. 1 (April 1994), pp. 1-8; Kathryn Nwajiaku, "The National Conferences in Benin and Togo Revisited", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3(1994), pp. 411-427.

demonstrations such as in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia³, or through liberation struggles such as in Uganda, Namibia and South Africa⁴.

This thesis examines liberation and democratisation processes in all these settings. It offers an analysis of African conceptions of liberation within the parameters of the discipline of International Relations. Historically, our analysis will begin with the emergence of the African State-System at the close of the 18th century. For the two case studies, the thesis also traces the genesis of the liberation struggles in both Eritrea and Ethiopia in view of establishing the link between their political activities since the beginning of this century to the contemporary situation. The empirical work done is meant to enable the reader to draw similarities and dissimilarities of views on liberation and democratisation from both countries, and to appraise theories of liberation.

Furthermore, the thesis provides us with substantial lessons to enable us realise that the current discourse on democracy in particular is not just something that has taken place because of similar incidents elsewhere, therefore giving the impression that the African people rarely initiate political changes of their own. Such an analysis has been a boon to the most repressive regimes in Africa, because it supports their defence that changes are being imposed on them from outside, for example from Western donors and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and/or World Bank. But as one commentator rightly remarked: "The African people, however, know that there has never been any time since independence when

³For a comparative analysis on the effects of the events of democratic change in most countries in Africa, see Naomi Chazan, *op. cit.*, pp.279-307; Samuel Decalo, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-35; and two books by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987) and *30 Years of Independence: the lost decades?* (Nairobi: Academy Science Publishers, 1992).

⁴The liberation struggle has always been the phenomenon of those countries for years. See Alex de Waal, "Ethiopia: Transition to What?" *World Policy Journal*, vol. ix, no. 4(Fall/Winter 1992), pp. 719-737; Joshua B. Forrest, "A Promising Start: the Inauguration and Consolidation of Democracy in Namibia", *World Policy Journal*, vol. ix, no. 4(Fall/Winter 1992), pp. 739-753; David Pool, "Eritrean Independence: The Legacy of the Dergue and the Politics of Reconstruction", *African Affairs*, 92(1993), pp. 389-402; and Douglas G. Anglin, "Southern Africa Responses to Eastern European Developments", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3(1990), pp. 431-455.

there was no pressure for democracy from below"⁵. Academics have only been involved in exerting this pressure since the early 1980s⁶.

Thus, the struggle to democratise Africa has been there since independence; the only difference now is that the world attention has changed, favouring the struggle of the people against repressive regimes in Africa and the rest of the world. However, in the case of liberation movements, unlike democracy, only minimal theoretical work has been done. Therefore it is the intention of this thesis to update the debate and provide an analysis of the link between liberation and democracy in the continent.

1.2. The Relevance of the Discourse for Africa

The democratic project or the process of redemocratising African politics is becoming the central focus in African studies. This is not only because of the anti-authoritarian climate in the West, but also because there are clear indications that peasants, workers, and intellectuals in Africa are no longer prepared to accept being victims of despotic regimes⁷. Revolutionary thought in Africa today encourages the view that democratic politics will be made possible only after all authoritarian regimes have been replaced by progressive, open and pluralistic systems of governance. This has been backed by the belief that any attempts to resolve these predicaments will not only succeed in bringing about political legitimacy, but will also lead to the restructuring of the economy to meet the needs of the people at the grassroots level. However, the demand for radical change has also generated its own dilemmas. For example, what type of democratic governance is acceptable to the African situation? Is political liberalism the answer? If not, what democracy?

In Western liberal terms, democratisation entails the establishment of political rights that are mainly encompassed in Dahl's three principles of polyarchy: competition for government

⁵A better defence of that view is given in the edition of African scholars, see Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, *30 Years of Independence in Africa: The Lost Decades?*, *op. cit.*, p. 6; also article by Hussein M. Adam explains how the democratic fight is as old as the history of independence in Africa, see his, "Frantz Fanon as a Democratic Theorist", *African Affairs*, 92(1993), pp. 499-518.

⁶See for example the proceedings of the 1985 Naivasha Conference on democracy in Africa edited by Afrifa Gitonga and Walter Oyugi (eds.), *Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988); and also the democratization literature of SAPES works and CODESRIA have been so radical even prior to the clear demise of the former east-west divide.

⁷See Robert Fatton, "Liberal Democracy in Africa", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 105, no. 3(1990), pp. 455-473; cited in Julius E. Nyang'oro, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135

power, political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, and finally civil and political liberties⁸. These three principal elements are also associated with bourgeois liberalism, portraying a high-level of "real democracy"⁹. In the current discourse on democracy in Africa, Larry Diamond takes Robert Dahl's literature as a basis for assessing the nature of African political systems in the post-Cold War era. For him, democracy is indeed a system of government that meets three conditions similar to Dahl's principles. As he observed, what is necessary is:

[m]eaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and finally a level of civil and political liberties - freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organisations - sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation¹⁰.

It is the absence of most of these principles of civil government since independence that provided the ground for the rise of public discontent and liberation movements. In fact, the on-going discourse on democratisation is concerned not only with the introduction of these democratic rights, but that indigenous institutions must be crafted which support the working of democracy. With this new focus, the current political discourse has revived hopes for democratic governance in the continent.

Comparatively, most of the post-colonial literature on African studies from the 1960s to the 1980s engaged very much with the development agenda¹¹. For example, issues dealing with ideology, policy choice or "democracy" and so on, were all subsumed under the general post-independence development project. Worse still, the choice was limited: what would deliver quickly the objective of development -- liberal or socialist methods? In a way, the era of

⁸See Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).

⁹Within a bourgeois framework, "real democracy" emanates from the three principals of polyarchy, see Georg Sorensen, *Democracy and the Developmental State* (Aarhus, Den.: Institute of Political Science, 1991).

¹⁰See his *Democracy in Developing Countries, vol. 2: Africa* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 1988), p. 47.

¹¹See e.g.: Crawford Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982); Richard Sklar, "Developmental Democracy", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 29, no. 4(October 1987), pp. 686-714.

African independence in the late 1950s through the 1960s was not a fortunate historical moment because the world was preoccupied with ideological competition and African countries were bound to fall into the muddles of Cold War politics. Perhaps if African independence were to take place today, there would not have been any dilemma(s) as to which way to go in terms of ideology and models of development. Today, the whole continent seems under pressure to replace one-party rule by multi-partyism. We will discuss later to what extent the link between multi-partyism and democracy is appropriate for Sub-Saharan Africa.

The shift from the development debate to that of pluralistic governance became unavoidable especially when the continent started facing economic problems, and structural adjustment programmes (policies) became a central focus, and therefore, a prerequisite for any relations with international finance. Hence, developmentalism began to pave the way to adjustment at the level of economy, and at the political level, bourgeois democracy and its tenets began to gain respect at the close of the 1980s. Even those who posed as socialist or neo-Marxist the world over began to revise their political and ideological standpoints at the close of this century¹². However, the shift did not go unchallenged. Some African scholars have already cautioned that the shift from the developmental paradigm to democratic change must be done with care. According to Julius Nyang'oro, there is a danger of falling into the trap of shifting to, and embracing, a new paradigm without taking stock of what was good about the old school of development¹³.

From the late 1980s, a much cautious, but rather operational and pragmatic approach, has been taken by a few scholars who attempt to place the debate on democracy in Africa in the

¹²For example, Julius Nyerere's Tanzania in an interview with the Kenyan press, prior to Kenya's multi-party elections in 1992 became apologetic and began to embrace the symptoms of democratic change. Not only that, there has been an enormous literature advocating, not explicitly for democracy, but in particular for issues of human rights. See SAPES and CODESRIA works by people like Issa Shivji, *The Concept of Human Rights in Africa* (London: CODESRIA Books, 1989); in idem (ed.), *State and Constitutionalism: An African Debate on Democracy* (Harare: SAPES, 1991); Claude E. Welch and Ronald I. Meltzer (eds.), *Human Rights and Development in Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Rhoda Howard, *Human Rights in Commonwealth Africa* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986); and Patrick Chabal (ed.), *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹³For earlier warnings on this, see Julius E. Nyang'oro, *The State and Capitalist Development in Africa: Declining Political Economics* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Julius E. Nyang'oro and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Corporatism in Africa: Comparative Analysis and Practice* (Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1989); and Manfred Bienfeld, "Dependency Theory and the Political Economy of Africa's Crisis", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 43(1988), pp. 67-87.

context of a changing global economy¹⁴. These scholars contend that democratisation in Africa must be viewed more as a process rather than a mere sharp or radical turn from authoritarianism to a more open political rule, and that democratisation in Africa must be discussed within the context of political economy¹⁵. Even though it is evident that liberal-democracy has since been justified on its own merit even by writers who considered themselves socialists, there is a danger of construing others like Amin, Shivji and Shaw as having an ideological reservation about bourgeois liberal democracy, since the trio posed themselves in the 1970s and 1980s as socialists. However, as Richard Sandbrook has argued:

From a democratic-socialist perspective, liberal democracy is a defensible goal as a political system characterised by regular and free elections in which politicians organised into parties compete to form the government, by the right of virtually all adult citizens to vote, and by guarantees of a range of familiar political and civil rights ...¹⁶.

The other salient issue of greater relevance in the debate is the nature of the African state and its fragmented civil society. It has been argued that the current debate in Africa about governance and the one-party state is a manifestation of the crises of the state *vis-a-vis* democracy and development. So to understand both the nature of the African condition, and the current debate about it, the argument goes, it is necessary that we focus on the analysis of the post-colonial state in Africa and its relationship to civil society¹⁷. As Ibbo Mandaza has observed, "African scholars are nearer now to the consensus that the African condition is an outcome of both internal and external factors"¹⁸. Therefore, there is a growing need for

¹⁴Proponents of this school include: Samir Amin, "The Issue of Democracy in the Contemporary Third World", *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 12(January 1991), pp. 83-104; Issa G. Shivji, "Contradicting Class Perspectives in the Debate on Democracy", In Issa G. Shivji (ed.), *op cit.*, pp. 253-260; and Timothy M. Shaw, "Revisionism in African Political Economy in 1990s", In Julius E. Nyang'oro and Timothy M. Shaw (ed.), *Beyond Structural Adjustment in Africa: The Political Economy of Sustainable and Democratic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1992), pp. 49-70.

¹⁵A plausible remark about this is made by Julius E. Nyang'oro, "Reform Politics and the Democratisation Process in Africa", *op. cit.*, pp. 144-146.

¹⁶See his "Liberal Democracy in Africa: A Socialist Revisionist Perspective", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2(1988), pp. 240-267:241; also cited by Julius Nyang'oro, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁷See Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994); and Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1989).

¹⁸See his "The State and Democracy in Southern Africa", in Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.), *30 Years of Independence in Africa: The Lost Decades?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-85:64.

studies of the relationship between the post-colonial state and civil society; and the contextual nature of democracy. Within the Sub-Saharan African situation, for example, the issue of governance and democracy could not be understood outside the context of revolutionary thought. Here it is necessary to go beyond the simple characterisation of the present changes in the continent as mere resonances of events elsewhere, in particular as major echoes of the collapse of former Soviet Union and the redemocratisation of its European buffers. It must be noted that post-colonial restructuring in Africa (SSA) has been the product of collective rebellious effort by revolutionary intellectuals such as in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and/or now the Congo (former Zaire). The effects of this restructuring have sent shock waves to other neighbouring regimes that are now perceived as islands of dictatorship.

Post-colonial liberation struggles have in specific terms affected the bulk of African societies, changed the nature of the state and the extent (and extant) of civil society in general. Like other post-colonial states elsewhere in the world, the African state is caught between the continuities and demands of old structures, as reflected in the economic power of the first generation leaders and their allies and international capital. We can observe such trends also in other countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya and Malawi. A comprehensive study of the African situation would have to provide insights into the political and economic conditions that almost inexorably propelled the post-colonial state towards becoming a one-party-state (*de facto or de jure*). It would further have to explore the conditions and means whereby civil society can create the space to overcome those negative aspects and factors through democratisation. This thesis contributes to such a study. The case studies selected for the discourse on liberation and democracy in SSA gives us a deeper insight into the problematic of the state and democracy in the post-colonial situation. Given the relevance of external and internal factors in the evolution of African societies, we are compelled to trace the historical emergence of the African state system before we analyse the changes post-colonial liberation has caused.

When the metropolitan governments withdrew from their colonies in Africa, most indigenous regimes succeeding them began to face severe opposition from their discontented citizens, mainly because the decolonisation slogans had falsely promised a heaven for their followers. Prior to independence, most national liberation movements in SSA cried for freedom from colonial regimes. During the colonial era the political mobilisation of the African masses by the nationalist leadership rested simply on the antipathy towards colonial domination. Nationalist movements, therefore promoted not only the politicisation of the masses but also the radicalisation of their consciousness. On the part of the masses, the assumption was that the freedom yearned for at independence was inclusive - for all peoples. But in retrospect, it appeared later that these hopes were never realised. And as a result, the majority of the

African populace started to witness a deteriorating situation in which the gap between the rulers in their mansions and the masses in their slums widened. In addition, most of the newly independent African countries emerged under the aegis of dominant ethnic and tribal groups who formed the leadership of the new nations. That in turn led to the concentration of power in the centre and the people began to witness the unfair distribution of the "national wealth" in terms of development. Consequently, the "marginalised" groups and classes of people in the periphery became the main centre of revolutionary movements.

The important aspect to emphasise when examining the political crises in Africa is what has already been pointed out, the nature of the African state, itself a product of colonialism. Many analyses of African politics today tend to attribute most problems in Africa to the nature of the African state¹⁹. However, the oppressive character of the post-colonial structure was mainly augmented by lack of a democratic order or institutions, and that has often triggered peasant mobilisation and nationalist sentiments from within. As a result, liberation movements in the post-colonial era have often become one channel or another for getting equal rights and perhaps even for democratising some parts of the continent. Thus, there is a link between liberation and democracy in the history of some African countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and/or now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, although the issues of liberation and democratisation cannot be separated entirely, this thesis will focus on the influence of the liberation movements on these developments. The process of "democratisation" will not be studied on its own, but only to the extent that it is linked to the process of "liberation".

1.3. Methodological Considerations

This study is a work in political theory whose primary intention is to explore the specific nature of African discourses on liberation in the post-colonial era. We will examine issues theoretically, and use the empirical data collected from Eritrea and Ethiopia to appraise and illuminate theoretical considerations. Moreover, the empirical work uncovers new narratives on liberation. Thus, the main aim of conducting this empirical research is threefold. First, it will contribute to the theories of liberation by looking at the specific problems faced by liberation from indigenous, that is, non-white-minority-regimes. Second, by looking at the self-views of the actors involved in the liberation struggle, the empirical findings illuminate

¹⁹ See in particular Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Zolberg Ergas, *The African State in Transition*; Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, *op. cit.*; and Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, *op. cit.*

theoretical underpinnings. Finally, by bringing in untapped sources, the thesis informs its readers about current problems in African societies.

(a) Sources and Source Material (the use of interviews and texts in this study)

The thesis incorporates an analysis of material obtained from the fieldwork in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The fieldwork involved the conduction of interviews, collection of archival materials and published and unpublished texts from key actors of the liberation struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia. In setting up these interviews, I drew a lot from personal contacts in the Eritrean diplomatic service. In addition, I collected opinions from the local population. I was also able to talk to foreign diplomats in Asmara and Addis Ababa so as to be able to oppose Eritrean and Ethiopian self-views to the assessments from outsiders.

(b) Organisation of Interviews

The fieldwork was conducted between January and July 1996 in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The interviews concentrated mainly on people's beliefs, ideas and experiences both during the thirty and seventeen years of war in Eritrea and Ethiopia respectively and their aftermaths. The respondents to interviews were mainly drawn from occupational categories that represented some of the most important constituencies in the post-liberation sectors of the Eritrean and Ethiopian states. I spoke to the ordinary citizens, fighters, and demobilised fighters, to both senior and junior ranks of the civil service in different governmental departments and ministries. I had long conversations with key actors in both domestic and foreign affairs. I spent time with the leaders of the EPLF (now the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, PFDJ) and a regional Governor in Eritrea. I did the same in Ethiopia where I had ample time with leading members at the EPRDF Headquarters in Addis Ababa, the Ministry of National Defence and other governmental departments and ministries. I had long interviews with key actors in the Constitutional Commission, members of parliament, women leaders, and others involved in research and voluntary organisations in the two countries.

Most respondents were aged between thirty and fifty, and a few elderly people. A sizeable group of young people drawn from my political science class in the University of Asmara also gave me their own views of the whole situation. The educational background of my respondents ranged from a handful who had completed only primary schooling to a number with advanced or professional university degrees. The interviews usually lasted between one and three hours. During each interview, the following themes were pursued: (a) the struggle for liberation-practical definitions and conceptions, (b) democracy and democratisation, secession and self-determination-practices and understandings, (c) transition from a liberation

to a government structure, (d) the future prospects of a post-liberation society (with examples from the Eritrean and Ethiopian cases), (e) general social issues: education, health, and the role of women, and the youth, and land reform, and finally (f) the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia and other neighbours in the region. In order to compare and verify the information acquired from Eritrean and Ethiopian nationals, I also had conversations with diplomats, journalists, administrators from other countries stationed in Eritrea and Ethiopia, social scientists, academics and students in public institutions.

(c) Research Findings

The findings of our study concern (i) the suitability of existing theories of liberation for the specific cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (ii) for the entire continental politics of Africa. Moreover, they concern (iii) the linkage between liberation and post-liberation governmental problems, (iv) the relationship between liberation and democratisation, (v) the impact of the end of the Cold War on the struggles for liberation, and (vi) more generally, contemporary problems of African societies stemming from the cluster of issues discussed in this thesis.

1.4. Overview

The thesis begins, in Chapter Two, with a review of the literature on African conceptions of liberation. Because concepts of liberation cannot be reviewed without referring to concepts of democracy, I have also examined parts of the literature on democracy. Because of their great influence on African thinkers and politicians, Marxist theories are examined in some detail. For example, pragmatic adaptations of Marxism are treated in particular *via* African revolutionary thinkers like Fanon and Cabral, and African statesmen like Nkrumah, Senghor, Neto, Toure and Machel. In the same vein, the Christian Socialisms of Kaunda and Nyerere, and the Stalinism of Mengistu are also examined. In this chapter, the relationship between liberation and democracy is also discussed in theoretical terms.

Chapter Three traces the historical emergence of the African state system and discusses the subsequent struggles for liberation there. It presents a brief history of the scramble for Africa, its partition and independence from European colonialism. It further discusses the notions of 'nation', 'state', and 'civil society'. This chapter then situates this historical narrative within the context of African international relations where the role of the United Nations (UN) as an international body and that of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as a regional organisation are also briefly outlined. As we shall see, the charters of the two organisations had unfavourable (if not contradictory) implications on post-colonial liberation movements.

Chapters Four and Five are case studies of the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Chapter Four presents the genesis of the Eritrean struggle for independence through liberation, drawing on individual experiences of Eritreans during the war. Chapter Five is structured in a parallel way as chapter Four but presents the case of the liberation struggle for democracy in Ethiopia. In both chapters, the role of the elites during the mobilisation process and the rise of peasant consciousness in response to the liberation struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia are examined.

Chapter Six offers a concluding assessment of competing theories of liberation in the context of the two cases studied previously as well as in the African context in general.

CHAPTER TWO: NOTIONS OF LIBERATION AND DEMOCRACY

Introduction

In African politics, liberation is a mass engagement in an enterprise where certain specific goals and objectives are thought to be attainable through it. This connotation is very much identical to its original meaning of the term developed from the American civil war in 1776 and the French revolution in 1789 and strengthened by the political writings of Karl Marx. The African concept of liberation first emerged when the need for independence became acute and was highly influenced by Marxist theories in the 1950s. In a theoretical discussion of liberation it is difficult to avoid the mainstream theories of the social sciences, including Marxist ones, with their roots in the Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment took the issues of justice and human rights across borders and has therefore heavily influenced the interaction of Western and non-Western societies. Thus, we are compelled to trace and explain the history of how the African continental state-system came into being. Such an approach cannot be skipped because it prevents us from being trapped into an irrelevant comparison of the "free" Western World to Africa without knowing how the so-called "free" world emerged, what ideas and conditions necessitated its emergence as a liberal society.

To be sure, liberal democracy took a long evolutionary process to emerge in the history of the Anglo-American tradition and the rest of the Western society²⁰. The devices we are quite familiar with come from two major sources. The first source is the long, slow, haphazard growth of the English Constitution from the Parliament of Simon de Montfort in 1265 through innumerable struggles for rights won a few at a time, as for example, in the *Magna Carta*. It was the experience of the English Constitution which came to influence the making of the American Constitution some years later²¹. The other second source dates back to antiquity - Greece and Rome, whose practices and writings on government inspired thinkers to design plans for ideas and ideals such as democracy, equality, freedom and rights. That long tradition in turn produced its often very different progenies - Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes, Burke and much later the Jeffersons and the Madisons in the framing of the U.S Constitution.

²⁰ For a study of the roots of democracy in Western society, see the collection of essays in John Dunn, (ed.), *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

²¹ See for example, Jack J. Harvey, *The British Constitution*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), and Wilbourn E. Benton, *1787: Drafting the U.S. Constitution* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1986).

Thus the "democracy thesis", embraced today in other parts of the world since the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, is an old idea that rests, however, on the nineteenth century proponents and interpreters of the idea. For example, the conservative French Alexis de Tocquville could agree with the liberal German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant that democracy was indeed the wave of the political future²². For Kant, liberal democracy was not only the political embodiment of freedom, itself the driving force of history, but also the basis for a peaceful world order²³. World peace, Kant thought, would follow from an expanded community of democratic nations. The idea of a world organisation, supported earlier by people such as Pierre Dubois in 1306, George Podebrad in 1460 and Emeric Cruce in 1623, appealed to the intellectual imagination of many peace lovers. Many twentieth century leaders led the movement for some similar form of international order that later resulted in the founding of the League of Nations in 1919 and culminated in 1945 to a United Nations Organisation that has continued to survive to date²⁴. In fact, liberal internationalists like Woodrow Wilson emphasised the salience of international law and institutions, and an active role for government as well as for commerce, in creating the conditions for democracy and peace²⁵. This has remained a concrete requisite especially in the third world where the call for national constitutional conferences, issues of human rights, freeing market economies and so on have become, in the eyes of many, major signals of democratisation²⁶. This African

²² See the article by Jerry Sanders, "*The Prospects for 'Democratic Engagement'*", p. 369.

²³ See for example Walter Bryce Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Ronald Beiner and William James Booth (ed.), *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993); and Andrew Hurrell, "Kant and the Kantian Paradigm in International Relations", *Review of International Studies*, 16(1990), pp. 183-205.

²⁴ See Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During WW II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967); and F. Warren Kuehl, *Seeking World Order* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969).

²⁵ See the influence and contribution of liberal internationalism in the development of International Relations as a discipline in A.J.R Groom, "Approaches to Conflict and Cooperation in International Relations: Lessons from Theory for Practice", *Kent Papers in Politics and International Relations*, 2(1993), pp. 9-15.

²⁶ See e.g. Abdullahi Ahmed An-naim and Frances Deng (ed.), *Human Rights in Africa: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Washington: The Brookings Institute, 1990); Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights in the New World Order," *World Policy Journal*, vol. ix, no. 2(Spring 1992), pp. 249-277; Dicker Richard, "Monitoring Human Rights in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3(1991), pp. 505-510; Ronald Cohen, Goran Hyden and Winston P. Nagon (eds.), *Human Rights and Governance in Africa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Mahmood Mamdani, "The Social Basis of Constitutionalism in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 28, no. (1990), pp. 359-374; Ben Turok, (ed.), *Alternative Development Strategies for African. Volume Three: Debt and Democracy* (London: Institute for African Alternatives, 1991); J. Barry Riddel, "Things Fall Apart Again: Structural Adjustment Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa", *The Journal of*

transition from an old order to the new will put both the classical and modern claims for democracy to their most significant test, where a clear distinction has to be made between democracy as a model and democracy as a process undertaken under previously uncondusive conditions in developing polities that are not, particularly in rural areas, well Westernised.

But a discourse on liberation and democracy in Africa and as elsewhere in the world, such as in Latin America and the breakaway republics of the former Soviet Union and its former European buffers, could not have arisen without prior influence from the preceding history of Western political thinking. Western political history has had a great impact, both positive and negative, on almost all aspects of the world's political systems. It is such a legacy that has led mainstream Western international relations scholars to comment:

From the point of view of what might be termed the "linear" development of ideas about international relations, however, it is Europe that really matters in terms of how "world" politics as we conceptualise today emerged. The legacy of the European nation-state system, despite many variations, has essentially been adopted as the world system in our time²⁷.

In fact, the African state-system emerged within the phenomenon of an established international system that was dominated by the triumph of Western liberal-democracy. Surely the West had a monopoly of 'civilisation' and world political leadership. Most of the 'backward' countries were in colonial tutelage to 'advanced' and very often liberal democratic states such as Great Britain and France, and it was assumed that before being granted independence, they were to be brought along to the point where they would run themselves on liberal democratic lines²⁸. Perhaps that would have happened had one substantial part of the world not rejected the liberal way as early as 1917, with the Russian revolution and the formation of the Soviet Union. Though the West, until the second world war, regarded the Soviet bloc as something outside the mainstream of world development, it achieved influence

Modern African Studies, vol. 30, no. 1(1992), pp. 53-68; and finally Julius E. Nyangor'o and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Beyond Structural Adjustment in Africa: The Political Economy of Sustainable and Democratic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1992). The page numbers for all subsequent citations of these references will be given within the text.

²⁷ See in particular William C. Olson and A.J.R. Groom, *International Relations Theory: Then and Now*, *op. cit.*, p.4.

²⁸ See among others, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961); P.J. Rooke, *The Wind of Change in Africa* (London: Allen, 1967); Gideon S. Were, *History, Public Morality and Nation-Building: A Survey of Africa Since Independence* (Nairobi: Gideon S. Were Press, 1992); I.K. Sundiata, "The Roots of African Despotism: The Question of Political Culture", *African Studies Review*, vol. 31, no. 1(1988), pp. 9-32; and C.B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 2.

over many of the Third World systems of government. The protracted Cold War occurred and its end has been celebrated at the close of this century as marking the triumph of liberal-democracy²⁹. Before this, most of the underdeveloped areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America did achieve their independence, and a majority of them became one form or another of one-party state. They rejected both the ethos and the actual institutions of the Western individualist liberal-democracy but tended to define themselves as democracies of their own variant and not necessarily similar to those in Westminster, the French Parliament, or the Congress and Senate of the United States of America. When the United Nations and many other governmental and non-governmental organisations formed, all newly independent African states enrolled as members of such organisations, where their styles of government became tacitly legitimised.

Therefore, apart from the recent attempts at promoting democracy in the world -- Samuel Huntington's "third Wave of democratisation in the modern era"³⁰ -- the concept 'democracy' and for that matter liberation, developed as humanity strove for civilisation. However, in order to analyse the discussion and for Africa to benefit from its relevance, we need to trace separately the origins of the terms liberation and democracy.

2.1. Notions of Democracy

Etymologically, the term 'democracy' was first conceived and popularised in ancient Greek City-States and was derived from two common Greek words: *demos* meaning the 'people', and *kratos*, meaning 'to rule'³¹. Yet, while the historical origin of the term is uncontested, its meaning remained elusive. In his introductory chapter, David Held writes "The history of democracy is curious; the history of democracies is puzzling"³². In fact, nearly everyone today says they are democrats no matter whether their views are on the left, centre or right. Political

²⁹ See the provocative debate in the following: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992); Timothy Burns (ed.), *After History?: Fukuyama and His Critics* (Lanham, Md.: Littlefield, 1994); and Christopher Bertram and Andrew Chitty (ed.), *Has History Ended? Fukuyama, Marx, Modernity* (Aldershot: Hants, 1994).

³⁰ See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 109-163; and by the same author "How Countries Democratize", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 4(1991-1992), p. 579.

³¹ See the etymological derivation and definition of the term in David Held, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3; Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956); Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 3-5.

³² See David Held (ed.), *Models of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

regimes of all kinds in, for instance, Western Europe, even the former Eastern bloc, Latin America and one-party systems in Africa, all claimed to be democracies. Worse still military leaders who lack distinctive legitimacy have often seized power with the pretext that they are cleansing the state in order to restore a rightful democracy. Yet, when one examines what each of these practised, there are radical differences. The whole attraction rests on the conception that democracy seems to bestow what David Held describes as '*an aura of legitimacy*' on modern political life: rules, laws, policies and decisions appear justified and appropriate when they are 'democratic'³³.

Democracy is and has been a remarkably difficult form of government to create and sustain. For instance, in Western societies it evolved through intensive social struggles and is frequently sacrificed in such struggles. Indeed the historical development of democracy took many forms and used many devices to reach especially its elusive goal, human freedom. And as we know of its origins, liberal democracy has often had a wayward historical development. So while we try to conceptualise the term in this study, it is much safer that we do not attempt to define democracy rigorously but rather outline some of the generally received definitions of it, and base our discourse on them.

Democracy as conceived in ancient Greece contained some of the ingredients of modern democratic ideals which include: maintenance of law and order; promotion of justice for all; and maximisation of freedom and equality for all citizens³⁴. Therefore, the institutional arrangements set up to ensure the survival of Greek democracy included: short office tenure for public officials, direct participation of all adult citizens in the legislative process, majority

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴ Among notable introductions to democratic theory and practice in all their varieties, see especially Robert A. Dahl, *op cit.*; C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); David Held, *op. cit.*; Jack Lively, *Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975); Carol C. Gould, offers a normative argument for the right of participation in decision-making in all aspects of political life including economic and social life as well, see his *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.31-90; James S. Fishkin, *Democracy and deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), pp.29-41; Geraint Parry and George Moyser, "More Participation, More Democracy?" in David Beetham (ed.), *Defining and Measuring Democracy* (London: Sage, 1984), pp.44-62; John Dunn, *op. cit.*; and most recently the translated works of Christian Meier: *The Greek Discovery of Politics*, trans. by David McLintock (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990) and *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, trans. by Andrew Webber (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

rule decision-making, prohibition of re-election to certain key offices, popular control of officials (including military ones), lot system of election for certain government positions³⁵.

While 'modern' democracies have extensively borrowed from the ancient Greek democratic conception, the latter, has however, been also conceived as defective in certain crucial ways. For example it was strongly anti-feminist, since women, even wives of male citizens, had no political rights. Moreover, though it endowed citizens with political and legal equality, it did not extend the equality concept to other fields such as education, economics and social arenas. Children, resident foreigners and slaves were all excluded from Greek democratic rights. Worse still, the Greek democratic arrangement rested on the economic institution of human slavery, where slaves and other non-citizen groups produced and reproduced all the city wealth, while the 'citizen class' such as all men engaged in political activities³⁶. In this context for example, Justin Rosenberg proposes that there is a structural relationship between the emergence of democracy and slavery³⁷.

Though the Greek version of democracy is interpreted by some as primitive and exclusive of the majority of the populace, others tend to think that the Greek democracy was a full democracy, open to all its citizens while admitting at the same time that the notion of citizenship was different. None the less the justifications given by the ancient Greek oligarchy for their type of 'democratic' arrangement are in some ways remarkably similar to the justifications used to legitimise oppressive regimes in former Eastern bloc, Latin America and Africa that claimed to be democracies. Operating within the context of a slave political economy, the ancient Greek rulers argued that the hierarchical division of labour and socio-political organisation that existed was just and hence, democratic, in as far as each person was seen to be performing the task(s) one was naturally fitted to do. Similarly, equality in this context was interpreted to mean equal within one's own class, gender, race and age group.

³⁵ See the enumeration of these in Wanjiku M. Kabira, Jacqueline A. Oduol and Maria Nzomo (ed.), *Democratic Change in Africa: Women's Perspectives* (Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1993), p. 5; Other necessary conditions of democracy are provided by Michael Saward, "Democratic Theory and Indices of Democratization", in David Beetham, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17; and for a detailed analysis see Jack Lively, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-110.

³⁶ For the exemplary democratic practices of classical Athens, see especially A.H.M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957); William G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy* (London: Methuen, 1966); C. Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and M.H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

³⁷ See his article "Secret Origins of the States", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2(April 1992), pp. 131-159.

We shall also see that many 'modern democracies', though based on a capitalist rather than slave mode of production, display significant similarities with the ancient Greek democratic practice³⁸.

When assessing Greek democracy, however, we must remember that, for the Greeks, democracy was more or something else than equal rights for the citizen. The rise of democracy signified a new era for mankind. The *polis* and democracy meant that aspects of social order were now in the hands of man to design. Order became, arguably for the first time in man's self-understanding, disposable, contingent, subject to human design, though still within certain limitations³⁹. The advent of democracy in Greece meant, then, a fundamental change in man's self-understanding, in his ontology, that is, in the way he related himself to his environment, to the cosmos. There are, in other words, ontological preconditions for the emergence of democracy.

As indicated earlier, it is often prudent not to attempt to define democracy precisely as there are numerous definitions. So the best alternative to this, would be to outline and contextualise the various definitions at our disposal. For Dahl, democratic theory is concerned with processes by which ordinary citizens exert a high degree of influence and control over leaders. However, this is a minimal definition that could be translated easily to mean a variety of things⁴⁰. In the "Nature of Democracy", Barry Holden defines it as a political system of which it can be said that the whole people, positively or negatively, make or are entitled to make, the basic determining decisions on important matters of public policy⁴¹. He also writes of various sorts of democracy: direct, indirect or representative⁴². However, his definitions presuppose the presence of a constitution, or other declared system of basic norms, which authorises the making of decisions by the people. In short, it requires the presence of institutions such as the executive, judiciary and the legislature. This is precisely what Africa needs, a democracy institutionally distinguished from other systems in which groups of people -- through civil disobedience, riot, general disorders, insurrection or the threat of it -- influence political

³⁸ See for example the publication by Keith Graham, *The Battle of Democracy: Conflict, Consensus and the Individual* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1986).

³⁹ See for details Christian Meier, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Robert Dahl talks of Madisonian democracy, Populistic democracy and Polyarchical democracy. See his *A Preface to democracy, op. cit.*; and his *Polyarchy, op. cit.*

⁴¹ See Barry Holden, *The Nature of Democracy* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1974), p. 8.

⁴² Barry Holden *op. cit.* p. 28.

decision-making to such an extent that they are, in effect, making the basic decisions on important matters of public policy.

It was Abraham Lincoln who developed the famous phrase, "government of the people, by the people, for the people"⁴³. Lincoln refers to the control of the state or states' actions by the people. But who are "the people"? The Athenian city-state of ancient Greece only included a minority of the society among the decision-makers. It mainly included the farmers, those involved in commerce, education and so on. However, in an early meaning of 'democracy' the sense in which the word is used by Aristotle, 'the people' meant precisely the poor who were not slaves. For Aristotle, a democracy is a *polis* in which the poor rule⁴⁴. 'The people' were always equated with the 'mob'. The other concept of 'the people' by capitalist societies in their 18th and 19th century development covered the middle classes rather than the poor⁴⁵. Sometimes the meaning was not so much the 'middle classes' but something like 'responsible people'⁴⁶. One of the crucial factors was the linking of the ownership of property with full membership of society and the consequent right to participate in political decision-making. Hence, the poor had no stake in society, and were therefore in one sense not of that society. However over the years, the whole thrust of democratic theory and democratic thought has been towards "inclusive citizenship", or the enlargement of the proportion of society involved in politics⁴⁷.

In the 1950s, John Plamenatz asked yet another question: "what are the necessary conditions without which democracy could not exist?"⁴⁸. The debate identified different categories for a sustainable democracy: cultural, political, economic, and general social conditions such as participation, consensus, freedom of activities such as of speech, association, press, freedom from arbitrary arrests, free and fair election procedures and so forth.

⁴³ See Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln in Text and Context: Collected Essays* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1988); and James M. Macpherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *The politics*, IV, p. viii.

⁴⁵ See D. Spearman, *Democracy in England* (London: Rockliff, 1967), p. 87.

⁴⁶ See for example, Voltaire's definition quoted by J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 244.

⁴⁷ See a satisfactory discussion of this by Jack Lively, *op. cit.* pp. 7-9.

⁴⁸ See John Plamenatz, "Cultural Prerequisites to a Successful Functioning Democracy", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 50, (1956), pp. 101-137

Some scholars have suggested that one way of understanding the concept democracy would be by looking at those countries that have proclaimed themselves as being democratic⁴⁹. However, such a pragmatic approach was attacked as illogical and one author refers to it as a major example of a “definitional fallacy”⁵⁰. Others like Schumpeter sought the development of an empirically based 'realistic' model of democracy⁵¹. Deliberately avoiding normative discussions of the meaning of democracy, he concerned himself with the task of accounting for how actual democracies work. For Schumpeter, democracy was a political method, that is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political-legislative and administrative-decisions by vesting in certain individuals the power to decide on all matters as a consequence of their successful pursuit of the people's vote⁵². This is what David Held explains as the result of democratic life which has almost become an axiomatic struggle between rival political leaders, arrayed for example, in parties, for the mandate and legitimacy to rule⁵³.

Others have also suggested the identification of certain principles that are not necessarily embedded in specific governments or countries. For example David Beetham's "Auditing Democracy in Britain", seeks to isolate 'the core ideas or principles embodied in the historical conception of democracy as "rule of the people"'. He takes these to be 'popular control' and 'political equality'⁵⁴. Hadenius arrives at a conception of 'Political democracy' which holds that public policy 'is to be governed by the freely expressed will of the people whereby all individuals are to be treated as equals'⁵⁵. Lively emphasises inclusive citizenship and political

⁴⁹ Already variants on this approach had surfaced. For example Arendt Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 2; however much earlier than that the approach had already been indicated in the fifth edition of J.A. Schumpeter, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

⁵⁰ See Barry Holden, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵¹ J. Schumpeter, *op. cit.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁵³ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁵⁴ See David Beetham's manuscript, "Auditing Democracy in Britain", *Democratic Audit Paper NO. 1. Human Rights Center University of Essex* (London: Colchester/Charter 88 Trust, 1993), p. 6.

⁵⁵ See A. Hadenius, *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 7-9.

equality⁵⁶. Sartori suggests that democracy not only entails majority rule and participation, but also equality, freedom, consensus, coercion, competition, pluralism, and constitutional rule⁵⁷.

With such a variety of definitions on offer, we can either simply retreat into essential contestability⁵⁸, which seems to amount to a “giving up”⁵⁹, or we can continue searching for reasons that could satisfactorily justify the adoption of certain specific principles of democracy as basic⁶⁰. Modern Western liberal democracy is often mentioned in this context as a basic model of democracy. We will discuss some of its principles in the following.

(a) The Liberal-Democratic Paradigm

Liberal democracy is a system of rule based on elected 'officers' who undertake to 'represent' the interests or views of citizens within the framework of the 'rule of law'⁶¹. It is basically a liberalised or liberally constituted democracy defined and structured within the limits set by liberalism⁶². But what is liberalism? Its meaning could be summarised in three main tenets: (1) Liberalism upholds the values of freedom of choice, reason, and toleration in the face of tyranny and any absolutist system⁶³; (2) liberalism sought to restrict the powers of the state and define a uniquely private sphere independent of state action. At the centre of this project was the goal of freeing civil society (particularly personal, family and business life) from political interference by the state⁶⁴. And (3) liberal democracy became generally associated

⁵⁶ See Jack Lively, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51.

⁵⁷ See Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1987), p. 184.

⁵⁸ A discussion of such alternative was raised by A. Arblaster, *Democracy* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), pp. 5-8.

⁵⁹ See David Beetham, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Saward, "Democratic Theory and Indices of Democratization" in David Beetham, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁶¹ David Held, "Democracy: From the City-States to a Cosmopolitan Order" in David Held (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁶² See Bhiku Parekh, "The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy" in David Held, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁶³ See for example, C.B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy*, *op. cit.*; and John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁶⁴ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

with the doctrine that individuals should be free to pursue their own preferences in religious, economic and political affairs, in fact, in everything that affected daily life⁶⁵.

According to Macpherson, in Western societies the democratic franchise was not installed until after the liberal state was firmly established⁶⁶. Democracy then fitted itself in the already prepared soil of the liberal state. This was mainly necessitated by the operation of the competitive, individualist, market society, and by the operation of the liberal state, which served the Western societies through a system of freely competing, though not always democratic political parties. Hence, it was the liberal state that was democratised, and in the process, democracy was liberalised. And not the other way round!

Di Palma further points to three qualities of society and political economy which have historically been conducive to the development of liberal democracy: (i) economic prosperity and equality; (ii) a modern and diversified social structure in which non dependent middle classes occupy centre-stage; and (iii) a national culture that, by tolerating diversity and preferring accommodation, is implicitly democratic⁶⁷. Therefore, liberal democracy is an historically specific form of democracy that arrived on the scene of international politics nearly two millennia after the disappearance of its archetypal Athenian form. Although in Western political history democracy preceded liberalism, in the modern era liberalism preceded democracy by nearly two centuries where it created a world to which the latter had to adjust.

Such antecedents are completely lacking in the building of democracy in most of the Third World, particularly Africa. Instead, democracy in most of Africa, as in other parts of both developing and underdeveloped new societies, came as a revolution against the liberal capitalist society and state situated far away. For example the political movements for national liberation for independence that came to power in those countries thought of themselves as democratic; since democracy was able to take a different connotation after 1917, to mean government by or for the hitherto oppressed classes subjected under capitalist or colonial rule for so long.

None the less, in the West the normal order in democratisation was that democracy was preceded by the emergence of first, the politics of choice, then the politics of competition, and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁶⁶ C.B. Macpherson, *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁶⁷ See Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 3.

finally the politics of the market⁶⁸. It is sometimes argued that, because Africa has never had a chance to undergo such processes of liberalism and democratisation as witnessed in the Western societies, it cannot be democratised at all. Such a trend of thought mainly emerged immediately after independence from the corridors of African socialist leaders such as Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, or Kenneth Kaunda. It is the legacy of this trend of thought that has been openly challenged in most of Africa since the turn of this decade.

Furthermore, liberalism began to gain intellectual and political ascendancy in different parts of Europe from the seventeenth century onward. It took the individual as the ultimate irreducible unit of society and explains the latter in terms of it. The conception is not of the community as a corporate entity; rather all that is seen to exist is a collection of autonomous individuals or groups⁶⁹. In this view, society 'consists' or is 'made up' of individuals and forms nothing but the totality of its members and their relationships. This idea is opposed by Hegelian works on community or society, a huge body of concepts with which we have no room to deal here⁷⁰.

To be specific, the liberal democratic paradigm dates from the debate engendered by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and these largely set the pace for modern liberal democratic thought⁷¹. These three are largely regarded as the first exponents of the liberal tradition. In particular, Thomas Hobbes marks the transition between a commitment to the absolutist state and the struggle of liberalism against tyranny. While John Locke signals the clear beginnings of the liberal constitutionalist tradition; and J.S. Mill was influenced by the intense discussion about the reform of the British institutions during his time, where he sought to defend a conception of political life marked by enhanced individual liberty, more accountable government and an efficient governmental administration unhindered by corrupt politics and excessively complex regulations⁷².

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁶⁹ See another elaborate explanation of the tenets of liberal democracy by Barry Holden, *The Nature of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-40.

⁷⁰ Although in some respect close to liberalism, Hegel's thought as interpreted by among others Chris Brown runs clearly counter to the internationalist leanings of most of twentieth century liberal thought. See his "Hegel and International Ethics", *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol. 5(1991), pp. 73-86); and in idem, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

⁷¹ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Mill was a clear advocate of democracy who preoccupied himself with the extent of individual liberty in all spheres of human endeavour. A liberal democratic government was important for Mill, not just because it established boundaries for the pursuit of individual satisfaction, but also because it contributed to the free development of individuality. For example, he maintained that participation in political life through voting, involvement in local administration and jury service was vital in creating a direct interest in government and, consequently, a basis for an informed and developing citizenry, male or female. That explains why Mill is often referred to as a man who conceived liberal democratic politics as a prime mechanism of moral self-development⁷³. In all, though Mill advocated individual liberty, he also recognised that some regulation and interference in individual lives was necessary⁷⁴.

In fact, the central problem faced by liberal political theory was how to reconcile the concept of the state as an impersonal, legally circumscribed structure of power, with a new view of the rights, obligations and duties of subjects. In other words, how was the 'sovereign state' to be related to the 'sovereign people' who were recognised as the legitimate source of the state's powers. Thus most liberal and modern liberal democratic theories have tried to justify the sovereign power of the state while at the same time justifying limits on that power⁷⁵. And since Thomas Hobbes, the struggle has been balancing might and right, power and law, duties and rights. In fact, the fundamental tenets of liberal democracy concern the centrality in principle, of an 'impersonal' structure of public power, of a constitution to help guarantee and protect rights, of a diversity of power centres within and outside the state, and of mechanisms to promote competition and debate between alternative political platforms⁷⁶.

These problems have led to the fundamental liberal notion that the 'separation' of the state from civil society must be a central feature of any democratic political order. And on the other side of the coin, it is held that any models of democracy that depend on the assumption that 'state' could ever replace 'civil society' must be treated with the utmost caution. Of course within the history of Western liberalism, the concept of 'civil society' has been interpreted in a variety of different ways which are also briefly examined under the category of African civil society later. Yet, there is a profound sense in which civil society can never be 'separate' from

⁷³ C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, *op. cit.*, ch. 3; and John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.

⁷⁴ On Mill see A. Ryan, *J.S. Mill* (London: Routledge, 1974).

⁷⁵ A good elaboration on this would be S. Hall and B. Gieben (ed.), *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

⁷⁶ David Held, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

the state; given that it is the state that provides the overall legal framework of society, and to a significant degree constitutes civil society.

2.2. Notions of Liberation

In his declaration on the question of the use of violence in defence of rights, Mahatma Gandhi thought:

Where the choice is set between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. I praise and extol the serene courage of dying without killing. Yet I desire that those who have not this courage should rather cultivate the art of killing and being killed, than basely to avoid the danger. This is because he who runs away commits mental violence; he has not the courage of facing death by killing. I would a thousand times prefer violence ... I prefer to use arms in defence of honour rather than remain the vile witness of dishonour⁷⁷.

This trend of thought has obviously had great influence upon most liberation struggles in Africa where violence has for long been an inevitable course of evicting repressive regimes. *Satyagraha* (Gandhi's spirit which has a particular Indian meaning)⁷⁸, at one time admired by most liberators has proved unrealistic in almost all of Africa, especially when governments meet peaceful demands with force. For example, Kenneth Kaunda's long admiration of Gandhi in the 1950s vanished when he became sympathetic to the use of violence in the liberation struggle in South Africa⁷⁹.

Thus, for de Braganca and Wallerstein⁸⁰, liberation movements do not just emerge one fine day out of the mind of some superman or at the instigation of some foreign power. They are

⁷⁷ Quoted by Aquino de Braganca and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Liberation Reader: The National Liberation Movements*, vol. 2 (London: Zed Press, 1982), p. 43.

⁷⁸ While Mahatma Gandhi greatly influenced Africa's political struggles before independence, Jawaharlal Nehru did influence Africa's diplomatic strategies after independence. See Michael Tidy and Ali A. Mazrui, *Nationalism and new States in Africa: from about 1935 to the Present* (Nairobi & London: Heinmann, 1984), p. 355.

⁷⁹ Kaunda insisted that, like Gandhi, if he had to choose between slavery and fighting for independence, he would choose the latter. And he posed "Violently, yes, I'd rather do this, though it may seem a contradiction". See Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The Struggle for Humanity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-257; *Kaunda On Violence*, edited by Colin M. Morris (London: Sphere Books, 1982); Fergus Macpherson, *Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia* (Lusaka: Oxford University Press, 1974); Stephen Chan, *Kaunda and Southern Africa: Image and Reality in Foreign Policy* (London: British Academic Press, 1992); and in idem, *The Decline of Kaunda: Essays of Praise and Complaint* (Canterbury, UKC: Board of Politics and International Relations, Series 1:1992; no.3).

⁸⁰ See Aquino de Braganca and Immanuel Wallerstein, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

born out of popular discontent. They emerge over long periods to combat oppressive conditions and express aspirations for a different kind of society. In short, they are agents of class and national struggles. Classes and nations, as we shall see, are creations of the modern world and, in the case of Africa, they were born in the crucible of the colonial experience. To understand the role of national liberation movements, we must first grasp the social forces they represent and the ways in which these social forces were shaped by their historical circumstances⁸¹.

In the context of colonialism, genuine liberation implied the fact of regaining not only one's historical personality as a free people but also one's own initiative as a maker of history. The argument is that such initiative cannot be regained as long as the people's productive forces, namely, the ability to produce and reproduce social existence, are subjugated to foreign domination, thereby negating the people's historical process. This specific type of foreign domination in the modern historical epoch is imperialism.

Cabral's definition of national liberation is "the phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of its historical process"⁸². In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected. From such conception, it is therefore clear that, liberation movements are defined as revolutionary political organisations that mobilise the oppressed peoples for purposes of overthrowing the regime, or imperialist domination in the case of colonialism. All liberation movements oppose the colonial *status quo* and all its aspects.

In the post-colonial era, liberation movements do not only strive for high positions in the state apparatus, as argued by their leaders. They are, as Nzungola-Ntalaja pointed out, organisations of workers, peasants, and other exploited classes and strata under the leadership of revolutionary intellectuals such as Afeworki, Sanawi, Museveni, Garang, Kagame, or Kabilla, who are committed to radical social change⁸³. In fact, such alliance between the popular classes with progressive revolutionary intellectuals is required for the success of the national liberation struggle especially in the post-colonial context.

⁸¹ These are discussed in part (d) of this chapter under class theories. It is clear that workers, peasants, students or underprivileged groups in society make up 'liberators'. A better example is de Braganca and Wallerstein, *The Liberation Reader, op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 86-101.

⁸² See Amilcar Lopes Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 102.

⁸³ See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Africa: Essays in Contemporary Politics* (London: Zed Books, 1987), p. 36. (emphasis added).

In liberation, there is an extraordinary confluence of individual and co-operative exhilaration, personal and communal zest. The Third World wars of liberation were waged with a specific purpose of achieving or defending a goal⁸⁴. Liberation remains one agent that reveals the historical bonds between peoples in society. It seeks to transform unjust relations among peoples in the world, generally relations of political and economic subordination. It seeks to ensure that the internal socio-economic forces, that is, those that evolve within each country, are restructured in the direction of progress. In Africa, internal forms of subjugation were caused by fragmentation into small ethnic or linguistic groupings, by the development of privileged classes endowed with their own dynamism. These in turn did yield to a form of oppression linked with neo-colonialism. Though such phenomena are also typical of other post-colonial societies in the world, at the present they are acute and tangible in Africa⁸⁵.

As a result, African revolutionary democratic theorists, from Fanon and Cabral to the present, seem to believe that the development of democratic institutions may put the continent back on the right footing of progress. The belief that democratic political systems tend to cater and meet people's demands and, therefore, are less prone to revolutions is very common to both social science researchers and practitioners⁸⁶. Ernesto Che Guevara, perhaps the quintessential exponent of voluntaristic revolutionary action, conceded that, "where a government has come into power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, the guerrilla outbreak cannot be promoted, since the possibilities of a peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted"⁸⁷. This observation appears to be correct, because it seems true that no revolutionary movement has succeeded in overthrowing a democratically elected government. That is why Samuel Huntington plausibly argued that, "perhaps the most important and obvious but also most neglected fact about successful great revolutions is that they do not occur in democratically elected systems"⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ The main goal was obviously independence. See Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁸⁵ I discuss this in details some time later in the chapter under elite class formation.

⁸⁶ See Juan Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crises, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁸⁷ See Guevara's *La Guerra de Guerrillas*, translated by Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 48.

⁸⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 275.

Liberation has also been understood as release from restraint or bondage or, simply to be set free⁸⁹. This definition of liberation implies that there are certain impediments, not necessarily external or physical, that stand in the way of one's realising one's potentialities as a morally autonomous agent. Therefore, if one is to be free, these impediments must be removed. But as Sir Isaiah Berlin once commented: "It may be the case either that one is unaware of those impediments or that one internalises them"⁹⁰. However, Fanon's conception of liberation is much more concretely and socially based than spiritual freedom or the Stoic internalisation of impediments. For example, it includes the removal of a whole arsenal of socio-economic, cultural and political restrictions, because such restrictions limit the area of choices and opportunities that are available to a person. Fanon's position is that the extent of one's freedom is a function of socio-political institutions and practices⁹¹.

While Fanon's analysis was to define liberation in terms of decolonisation, ours is to examine it in terms of a struggle against a regime that is indigenous. In the 1950s and 1960s, liberation and independence were often synonymous with political independence or freedom from alien rule. Today, liberation means more than political independence. Prior to independence, the political mobilisation of the African masses by the nationalist leadership rested simply on the antipathy against colonial domination. Where the nationalist movement created an effect, by promoting not merely the politicisation of the masses but also by radicalising their consciousness. On the part of the masses, the assumption was that the promises made by liberation leaders would be honoured. But in retrospect, it appeared that the contrary became true. The leaders responded to the people's demands either with more empty promises or with repression. Right after decolonisation, the popular alliance formed during the independence struggle began to disintegrate.

For Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, what followed independence is the fact that the post-colonial state became principally concerned with serving the interests of those who control it as well as those of their external allies and patrons⁹². Thus, power became more and more concentrated in the centre, and people began to witness the clear unfair distribution of the "national wealth". That resulted in the subsequent emergence of the struggle to reliberate the continent from the

⁸⁹ See L. Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986), p. 66.

⁹⁰ See Isaiah Berlin, *Four essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xxxviii.

⁹¹ L. Adele Jinadu, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁹² See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

control of demagogues who still seem to exemplify a form of colonial domination from within⁹³. What has taken place then is an effort of transforming the post-colonial state to meet the interests of African deprived urban dwellers and peasants.

In a way, the liberation struggles are a continuous process of the 'second independence' movement. The prime examples of these movements included the second independence movement in Congo-Kinshasa (formerly Zaire)⁹⁴, Chad, Uganda, the heroic liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa, the struggles for national self-determination/secession in north-east, and west Africa - Western Sahara, Biafra, Ogaden, Southern Sudan and now independent Eritrea⁹⁵. In all these, the marginalised groups and classes of people in the periphery became the recruitment and ideological centre of revolutionary struggles.

Another notion of liberation exemplified in Fanon's writings points to an interaction between liberation and the concept of revolution⁹⁶. In this sense, liberation is inextricably bound up with social and political revolution. It is part of a continuing process in which, philosophically, human potentialities are forever enlarged. Liberation is thus constituted by a perpetual search for a way of life where "truth", "justice" and "equality" reign. Once such a way of life has been discovered, conditions of alienation will no longer exist. This is what is usually referred to as the utopian, romantic, or chiliastic aspect of Fanon's thought⁹⁷. This pejorative connotation of "romantic", however, should not be allowed to detract from the merit of Fanon's position. Because by focusing on liberation as a continuous process, one is able to examine the shortcomings of one's society and demonstrate how that society is incompatible with freedom as self-fulfilment. It therefore matters less that Fanon's conception of liberation is romantic or utopian than that it provides one possible yardstick for assessing social reality. The conception of liberation is also implied in Fanon's call for the creation of a new man⁹⁸.

⁹³ Such domination has been interpreted from certain academic circles to imply class domination. See for example, Richard L. Sklar "The Nature of Class Domination in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4(1979), pp. 531-552.

⁹⁴ See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, "The Continuing Struggle for National Liberation in Zaire", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4(1979), pp. 595-614.

⁹⁵ A good number of these are covered by Alexis Heraclides, *op. cit.*, for example, Biafra, Eritrea, Katanga, and Southern Sudan.

⁹⁶ L. Adele Jinadu, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁹⁷ See Aristide Zolberg, "Frantz Fanon: A Gospel for the Damned", *Encounter*, vol. 27(November 1966), p. 58.

⁹⁸ See Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

Most scholars who have written on Fanon think that the concern with the creation of the new man gives Fanon's notion of liberation and all his writings a universalist perspective⁹⁹. In other words, there is an Hegelian/Marxist flavour to Fanon's notion of liberation and revolution as involving the creation of a new man. Like Hegel and Marx, what Fanon offers us is a theodicy, that man is pictured as reaching out and progressing towards higher and higher horizons that, perhaps when the highest horizon is attained, must eventually consummate itself. It is then and only then that harmony will be established, that man will become truly human and will be able to purchase his interests unencumbered by prejudice and hate. This is Fanon's ultimate goal, based on his firm belief that "no attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free"¹⁰⁰.

Generally speaking, it is worth-noting that since independence, the general history of liberation movements in Africa reveals the emergence of three categories. The first category is that of the national liberation movements that began since the 1950s, and terminated with the struggles in the Portuguese colonies and the former Rhodesia in the 1970s and 1980. There is a vast literature on this which I need not rehearse here¹⁰¹. The national liberation movements were directed against colonial-white-minority regimes all over the continent. Their main objective was clear - independence. Nationalism was the agent for harmony and a driving spirit during the national liberation struggle.

The second category of liberation movements were those that demanded secession at independence or after independence¹⁰². They were the creation of ethnic discontent from

⁹⁹ Jinadu, *op. cit.*, p. 8; also Aristide Zolberg, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁰¹ See for example, George C. Grants, *The Africans' Predicament in Rhodesia* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1972); J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup* (London: Westview Press, 1980); Stephen Chan (ed.), *Exporting Apartheid: Foreign Policies in Southern Africa, 1978-1988* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Michael Charlton, *The Last Colony in Africa: Diplomacy and the Independence of Rhodesia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); David Birmingham, *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique* (London: James Currey, 1992); Stephen Chan and Vivian Jabri (ed.), *Mediation in Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1993); and Moises Venancio and Stephen Chan, *Portuguese Foreign Policy in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

¹⁰² Various studies have been carried out on these and a useful survey is Alexis Heraclides's work *The Self-Determination of Minorities in International Politics* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991); others include Harold S. Johnson, *Self-Determination within the Community of Nations* (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1967); Chris Brown, *Political Restructuring in Europe: Ethical Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); and Kamal S. Shehadi, *Ethnic Self-Determination the Break-up of States* (London: Brassey's for IISS, 1993).

within. For example, Southern Sudan (1955-1972); Katanga (1960-1963); Eritrea (1961-1992); and, perhaps, Ogaden (1970s)¹⁰³. Most of them are analysed as the consequence of colonial policies of divide and rule that had to be replaced after independence in the more difficult task of building new nations out of ethnically and diverse communities. Civil wars became the most serious of challenges that several new African States had to face. Within this, we have to distinguish between two types of civil wars: those waged directly for secessionist purposes and those waged out of regional ethnic rivalry within the state. Other civil wars were a result of the unwillingness of a region or an ethnic group to submit to a central authority dominated by a rival (though not necessarily) ethnic group. The best examples are Chad (since 1965) and Angola (1975-1976, then continued).

Generally, the foregoing categories of national liberation movements for independence and the secessionist struggles are quite distinct from the third category which is the centre of this project. The first category had independence as its primary objective, which was achieved all over the continent. The second category is often caused by problems of disunity and discontent from particular ethnic groups or regions. The third category, the post-colonial liberation movements are not necessarily ethnic or regionally based. They are, if one uses Harry Eckstein's title, 'internal wars', defined as any attempt to alter state policy, rulers, or institutions by the use of violence, in societies where violent competition is not the norm and where well-defined institutional patterns exist or strive to exist¹⁰⁴. Their primary objectives do not include independence and secession. They are basically directed against a particular regime in power, especially regimes that have alienated and marginalised the bulk of their populations. Most, if not all, liberation struggles of this category do command a nation-wide support and their leadership is often a mixture of diverse ethnic elites. The main and strong objective in this category includes instant overthrow of the regime in power; establishment of democratic order and institutions (rewriting constitutions) that will address national issues irrespective of ethnic or regional diversities. These movements often have 'democracy' in their manifestos as the major objective. What they aspire to, within such terms, is the establishment of efficient, legitimate and domestically stable regime¹⁰⁵.

2.3. Marxist Discourses on African Liberation

¹⁰³ See Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-225.

¹⁰⁴ See Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War* (New York: Praeger, 1964), also Lawrence Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁵ They aspire, in a way, to a correction of the 'Quasi-State' image labeled by critiques of third world states. See for example, Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States, op. cit.*

In the writings of most African scholars, it has been established that both Marx and Engels knew very little, if anything, about Africa¹⁰⁶. Save for the few, and often very rare isolated remarks on Africa in their writings, Marx and Engels paid little attention to one of the world's vast continents. That is partly why historical materialism was unable to challenge the image of Africa portrayed in Europe by the representatives of European colonial interests. However, Marxist literature has had great impact on African liberation and the subsequent establishment of its most social systems¹⁰⁷. For example, Marxist writings on political as well as guerrilla warfare have had a fuelling impact on the formation of liberation struggles in most of Africa, and the establishment of most post-colonial economies. Therefore, we will now briefly outline some aspects of African Marxism.

(a) Marxist Influence on African Liberation

In order to comprehend the Marxist impact, we need to find out precisely what generally is in Marx's writings that has for years successfully influenced the thinking of both academics and practitioners, and for that matter most African leaders. Marx's analysis of the social systems was less sophisticated than portrayed in the works of most of his twentieth century followers. He looked at the society of his time in Europe and discovered two different kinds of people, namely, the factory owners on the one hand, and the workers on the other. In his analysis, it is the workers who often suffer, and he identified the main reasons for their sufferings. As a result, he aimed all his efforts to the elimination of the causes of misery in his particular society. There is not enough space here to review the concepts he introduced in analysis: "class-struggle", "oppression", "exploitation", "proletariat", "bourgeoisie", or "alienation".

In his plan for action, Marx proposed the complete overthrow of the capitalistic system, or as he noted, "a violent overthrow of the former conditions of production". For effective purposes, he preached 'revolution', a complete overhaul of the system. He wanted a situation where no person would exploit another in order to make profit. All should become equals in the process of work and in society. In order for this to be achieved, he offered a whole concrete plan of action, under the umbrella of what he called "scientific socialism". He, however, held that leaders of the revolution had to wait until the time was ripe. That is, the

¹⁰⁶ For a lucid analysis of Marxism and the study of African social reality, see Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Africa*, op. cit., pp. 1-21: 7.

¹⁰⁷ For a very simple analysis and application of Marxist theories in African social systems, see Oswald Hirma, *The Gospel and the Social Systems: An introduction into Capitalism, Marxism and African Socialism* (Nairobi and Kampala: St. Paul Publications, 1981).

time when tension erupts between factory owners and workers; when the workers became conscious of their role in the struggle; when the workers of the whole world joined in the revolution. However, Marx also foresaw that the revolution would occur in stages. The first stage should be "socialism", where the means of production should become "socialised", that means they had to become property of the workers. Once the "mode of production" had changed, a new society would make its logical appearance, and this would be the "Communist Society", the classless and community-minded society. This is the second and final stage of the revolution.

Generally, Marx's thinking had a global perspective. It never mattered whether the revolution took place in one part of the world or another. He precisely saw the whole world involved in his socialist/communist revolution. That is why he did proclaim the World Communist Revolution, when in February 1848, together with Engels, they composed the Manifesto of the Communist Party on the occasion of the First International "League of Communists". In the Manifesto, they wrote:

The Communists scorn to conceal their views and their intentions. They openly proclaim that their aims can only be attained by the overthrowing by force of all existing order of society. Let the ruling class tremble before the communist revolution! The proletariat have nothing to loose but their chains. They have the world to gain. Workers of the World, Unite!¹⁰⁸.

One major distinguishing element between Marx and his followers is that the communist revolution was not just a violent overthrow of the regime, but rather a radical change of mind and society. Given that there are so many varieties of Marxism, it is often difficult to establish a "Marxist" perspective on certain issues¹⁰⁹. The issue of democracy is no exception. For Lenin, for example, the rule of a class can take a wide range of political forms. In his account, capitalist rule in the first half of this century manifested itself in a wide range of political forms including monarchical (Britain), fascist (Germany and Italy), and parliamentary (France and U.S.) democratic systems¹¹⁰. So for Lenin, when talking of democracy, it must be asked "democracy for what class?". His implication is that the specific historical forms of democracy

¹⁰⁸ See D. Ryazanoff, *The Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1963), p. 68..

¹⁰⁹ See Shlomo Avineri (eds.), *Varieties of Marxism* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

constitute democracy for a specific class or classes and the denial of it for other classes¹¹¹. Hence, democracy, as conceived within certain Marxist/Leninist thinkers, does not qualify as a better or ideal means of running society. That is why in most parts of the world, especially Third World countries, during the Cold War period, there emerged a muddled conception of democracy. A communist variant of democracy was advanced widely and it was not meant to be similar to the western liberal-democracy.

Therefore, during the Cold War, African countries had to search for their own way in the conflict of ideologies. "Which way to go: West or East?" The anticipated expectation prior to independence, that Africa was to follow the west, did not materialise. In theory, the vast majority of African leaders rejected both Marxism and Capitalism. They sought to go their own way and declared: "African Socialism-a Third Way!"¹¹². And in December 1962, at the "Dakar Colloquium", the leaders of the newly independent African countries vocally rejected both Marxism and Liberal Capitalism and decided to follow an African adoption of socialism as a "third way". That led historians like Basil Davidson to declare in the 1960s that the leaders of Africa "are all socialists now"¹¹³.

Reflections of Marxist influence in Africa include works of African theoreticians and revolutionaries like Fanon, Cabral and Machel as well as those of African statesmen like Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kaunda, Toure and/or Shengor. We do not, however, wish to give a detailed account of these works due to lack of space. While Amilcar Lopes Cabral was the leading theoretician of the liberation movements of Lusophone Africa, Frantz Fanon influenced the liberation of Francophone Africa. Cabral founded the PAIGC which he led until his assassination in 1973 in Conakry, and Fanon was instrumental in the making of the Algerian war, the bitterest of all French Africa wars of independence¹¹⁴. Similarly, Julius

¹¹¹ See V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, (find full title?) *op. cit.*, p. 235; and in idem, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932).

¹¹² See the collection of articles by Carl G. Roseberg and Thomas M. Callaghy (eds.), *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Assessment* (Institute of International Studies, Berkeley: University of California Berkeley Press, 1979).

¹¹³ See Basil Davidson, *Which Way Africa?: The Search for a New Society* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), p. 116; for a short description of African Socialism, see Dorothy Dodge, *African Politics in Perspective* (Princeton, N.J., and London: D. Van Nostrand Company, INC., 1966), pp. 97-102; and finally, see Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), especially pp. 96ff.

¹¹⁴ See Amilcar Lopes Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, *op. cit.*; Strike Mkandla, "The Thought of Amilcar Lopes Cabral of Guinea-Bissau" (University of Kent, Ph.D. Thesis: 1983); and Adele Jinadu, *Fanon*, *op. cit.*

Nyerere took Marxist orthodoxy seriously when he introduced his famous *Ujamaa*; and Kenneth Kaunda's fashion was displayed in his ideology of humanism¹¹⁵. And some of the most articulate Marxist works are those by Kwame Nkrumah, described by Mazrui and Tidy as "Africa's Lenin and Ghana's Czar"¹¹⁶. For Nkrumah, Ghana's independence meant nothing if the rest of Africa was still under colonial control.

(b) Pragmatic Adaptation of Marxism in Africa

Certain aspects of Marxism were embraced by a section of African leaders. Nkrumah's efforts at theorising, the revolutionary thoughts of Fanon and Cabral, the Christian socialisms of Kaunda and Nyerere and the Stalinism of Mengistu, were all influenced by Marxist orthodoxy. For instance, the African struggle against colonial powers was regarded as a "class-struggle" in the Marxist sense. Lenin's theory of "imperialism" as the international form of capitalism was also accepted within this section of leaders. Despite that, both Marxism and Capitalism were disguisingly declared as foreign to the African way of life in the Dakar Colloquium. For example, capitalist "individualism" which makes people think only of themselves and obsessed by the spirit of profit-making, was absolutely rejected as a contradiction of African communalism and spirit of sharing. They also rejected the Marxist teaching of "classes" and "class-struggles", arguing that in traditional African society there were no classes¹¹⁷. For example, Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta and Tom Mboya argued for a philosophy of democratic African Socialism based on a traditional African way of life¹¹⁸. Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda declared that "let the West have its Technology and Asia its Mysticism! Africa's gift to the World culture must be in the realm of Human Relationships. I suppose I could be called a humanist ..."¹¹⁹. Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor argued that in Africa there were no classes, everyone was a worker and prestige was not based on wealth but on wisdom and age. For

¹¹⁵ See *Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa, op. cit.*; *Ujamaa: Essays in Socialism*; and *A Humanist in Africa, op. cit.*

¹¹⁶ See Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*; and refer to the bibliography for Nkrumah's works.

¹¹⁷ For the declaration of each individual leader on this, see Oswald Hirma, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-112.

¹¹⁸ See Alfred Lithuli, Kenneth Kaunda, D.K. Chisiza, Tom Mboya and Julius Nyerere, *Africa's Freedom* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968); Jeremy Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972); Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (London: Deutsch, 1972) and by the same author, *The Challenge of Nationhood: A Collection of Speeches and Writings* (London: Deutsch, 1972); and for a comprehensive analysis of all, see John Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

¹¹⁹ See Oswald Hirma, *op. cit.*, p. 103; and also Kenneth David Kaunda, *A Humanist in Africa, op. cit.*

him, "communalism" or the "communal basis" of African society gave its members a single soul - a high ideal of solidarity in which all participated¹²⁰. Hence, Senghor's ideas and ideals of Negritude strengthened his efforts of trying to establish a political system based on African tradition and values. Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah concurred with Senghor on this aspect of communalism, and so did Tanzania's Julius Nyerere who professed *Ujamaa*- "familiness"¹²¹.

In the whole of Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were the three main countries where aspects of the socialism of Marx and Lenin were implemented¹²². For example, when he took over power in Mozambique in 1975, Samora Machel nationalised all businesses, factories and accommodation and became very radical on the Church. This was in line with the Marxist idea of wiping out the profit-making bourgeoisie (middle-class, capitalist) who "grew rich on the backs of the poor" as he declared. As a result, little stores became "peoples shops" run on non-profit lines for the benefit of the masses; land-owners were stripped of their property which henceforth was to be run by the state. Though Machel's Marxist principles became bogged down in practice, he, with considerable courage, met the crisis head-on. However, like most of his African counterparts, Machel later changed his Marxist/Leninist way of economy into a "mixed economy" where private enterprise goes together with state-controlled businesses. He claimed it did not mean a deviation from the principles of Marxism/Leninism. He allowed multi-national corporations to operate in Mozambique, "provided they do not take the national's riches 'and leave us with holes in the ground'". Robert Mugabe too implemented his own specific Marxist/Leninist principles in Zimbabwe¹²³. When he took power for example, he wished to "distribute the wealth of Zimbabwe among all the people of the country". He was determined to expropriate farms which were not worked properly for the common good but exploited for personal profit only by so-called cheque-book farmers.

What also deserves attention in this section is the Stalinism of Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia. According to various writings, "Ethiopia's Socialism" is counted as one amongst

¹²⁰ See Leopold Sedar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. and with an intro. by Mercer Cook (London: Poll Mall, 1964).

¹²¹ See Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular reference to the African Revolution* (London: Heinmann, 1964); and two books by Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism*, *op. cit.*, and *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, *op. cit.*

¹²² See Oswald Hirma, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-112.

¹²³ See for example, *Zimbabwe: The First Decade, 1980-1990* (Harare: Roblaw, 1990).

the few radical applications of Marxism/Leninism in Africa¹²⁴. As a concept, socialism in Ethiopia is a hybrid of socialism and nationalism which became more popularised in the Amharic term of *Hibretesebawinet* (a compound word of *Hibrette*-social, and *Sebawinet*-humane), close in meaning to Nyerere's Swahili concept of *Ujamaa*, and both convey social norms of togetherness. Even though these concepts were not strictly corresponding with Marxian scientific socialism, they were a very important ideological vehicle in the mobilisation of the masses. "Ethiopia's Socialism" was basically carried from the urban center to the countryside where propaganda and agitation against the nobility was conducted among the masses and mass literacy became a prerequisite. In order to become effective, "Ethiopia's Socialism" was implemented through the help of the revolution.

One of most instrumental elements in the implementation programme of "Ethiopia's Socialism" were the students, and to that effect, the *Dergue* officially proclaimed the *zemecha* in 1975, a programme whose effects later on backfired against the regime¹²⁵. The real implementation of socialism in Ethiopia began on the 1st January 1975, when the PMAC declared all banks and insurances as public property; and in the first week of February the same year, the government nationalised 22 industrial and commercial firms, mostly owned by foreign capitalists, without compensation. Most radical in such implementations was the declaration of the nationalisation of all rural lands, thus ending the feudal land tenure system for ever.

On the other hand, the implementation of socialism in Ethiopia was also accompanied by a turbulent, bloody and agonising period for the country. For example, Mengistu Haile Mariam consolidated his leadership by eliminating the bulk of the makers of the revolution. He began to amass more power and authority than he was able to cope with, and as a result, dug the grave of his own downfall. Apart from the fact that he lacked the charisma of a Lenin or Stalin and a personal *aura* of a Haile Selassie, Mengistu trusted very few and delegated little of real significance. As Kinfu Abraham has summarised, "while his patrimonial hegemonic regime had all the trappings of the previous regime, he lacked the human face, conventional wisdom and diplomatic suave of his predecessor"¹²⁶. However, a conversion to the socialist *credo* that time was an automatic guarantee of prestige and a host of fringe benefits. In fact,

¹²⁴ See Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*; John Markakis, *op. cit.*; Addis Hiwet, *op. cit.*; Christopher Clapham, *op. cit.*; Kinfu Abraham, *op. cit.*; and Jonathan Abraham, *Ethiopia's Road to Perestrojka* (Uppsala: SIAS, 1990).

¹²⁵ See chapter five for more details.

¹²⁶ See Kinfu Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Mengistu and his followers had made a mockery of socialism by turning it into a fountain of wealth, power and influence for a very few and of grinding poverty for millions. Therefore, after seventeen years of muddling in the field of ideology, few Ethiopians really understood the meaning of socialism and fewer still had benefited from the loud rhetoric of the socialist utopia promised to them.

Even though the influence of Marxism upon revolutionary struggles of this century is quite apparent, it raises a number of paradoxes when it comes to the analysis of revolutionary struggles in Africa. Whereas the bulk of the work of Karl Marx was primarily concerned with workings of the capitalist system and the self-generated preconditions of its overthrow by socialism, the twentieth-century revolutions that have derived some form of inspiration from his ideas have generally taken place in countries where capitalism had not yet been as developed as in Marx's prototype of the pre-Revolutionary capitalist state¹²⁷. Still, Marxist followers in the Third World contemplated the possibility of a seizure of power by the proletariat, basing their argument on the fact that developed capitalist states had established a crude form of capitalism in colonial countries. There was also a widespread hope that capitalism had a role in creating the preconditions of socialism in the colonies -- a conception that led, after independence, to a misguided programme of development.

In practice, not only has Marxist rhetoric been translated in varying degrees into the programmes in the struggle against colonialism, but such rhetoric has also been reported to have influenced post-colonial liberation movements. For example, though unconfirmed, Clapham writes that "the EPLF in Eritrea and the EPRDF in Ethiopia had perhaps the most deeply rooted Marxist formation of any African insurgency, and as late as 1989, the EPRDF leader Meles Zenawi was looking to Albania as a model of autonomous socialist development"¹²⁸.

In most cases, Marxist studies developed as a critique of the Western-dominated field of research on Africa, that either ignored or distorted Marxism as a scientific method of inquiry¹²⁹. Hence, most studies of African social reality tried to demonstrate that Marxism or historical materialism is/was a living science, and not the ideas of some dead thinker or thinkers. It was argued that Marxism was a revolutionary world outlook developed for purposes of providing adequate solutions to the concrete problems facing the working and

¹²⁷ Again, Strike Mkandla's perceptive thesis on Guinea-Bissau, *op. cit.*, is a better example here.

¹²⁸ See Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

¹²⁹ See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

exploited classes in their struggle for emancipation. Thus, in Africa, one can say that Marxism has been understood as 'the concrete analysis of concrete conditions' guided by a revolutionary theory which seeks to understand the world in order to change it.

(c) The Spirit of Nationalism and Liberation

Nationalism, defined in the African context, is the championing of the case for independence of a people (generally within a given territory). It can have a social-revolutionary content or simply a 'political' one concentrated on the organs of state power but not postulating major changes to the basic socio-economic organisation of the given national unit. Amilcar Cabral, for example, addressed himself directly to this question of the forms which struggles for national liberation can take¹³⁰. African nationalism was essentially concerned with the specific process of ridding Africa of alien rule. Its earliest stage focused on nationalist efforts to forge an effective anticolonial coalition. Thus, leaders of African liberation were virtually all drawn to it by intense sympathy for its aims, operating in an 'intimate symbiosis' with the nationalist struggle on the ground¹³¹. It was widely held amongst African nationalist that European colonialism would resist tenaciously in line with the 1944 Brazzaville Conference declaration of French colonial officials that self-government was ruled out 'now or in the future' and British official expectations that independence for Kenya and Tanganyika (today Tanzania) lay some fifteen or thirty years ahead, worsen the expectations.

Amongst scholarly works on African nationalism, Thomas Hodgkin provided the classic synthesis, adopting an inclusive definition of nationalism as all forms of anticolonial protest and any organisational or group assertion of 'the rights', claims, and aspirations of a given society (from the level of the language group to that of "Pan-Africa") in opposition to European authority, whatever its institutional form and objectives. Hodgkin's book is suffused with the excitement of nationalism in action and delights in the variety and ingenuity of African protest¹³².

However, there are other scholarly materials that also contend that nationalist politics developed as an appropriate way to negotiate with the modern colonial state at both central

¹³⁰ See Strike Mkandla, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

¹³¹ Crawford Young, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class in Africa", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, vol. XXXVI (1986), p. 423; also quoted by Henry S. Wilson, *African Decolonisation* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1994), p. 3.

¹³² See Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, *op. cit.*

and local levels. On the strength of its claims to have developed forms of politics suitable for a modern state, nationalism based its title to supersede colonialism. Thus, African nationalists condemned the colonial state as an essentially transitory phenomenon unable to make the transition to full modernisation. But nationalist organisations claimed to be more than just modern political machines intent on wresting control of state power. The politics of nationalism, infused with traditional symbolism and idioms, fiercely defended indigenous society against alien encroachment. John Breuilly neatly sums up this capacity to embrace both local tradition and modernity when he wrote: "Nationalism thus always combines ... incompatible concerns with modernity (in the form of statehood) and tradition (in the form of expressing the unspecialised culture of indigenous society)"¹³³.

Mazrui and Tidy identified two kinds of political nationalism in Africa during the struggle for political independence in the middle of the twentieth century. These were: (1) The ethnic sub-nationalism of a community speaking one language and (2) the multi-ethnic nationalism, where men and women of different ethnic sub-nations have striven together to develop a feeling of patriotism, or love for their political country, and build one political nation out of numerous ethnic groups (as is the case in most of Africa)¹³⁴. They further claim that "nationalism was a strong feature of African civilisation in the pre-colonial period. Colonial rule in general had the twin effects of weakening nationalism"¹³⁵. For them, it is inappropriate to attribute the creation of nations in Africa to colonialists. Instead, they argue that colonialism destroyed many African political nations in the process of establishing their own political pattern in Africa. For example, large empires like those of the Tokolor, Mandinka and Fulani were split up between several colonial territories. Independent smaller nations like Zulu or Baganda were submerged within a single colonial territory. They also argue that several African states which fell victim to colonialism managed to re-emerge in the post-colonial era with substantially their pre-colonial boundaries, hardly affected by the redrawing of the political map of Africa by Europeans. These states include Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Dahomey, Madagascar, and the kingdoms of Swaziland and Lesotho. The majority of the new African nations are commonly supposed to be conglomerations of mainly 'stateless' societies and small states, lumped together fortuitously by European chancelleries or delineate colonial territories during the scramble for Africa.

¹³³ See his *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 193.

¹³⁴ See Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Scholars have pointed out that nationalist historiography is part of an effort to create what Benedict Anderson terms "imagined communities"¹³⁶. In this case, events of the past are often emphasised in order to support a specific claim of the future. This is how the spirit of nationalism and liberation worked to fight European colonialism until the states' control was handed to indigenous African leaders. In fact, the yearning for decolonisation emphasised the need of self-government though nobody was critical enough to question the precise nature such self-government should have.

(d) Class Theories, Class Formations and Class Fractions in Africa

Marx and Engels devoted much attention to the explanation of the behaviour of different social classes in revolutionary conflicts, a task found in future struggles to be of critical importance in the formulation of the most relevant strategy for consolidating different sources of revolutionary activity. However, the analysis of the position of social classes and strata *vis-a-vis* revolutionary struggles does not normally yield success as a guarantee; the final outcome may be determined by a cluster of other factors, including the degree of cohesion of the incumbent state apparatus. But even with such qualifications, the analysis of classes and class behaviour rightly remains a central concern for revolutionaries and students of revolution.

However, the orthodox thinking during independence was that traditional African society is "classless". It was on this basis that most African leaders maintained that the process of building the nation-state rests on communalism and co-operation. As history showed, this idea could easily be instrumentalised. Kenneth Grundy suggested, with great relevance for Africa, that "where there is an element of disintegration in the social structure ... the tendency will be for the leaders to minimise its importance"¹³⁷. And Karl Mannheim observed that elites often use ideologies in order to encourage national integration¹³⁸. Thus, it was upon the ostensible 'classlessness' of indigenous society that a potent emotional defence of the one-party state and of African Socialism flourished.

¹³⁶ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹³⁷ Kenneth W. Grundy, "The 'Class Struggle' in Africa: an examination of conflicting theories", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. ii (1964), p. 392.

¹³⁸ See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: an introduction to the sociology of knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936); and Walter Carlsnaes, *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: a critical examination of Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

Some African leaders, however, argued that there are classes in African societies but class differentiation did not imply a diversification of interests and still less an opposition of interests¹³⁹. According to this view, class consciousness is not sufficiently developed to create conflict between African peoples. Hence, it is often argued that classes, and the conflict they create are characteristic of Western industrial society and with some vigilance never need be experienced in Africa¹⁴⁰. Such vigilance derived support from an ideology of African socialism which stresses co-operative rather than conflicted models of development¹⁴¹. Nyerere's major use of the concept of a classless society was to defend the one-party systems on the grounds that multi-party democracy makes sense only where there are antagonistic classes¹⁴². Thus, Nyerere introduced what he hoped would become an institutionalised system of internal party competition in order to ensure that the temptations of the single party would not become too great.

From other perspectives, the concept of 'social class' implies some degree of consciousness of kind, some feeling of common cause with others in the same position *vis-a-vis* those either below or above oneself in the prestige scale¹⁴³. This definition of a social class does not imply any relationship between class and economic position; therefore, it is non-Marxian. In a similar line, James Meisel argued that a ruling class exists where there is 'group consciousness, coherence and conspiracy'. For him, class is not necessarily determined by economic conditions¹⁴⁴. Yet others like Wright Mills contend that the term 'class' is an economic one. So that the phrase a 'ruling class' entails the theory that an economic class rules politically¹⁴⁵.

¹³⁹ Some African leaders agreed with the arguments of Modibo Keita, "The Single Party in Africa", *Presence Africaine* (Paris), vol. ii, no. 30 (1960), p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ Peter C. Lloyd, *Classes, Crises, Coups: Themes in the Sociology of Developing Countries* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), p. 153.

¹⁴¹ See Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa - Essays on Socialism*, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁴² See his article, "Democracy and the Party-System", in Paul E. Sigmund (eds.), *The Ideologies of Developing Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 305-313.

¹⁴³ See J. Clyde Mitchell and A.L. Epstein, "Occupational Prestige and Social Status among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia", in Pirre L. van den Berghe (ed.), *Africa, Social Problems of Change and Conflict* (San Francisco, Cal.: Chandler, 1965), p. 215.

¹⁴⁴ See James Meisel, *The Myth of the Ruling Class: Gaetano Mosca and the "Elite"* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Wright Mills chose the term 'Power Elite' as a title of his book rather than 'Ruling Class', because for him, the latter is a 'badly loaded phrase'. See his *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 277.

However, for “class” to become a useful construct in the studies of African politics and society, several confusions of the concept must first be removed. For example much of the work on class begins with the notion of inequality, and with the (often unstated) presumption that inequality, for both moral and developmental reasons, is undesirable¹⁴⁶. Unfortunately, all societies today do exhibit inequalities and that is likely to remain so. Focusing on inequality raises questions such as who is disadvantaged, why, and with what consequences? However, as Marx pointed out, class is not just a tool for the study of inequality, but it is a tool for the study of sources of change in society¹⁴⁷. It is in that use, in the search for structural sources of change, that class will contribute to the study of the political restructuring and democratisation in Africa.

In the African context, a clear distinction has been made between class and economic factors. Max Weber argued that, as the basis of political power, possession of the means of administration may be an alternative to the possession of the means of economic production¹⁴⁸. This is significant in Africa since most countries do not possess a sizeable private economic sector. As a consequence of this, employment opportunities are often dominated by the government or, more precisely, by the civil service¹⁴⁹. Indeed, in Black Africa, there is no section of the intellectual classes that is independent of the government. Thus, we see the rise of a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' in Africa, whose political power derives from administrative rather than economic sources even though a high ranking in the bureaucratic hierarchy is still coupled with economic rewards¹⁵⁰. Africa's bureaucrats and, to a somewhat lesser extent,

¹⁴⁶ See for example, Joel Samoff, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁷ For Karl Marx, 'class' was not primarily a category for describing how a particular capitalist society looked at any given point in time, but rather above all an analytic tool for elucidating the sources of structural change within the capitalist system. See Isaac Balbus, "Ruling Elite Theory vs. Marxian Analysis", *Monthly Review*, vol. 1, no. 2(1971), pp. 37-38; in idem "The Negation of the Negation", *Politics and Society*, vol. 3, no. 3(1972), pp. 49-63.

¹⁴⁸ Cited by Thomas Burton Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 42.

¹⁴⁹ This was satisfactorily discussed in an article by Aristide R. Zolberg, "The Structure of Political Conflict in the New States of Tropical Africa", *The American Political Science Review*, vol. lxii, no. 1 (March 1968), pp. 70-87:74-75.

¹⁵⁰ Rene Dumont, in *False Start in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1966), especially p. 81, argued that power in Africa is derived from administrative positions rather than wealth. Dumont's argument however, falls short because he does not add the fact that the African bureaucrats do earn a disproportionate share of the economic rewards. For example, it is evident from Ruth First's argument about Nigeria that in the late 1960s and 1970s, university graduates commenced their careers in the civil service with salaries of over , 700 and, indeed, could eventually rise to , 3,900, even in countries

politicians, are marked by the levels of education they attained. Therefore, education still remains the sole pathway to elite status, which in turn is usually followed by employment in government. Education plays a large role in determining whether the elite will solidify their position by becoming a ruling class or not.

In a predominantly illiterate society, education tends to set an individual apart. Thus, if education is taken as one way of identifying the development of classes in African societies, then there are so far two major classes: the educated (formal) class, which are a minority, but rank at the top of the class continuum, and the illiterate class, which form the bulk of the population below¹⁵¹. However, in the 1960s, Archibald Callaway argued that manual workers, teachers, and unemployed school-leavers who drift to the urban centres, may constitute another class in African societies¹⁵². Though class consciousness is already developing, their consciousness is not yet organised on a class basis in most of Sub-Saharan African Cities. This may imply that classes may develop in cities but not countrywide such as affecting the rural areas. The latter do not simply fit for the development of classes, because the pattern of sub-dividing and fragmenting land holdings, had a levelling effect. For example, there is no employment of labourers in the rural areas. Above all, it has already been pointed out quite clearly that landownership in most of Africa is not regarded as landlordship or exploitation¹⁵³, and members of the extended family and friends are often engaged for labour work in fields, and not hired workers.

Thus, unless the rural agricultural sector is commercialised fully, there is no room where rural classes will form. Even then, declining world prices and corrupt marketing structures may discourage cultivators and drive them to withdraw from the commercialisation of production. There is a wide range of evidence that this has happened in some areas of Africa. In Senegal, for example, it is documented that peasants responded to low prices by simply abandoning the cultivation of groundnuts and reverted their efforts to the cultivation of the local food crop,

where the average income per capita was estimated to be only , 29 per annum. See her *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup D'etat* (London: Allen Lane, 1970), p. 106.

¹⁵¹ The World Bank surveys, are often correct to state in their findings that most African countries have a very low percentage of literacy compared to the illiteracy one. This could be found in the recent World Bank Reports.

¹⁵² See his "Unemployment among African School-Leavers", in Laing Gray Cowan, James O'Connell and David G. Scanlon (eds.), *Education and Nation-Building in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 235-237.

¹⁵³ See Szymon Chodak, "The Birth of an African Peasantry", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 3 (1971), p. 338.

such as millet¹⁵⁴. Furthermore, it is often difficult to speak of class consciousness among African peasants so long as they also attribute their deprivation to some impersonal Fate or God rather than to the machination of other social classes¹⁵⁵. Thus, conflicts in African societies arise due to friction within the elites and not between the elite and the rest of the society. Thus, Robert Jackson was correct when he observed about two decades ago that, "political conflict in contemporary Africa is not a type of conflict born of class antagonisms so much as one that reflects the mutual hostilities of communal groups in the larger society or the struggle among elites or factions"¹⁵⁶.

Therefore, studies in African politics have attempted to define 'class' in terms of the relationship to the sources of authority, economic status in terms of both occupation and wealth, educational levels, style of life, and to a limited extent, the existence of a consciousness of a corporate class identity¹⁵⁷. A good example is Merran Fraenkel's *Tribe and Class in Monrovia*, which distinguished between an 'upper class' and a 'middle class', where the latter consists of 'white collar workers, teachers, nurses and so on, who had subordinate positions in the government-based hierarchy¹⁵⁸. And according to Peter Marris in his study of rehousing in Lagos, a class division results from a divergence between the patterns of life of rich and poor¹⁵⁹. So class may as well be used to refer to a simple income category.

Others still use the term class to denote a stratum of positions whose members enjoy common attitudes and ideologies towards self and society, consciousness of kind, and a sense of

¹⁵⁴ See Donald B. Cruise O'Brien, "Cooperatives and Bureaucrats: class formation in a Senegalese peasant society", *Africa*, vol. xli, no. 4 (October 1971), p. 275.

¹⁵⁵ In fact, Kenneth Post's "'Peasantization' and Rural Political Movements in Western Africa", in *Archives Europennes de Sociologie* (Paris), concludes that there are grounds for doubting that this has occurred in modern Western Africa. Quoted by Robert A. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

¹⁵⁶ Robert H. Jackson, "Political Stratification in Tropical Africa", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. vii, no. 3 (1973), p. 397.

¹⁵⁷ See an extended discussion of these by V.L. Allen, "The Meaning of the Working Class in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1972), pp. 169-189.

¹⁵⁸ See Merran Fraenkel, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia* (London, 1964), p. 196 and 201. Though his distinction seem arbitrarily so, he definitely set a good example of class identification in African societies.

¹⁵⁹ See his *Family Life and Social Change in an African City* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1962), p. 140.

fundamental antagonism to other strata¹⁶⁰. A fitting example would be Clyde Mitchell who identified the African middle class in British Central Africa as those people who used Europeans as a reference group for their behaviour. In this analysis, class is determined by 'civilising' factors and the prestige that comes with them. In the 1960s, it was observed that in many parts of Tropical Africa, a "modern class has only begun to form", where modern referred to "values and self-styles", and the authors pointed to the adoption of a "Western style of life", a "growing Westernised elite", and a "middle-class European style of life"¹⁶¹.

This in turn explains why revolutionaries such as Cabral contended that a ubiquitous legacy of colonial rule was the creation of new classes (colonial strata) in African Cities. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, the urbanised African population comprised members of the liberal professions, dockworkers and other blue-collar workers, and some 'déclassés' comprising a lumpenproletariat and marginalised youth¹⁶². Therefore, in most African countries, the social classes absorbed varying degrees of English, French and Portuguese cultures. Especially the better off like the professional officials (in Cabral's term, 'the petty-bourgeoisie') become deeply immersed into foreign culture. Generally, most of the foregoing literature preoccupied itself with observable life-style features, and consequently lack definitional clarity. Others such as Samir Amin, Giovanni Arighi and Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja attempted to examine class positions but, in causal terms.¹⁶³.

In all, scholars from the Marxists, neo-Marxists and structural dependency schools argued that both colonialism and the incorporation of African societies into a world capitalist system (and the class divisions this entailed) contributed to the formation of modern classes based on their relationship with to the means of production and their conflicts with other classes on issues of

¹⁶⁰ See Julius Gould and William L. Kolb (eds.), *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1964), p. 649.

¹⁶¹ See the conference papers on Methods and Objectives of Urban Research in Africa that were published, edited by Horace Miner as *The City in Modern Africa* (London: Pall Mall, 1967).

¹⁶² See Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea, op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶³ See Samir Amin, "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Origins and Contemporary Forms", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol., 10, no. 4(1972); *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); *Unequal Development: an essay on the Social formation of peripheral capitalism* (Hossacks: Harvester Press, 1976); *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); *Technological Change, Industrial Restructuring and Regional Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); and *Eurocentrism* (London: Zed, 1989).

private and public policy¹⁶⁴. Today, the African bourgeoisie is generally thought to include the political elite, and leading bureaucratic and parastatal officials, the local auxiliaries of multinational companies, business people, landlords (in Imperial Ethiopia), large plantation and cash-crop farmers, and high-ranking personnel (i.e. corporate lawyers and accountants).

(e) Theories of Revolution

The early use of the term revolution referred to the 'turning around' of political power and was applied to the restoration of monarchies as well as to their overthrow¹⁶⁵. However, in one sense, revolution is also often used allegorically to refer to any wide-ranging change in society, one instituted, perhaps, by scientific or technological changes such as the Copernican and industrial ones¹⁶⁶. Political revolution occur in all kinds of forms and political orientations, from conservative Calvinism to the anti-ecclesiastical, chiliastic sectarian movements of religious puritanism. These revolutionary assaults were directed against the Royal, Episcopal, established Church; against the monarchy itself; against compulsory religious institutions; and finally, against every sort of political discrimination (i.e. against the less powerful in society). The common objective of these endeavour was to secure the personal rights of individuals - rights which were derived from the divinely-ordained right to freedom of conscience and from the natural right to life, liberty, and property¹⁶⁷.

Thus, in political science, the primary meaning of revolution is a deliberate, intentional, and most probably violent overthrow of one ruling class by another, often fought out as a conflict between the mobilised masses and the existing system. For example, as used by the French, the term revolution implied not only a change in the top echelons of a political system, but a change in the society as a whole. Above all, it meant both the altering of the power distribution and a complete overhaul of the social structure. The revolution in France led to the creation of a middle-class controlled republic instead of an aristocratically-controlled monarchy.

¹⁶⁴ In analysing African class cleavages and social conflicts, Naomi and colleagues explain this point more in details. See Naomi Chazan, et al., *op. cit.*, pp.116-124.

¹⁶⁵ See David Robertson, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹⁶⁶ See Karl Griewank, "Emergence of the Concept of Revolution", in Bruce Mazlish, Arthur D. Kaledin and David B. Kalston (ed.), *Revolution: A Reader* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 13-18.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

In another view, revolution serves as a means of personal liberation. It is a vehicle for satisfying inner drives on the part of leaders and followers. In other words, revolution and liberation are inextricably bound. According to this view, revolution is not merely a political act aimed at transforming the colonial situation. Both notions of liberation and revolution give expression to a continuing process through which man's potentialities are continuously enlarged. It is a process that spans time, giving direction to social and political life. Thus, over the years, the term revolution has come to be associated with fundamental changes in the political, social, economic and psychological dimensions of human organisation¹⁶⁸. But, the contemporary literature on revolution seems profuse, and concentrates around issues such as the causes and consequences of revolution, revolutionary leadership, comparative studies, and definition of revolution¹⁶⁹. For example, popular opinion often identifies or associates revolution with violence¹⁷⁰. Revolution raises in one's mind a spectre of destruction, brutality and carnage, a reaction which, as John Dunn pointed out, is partly fed by the pronouncements of revolutionaries¹⁷¹. The major lesson of revolutions is that they have often wreaked massive damage on the existing power structure. Thus, an examination of a sample of the relevant social science literature shows that the notion of violence is often built into the meaning of revolution¹⁷². The very notion of a non violent revolution is, according to this view, a contradiction.

¹⁶⁸ See Stanley A. Kochanek, "Perspectives on the Study of Revolution and Social Change", *Comparative Politics*, vo. 5, no. 3(April 1973), p. 314.

¹⁶⁹ For useful views of these, see Lawrence Stone, "Theories of Revolution", *World Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2(January 1966), pp. 159-176; Isaac Kramnic, "Reflections on Revolution: Definition and Explanation in Recent Scholarship", *History and Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2(1972), pp. 22-63; Michael Freeman, "Review Article: Theories of Revolution", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, part 3(July 1972), pp. 339-359; Perez Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 1(March 1973), pp. 23-53; and most reviewing, is Jack A. Gladstone, "Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation", *World Politics*, vol xxxii, no. 3(April 1980), pp. 423-453.

¹⁷⁰ Revolution is described as a rapid, violent and irreversible change in the political organisation of a society. See for example Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: an introduction* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 160.

¹⁷¹ See John Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomena* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 12; and also Stephen Chan and Andrew Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷² See Chalmers Johnson, *Revolution and the Social System* (Stanford, Col.: Hoover Institution, 1964); Harry Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars", *History and Theory*, vol. 4, no. 2(1965); and Robert T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princetom University Press, 1970).

Similarly, Marxism/Leninism regards violence as an accompanying characteristics of revolution¹⁷³. For this view, violence plays an essentially instrumental role in the revolutionary process. Violence is viewed as an evil necessity called for by the violence of the bourgeoisie state apparatus. Lenin himself expressed, "the replacement of the bourgeois by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution"¹⁷⁴. Marx and Engels had expressed similar views about the inevitability of a violent revolution in their famous *Communist Manifesto*. However, Marx sometimes gave the impression that a peaceful non-violent revolution was feasible in the two countries of England and the United States of America¹⁷⁵. It is such ambivalence in Marx that led to the separation of his followers, some years later, into "moderates" on the one hand, and "extremist" on the other¹⁷⁶. The former advocated for a peaceful transformation of society, while the latter became the sole harbinger of violent change in society. For example, according to Fanon, a violent revolution is likely to be more "authentic" than a non-violent one. In the context of Africa, Fanon proposed that violent revolutions can be regenerative, in that they can create "new" individuals and a "new" social consciousness¹⁷⁷. This conception is also implied in Engel's reference to the "immense moral and spiritual impetus which results from every victorious revolution"¹⁷⁸.

However, most African liberation leaders regard revolution as involving more than the violent or non-violent overthrow of a political regime. They view revolution as a process of fundamental social, economic, political and institutional change. From the African point of view, liberation movements are often waged in terms of revolution, where established quasi-constitutional processes are often undermined as inept. Thus, liberation movements are often destined for absolute change and the complete overhaul of the system. In other words, change comes through a revolution, not evolution. What precipitates revolution is the widespread belief that the existing system of power, the existing system of power relations between the people, is somehow thwarting their humanity. And this was true of the great liberal revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries in England and France, as well as the non-liberal revolutions of this century. The common view which underpins every revolution is that the

¹⁷³ See for example, L. Adele Jinadu, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁴ See V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁵ See M.G. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (New York: Lawrence, 1928), *passim*.

¹⁷⁶ For the ambivalence and disintegration of Marxism, see Alfred G. Meyer, *The Unity of Theory and Practice* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1966), pp. 103-121: 115-116.

¹⁷⁷ See L. Adele Jinadu, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹⁷⁸ See Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, quoted in V.I. Lenin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

very structure of society, the dominant power relations in it, have made people less than fully human, have warped them into inability to realise or even to see their full human potentiality. It is on this basis that the turmoil of post-independence or post-colonial era generated a wide variety of revolutions. Even though falling short of being truly "great" revolutions such as the great revolutions in England, France, Russia and the United States¹⁷⁹. In Africa, most revolutions have helped in the establishment of, if one uses Andrew Williams words, "'ideal types' of political organisation, that includes different models of democracy, governance, political culture, that are at the heart of our current international society"¹⁸⁰.

2.4. On the Relationship Between Liberation and Self-Determination

The principle of 'equal rights and self-determination of all peoples' was enshrined in the purposes of the United Nations in Article I of the Charter¹⁸¹. This became accepted as the basic principle of international law from 1948 when it was further endorsed with greater rhetorical force in the Declaration of Human Rights. The UN not only endorsed such a declaration but it also asserted the principle of self-determination as the central legitimising principle of international society¹⁸². From that time, the principle came to enjoy international consensus with no single state making explicit official objections to the Charter.

However, as with so many other international norms, the consensus depended in practice on a considerable degree of ambiguity, which every member-state strove to resolve to their own advantage. For example, architects of African and Arab nationalism, or Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism, all sought to resolve the ambiguity of the Charter to benefit their struggle for independence. Various European imperial powers also strove to revamp structures of their colonies to take account of post-war international norms. Europe itself had since the French Revolution sought to address crucial political issues such as "what constituted a 'people'", and "what could be construed as 'self-determination'?" The new internationalism too, meant that such political questions were bound to contaminate Europe's African empires as well. And evidently, at the end of the Second World War African nationalism picked up a severe attack

¹⁷⁹ See Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1938).

¹⁸⁰ See Stephen Chan and Andrew Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁸¹ See Herbert G. Nicholas, *The United Nations as a Political Institution*, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 197.

¹⁸² See H. Wiberg, "Self-Determination as an International Issue", in I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), p. 43.

on European colonialism branding it as outdated, oppressive, inefficient as well as artificial¹⁸³. From thence on, the principle was indeed used as a major defence for the nationalist struggles throughout the Third World.

Because it seemed obvious that Eritreans were denied their right to benefit from the principle of self-determination in the face of international legal principles, the fundamental historical and legal peculiarity of the Eritrean national liberation movement were best defined in terms of contemporary international law. According to Bereket's seminal work, *Eritrea and the United Nations*, the Eritrean people possess the characteristic of a people according to international law and their claim to self-determination is legally founded. Convinced that their case was similar to that of other peoples of the world who were also fighting for the right of self-determination, Eritreans wrote numerous appeals to the international bodies seeking legal assistance. The Eritrean case was referred to the UN, and in 1952 the UN Resolution 390(V) federated Eritrea and Ethiopia instead¹⁸⁴.

The resolution tacitly recognised the existence of an "Eritrean people", which was clear, according to the UN view, that federation cannot annihilate it. The international recognition of the Eritrean people meant, therefore, that under the 1952 settlement, the UN made the Eritrean people beneficiaries of certain rights without being a legal entity¹⁸⁵. That is why, when in 1962, the federal arrangement was abrogated by Emperor Haile Selassie, Eritrean nationalists took up the option of armed struggle to achieve their right of independence. Eritrea's ultimate goal throughout the liberation struggle was to gain independence, much like other African countries which had suffered the yoke of colonial domination. Accordingly, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Eritreans define their liberation struggle very much in terms of self-determination and independence.

Ethiopians too became fed up, first with the history of monarchical or dynastic rule and, second with nearly two decades of a military autocracy. As a multi-ethnic society, the present leaders argue, Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups and regions deserve the right of determining their own future but within the larger Ethiopian polity. But for such views to prevail, Ethiopia

¹⁸³ See Henry S. Wilson, *African Decolonisation* (London: E. Arnold, 1994), p. 92.

¹⁸⁴ For details on this UN resolution, see chapter four.

¹⁸⁵ Alain Fenet provides a short but very useful study on the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination from the perspective of an international lawyer. See his "The Right of the Eritrean People to Self-Determination", in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1990), pp. 33-45. [detail title reference]

required a severe liberation struggle to root out the previous establishment and reconstruct a new order that would meet the needs of every Ethiopian citizen. The EPRDF-led government in Ethiopia has proved and is still proving that only liberation could deliver democracy and the right of every Ethiopian nationality to self-determination. This gesture is widely perceived as the least common denominator that would resolve the historical political differences that have threatened the survival of the Ethiopian state.

Therefore, it will be noted that Eritrean and Ethiopian self-views are all constituted by issues of liberation, self-determination and the project of democratisation. These three concepts form an 'intimate symbiosis' between them and are often regarded as major points of reference throughout the transition in both societies. Moreover both liberation struggles strove for the achievement of self-determination and democracy. Nonetheless, Eritreans view the process of their liberation struggle not as a provider but a designer of their way of life, and unlike the Ethiopians whose liberation struggle is viewed as a hope of preserving the unity of the state threatened by disintegration.

2.5. On the Relationship between Liberation and Democratisation

The foregoing points to the argument that throughout the liberation struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia, an 'intimate symbiosis' has existed between the concepts of liberation, self-determination and democracy. The right to self-determination is a democratic right which, as a universal principle, was sought by the first generation of African leaders as a war aim for decolonisation. Post-colonial liberation movements too, have proclaimed among other things that their people must be given the opportunity to discuss what matters in their life and how their way of life must be conducted. As will be argued in the cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia, such aspirations can only be delivered in a democratically ordered society. For years, the mobilisation of the Eritrean and Ethiopian liberation fighters was guided by such aspirations.

Therefore, as will be shown in later Chapters, all documents of the liberation fronts in Eritrea and Ethiopia contained democratic principles as one primary objective of the struggle. Historical records also show that liberation movements or revolutions from the French and the American onwards invoked democracy and democratic principles as crucial objects. Throughout the struggle, Eritreans were often critical of democracy as a "dogma" and preferred to consider it as a practice. What the EPLF (now PFDJ) purports to do is to provide content and meaning to democracy within the country's own unique history and conditions. The experiences of the Eritrean society provide a ground upon which an indigenous autochthonous democracy can be nurtured. According to Bereket Habte Selassie, such home-grown order can come only through independent and innovative thinking, rather

than wholesale adoption of policies from external sources. And such an approach bodes well with the Eritrean experience during the process of liberation where independent thinking and self-sufficiency were alleged to be its distinguishing aspects. Thus, the liberation struggle in Eritrea encouraged as its democratic gesture, independent thinking and self-sufficiency.

It has also been admitted that the liberation struggle in Eritrea exerted tremendous influence on the liberalisation and the democratisation programme in Ethiopia¹⁸⁶. The EPLF (PFDJ) has had enormous influence on the liberation fronts in Ethiopia, especially on the EPRDF. As we shall see, pioneers of the TPLF (some of whom now constitute the leadership of the EPRDF) were trained and brought up by the EPLF. It was common perception among the EPLF that Eritrean independence requires the overthrow of the hardline regime in Addis Ababa, which could be quickly achieved *via* the strengthening of the various fronts in Ethiopia. This was proved in 1991 after the EPRDF entered Addis Ababa when Eritrea became *de facto* independent.

Similarly, the concepts of liberation, self-determination and democracy in Ethiopia became almost synonymous and that is why after the overthrow of the *Dergue* the EPRDF convened a national conference to discuss the future of the country¹⁸⁷. This was a gesture of the EPRDF's commitment to democratisation, putting its war aim into practice. Ethiopian experiences, as we shall see, lean more towards the yearning for democracy and democratisation whose full realisation is only defined in the context of the self-determination of ethnic nationalities in the country. Unlike in Eritrea where democracy and democratisation are viewed as home-grown values and a way of life, in Ethiopia democratisation (defined in terms of self-determination) is projected as the least common denominator and preserver of the unity of a threatened multi-ethnic state. And as a result, Ethiopians take democracy as a universal legal framework required for keeping together a highly, though still uniquely constituted, fragmented society.

¹⁸⁶ See Assefaw Bariagaber, "Liberalisation and Democratisation in Ethiopia: Domestic Consequences of the Conflict in Eritrea", *Eritrean Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1(Spring 1994), pp. 69-89.

¹⁸⁷ See Sarah Vaughan, *The Addis Ababa July Conference of 1991*, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER THREE: THE HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF THE AFRICAN STATE-SYSTEM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION

Introduction

The current democratisation process that came to the surface at the close of the 1980s in most of Africa has been seen as a panacea for all the continent's ills of the past because it is expected to inject accountability into politics and improve management of the economy. However, this continuous yearning for accountability and transparency, to be realised through multi-party democracy, has equally been confronted by a number of obstacles some of which are historically traceable to the era of colonialism and others of which are indigenous. This chapter examines the historical obstacles which grew during the formative years of the African state, and are mainly regarded as consequences of colonialism. Unlike the European state-system which had ample time for its evolution and whose fashion has generally been adopted as a model for ordering the rest of the world, the African state was built in a short time. As a result, many of the normative and analytical problems about the relations between the state and society in Africa, especially South of the Sahara Desert, have been mainly exacerbated by the hurried nature of the formation of the African state.

Thus, in order for us to understand such factors and fully comprehend the salience of the whole discourse on liberation and the emergence of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa, tracing the origins of nationhood in the African continent becomes a very important element.

We noted earlier that the state is a construct of Western culture. There is a wide range of evidence backing this claim, that the "modern world", in all its aspects including its States-System, has its roots in the culture of Western Christendom. Thus, as Schuman noted:

All the peoples of the globe have in varying measure been "Europeanised" in the process. The contemporary State System which covers the planet is, in most of its essentials, European as its origins, practices, and motivations. But its point of departure was early Western Christendom, in whose development the "Dark" and "Middle" Ages were but the sunrise and morning of a day which is now past noon¹⁸⁸.

Therefore, while tracing the history of the emergence of African State System, a very important point to keep in mind is that the Western States-System has essentially been adopted

¹⁸⁸ Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics: The Western State System and the World Community* (New York, Toronto & London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, INC., 1958), pp. 55-56.

as a model for framing the entire world system in our time. As is often pointed out, the historical precursors to the Western-State System were not nation-states, but the City-States of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy¹⁸⁹. It is from these two major ancient traditions that the West derived its principles of internal government and that of diplomatic representation. From thence, basic characteristics of nationhood developed, that qualified states to engage in international affairs. States' involvement in international relations, therefore, depends on a host of conditions including the ability to pursue national interest, national security, and economic strategy¹⁹⁰.

The Western State System came to rest upon the three cornerstones of the concept of sovereignty; the principles of international law; and the politics of the balance of power. The concept of sovereignty has been elevated to the dignity of a political theory and later to that of a juridical idea underlying the whole structure of modern international jurisprudence. The principles of international law have evolved into a system of public law in the community of nations. And the politics of the balance of power has become an avowed principle of foreign policy, accepted and acted upon so consistently by all the great states that it may well be viewed as the central theme about which the web of diplomacy is woven¹⁹¹. Such is the way the European State system became established and was later simply adopted as a formula to carve up African States. According to various sources, the emergence of African State-System took place nearly after four centuries of contacts with Europe. The first and largest period in the history of African Studies began c.1500, with the establishment of trade relations between the African continent and the then emerging, and European-based capitalist world economy of the Middle Ages¹⁹². The four hundred years of Afro-European relations were

¹⁸⁹ For details on this, refer to the following literature on the origins of states: J.H. Shennan, *The Origins of the Modern European State, 1450-1725* (London: Hutchinson, 1974); Elman Rogers Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization: the process of cultural evolution* (New York: Norton, 1975); Ronald Cohen and Elman R. Service (eds), *Origins of the State: the anthropology of political evolution* (Philadelphia: Institute of the Study of Human Issues, 1978); Ralph Pettman, *State and Class: A Sociology of International Affairs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 108-112; and Stephen Chan, *Issues in International Relations: A View from Africa, op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Chan lists eight of these conditions, see *Issues in International Relations, op. cit.*, p. 4; see also K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. sixth edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992), pp. 82-114, especially on "The purposes of states: foreign policy goals and strategies".

¹⁹¹ See Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics, op. cit.*, pp. 66-72.

¹⁹² The records hold that by about 1500, Portugal alone had taken some 700 tons of gold out of Africa. See Hosea Jaffe, *A History of Africa* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1985), especially pp. 43-64; also Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter- Revolution in Africa, op. cit.*, p. 5; and Paul

dominated entirely by the two events of colonialism: first the slave trade, which constituted the primary means of primitive accumulation, and second, the trade in the raw materials needed for industrial production in Europe¹⁹³. These two were the primary concerns connecting Africa and Europe. However, the first detailed descriptions of African social formations and states were written by learned historians in the African countries bordering the Mediterranean. Writing in Arabic, they described the civilisations of the Sudan and the regions along the course of the Niger. Such scholars include El Bekri, El Idrisi, El Masudi, Ibn Hawkal, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, Yakut, Makrisi, Al Hassan Ibn Mohammed (also Leo Africanus), and Es Sadi. Their writings revealed the existence of a series of societies, which were subsequently 'discovered' by European travellers and writers such as Dapper, Lopez, Cresque, Mungo Park, Barth and Frobenius. However, the scientific interest in the scramble for Africa won official sanctions in Europe only in the nineteenth century with the 1884-85 Conference in Berlin. The deliberations at the Berlin African Conference superseded any prior European involvement in the continent.

In this chapter, we shall take the period of the 'Scramble for Africa', as it is always labelled, as the decisive period in the development of the African States System. This will include both the formal partition on paper at the Berlin Conference and its subsequent historical reality on the ground. Thereafter, I will discuss the formation of nations and the concept of the 'state' in African politics. Our attention will also be drawn to the analyses of the category of African civil society. Finally, I will summarise the emergence of African states-system and its subsequent engagement in international affairs since independence. I will also present the major events that dominated post-independence Africa's international relations.

3.1. The Scramble for Africa, its Partition and Independence

The 'Scramble for Africa' and its subsequent partition are two major events that have created contention amongst both historians and scholars of post-independence African politics¹⁹⁴.

Cammack, David Pool and William Tordoff, *Third World Politics: A Comparative Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 13ff.

¹⁹³ See Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* (London & New York: Longman, 1994), p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ The circumstances that led to the Scramble for Africa and its partition have been discussed at length in numerous published works. See for example, A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (London: James Currey, 1987), pp. 26-57; in idem (ed.), *General History of Africa, vol. vii* (London: Longman, 1985); J. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1955); R.E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 1961); J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965);

Worse still, historiography has added a pack of jostling theories such as the rise of, on the one hand, Eurocentric explanations that are often sympathetic towards the imperial powers, and on the other, an Afrocentric interpretation of colonial history, which takes into account the values and concerns of the African people. Still, many scholars have sought to provide comprehensive interpretations of the Scramble and partition of Africa. Two major series of publications include the *UNESCO General History of Africa* and the *Cambridge History of Africa*¹⁹⁵. However, the explanations given by these sources have been met by considerable criticisms from some African scholars as having not proven adequate in attempts to explain the events of this particular period¹⁹⁶. Indeed, the complexities of the Scramble appear to continue to defy any general comprehensive interpretation, because the great diversity of Africa and its peoples, and the inextricable interests and motives of the European powers, preclude any single sweeping theory to explain the partition in every region of the continent¹⁹⁷.

Nevertheless, a more meaningful and accurate understanding of the partition can yet be best achieved by regarding the Scramble as a series of interconnected events, which were also conditioned by different patterns of human motivation and behaviour in each of the disparate regions of Africa. I am not, in any case, intending to discuss these in detail here for reasons of both space and relevance¹⁹⁸.

Generally, a survey of the literature on the Scramble for Africa shows that there were hesitant beginnings to the partition of Africa long prior to the Conference of Berlin in 1884-85. For

V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983); J.S. Keltie, *The Partition of Africa* (London: E. Stanford, 1983); G.N. Uzoigwe, *Britain and the Conquest of Africa* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1974); B. Sutcliffe and R. Owen (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972); and Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

¹⁹⁵ In these two useful major publications of the History of Africa, various scholars have contributed massive accounts of events. See *The Cambridge History of Africa*, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and *UNESCO General History of Africa*, 8 vols. (Paris: UNESCO, 1985).

¹⁹⁶ See Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism op. cit.*, pp. 1-26.

¹⁹⁷ See Robert O. Collins, *Europeans in Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 71-77.

¹⁹⁸ These are well dealt with in a number of scholarly sources, such as by Raymond F. Betts (ed.), *The Scramble for Africa: Causes and Dimensions of Empire* (London: D.C. Heath and Company, 1972); G.N. Sanderson, "The European Partition of Africa: origins and dynamics", in J.D. Fage and R. Oliver (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 96-158; in idem "The European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjuncture?", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 3, no. 1(October 1974); and a number of articles in both the Cambridge and the UNESCO history of Africa series cited above.

example, the discovery of diamonds in South Africa in 1869, is alleged to have provided the incentive and capital for a large influx of Europeans, who ultimately spilled across the Limpopo River into Central Africa¹⁹⁹. Another recounted event has been the opening of the Suez Canal in the same year. The Canal, made possible by the development of the steamship, not only made the East African coast more accessible, but also soon became the great pivotal point in the British imperial strategy. Thus, British interest shifted to Cairo with repercussions as far south as the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and as far west as Wadai and Lake Chad²⁰⁰. Besides that, some historians still regard the Scramble for Africa as having started a bit earlier with Leopold's crusade in Brussels from 7th January to 15th September 1876, that culminated to the raising of three flags across Africa from 14th September to June 1878²⁰¹. Also the period when the African Association was formed (strictly the 'Association for promoting the Discovery of the Interior parts of Africa') in 1788, largely under the inspiration of Joseph Banks, the then President of the Royal Society, who had accompanied Captain Cook's voyage to the Pacific in 1868, is also regarded as marking the beginning of the European Scramble for Africa²⁰².

Furthermore, some historians still regard the greatest triumph of the African Association as having began with the dispatch of Mungo Park's first expedition of 1795-97, which finally established the general direction of the River Niger which had long mystified Europeans²⁰³. A similar development took place nearly a century later in 1881, when the French extended their control over Tunis. Like the British in Egypt, Zanzibar and Turkey, the French had hoped to maintain their influence by supporting the government of the Bey, the Tunisian ruler and to avoid annexation²⁰⁴. However, these occupations by the French and the British are regarded, in the interpretations of Eurocentric historians, as non-signals or non-precipitators of the Scramble for Africa. For Eurocentrics, the partition of Africa required greater stimuli than the

¹⁹⁹ See Robert O. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ According to Claude Ake, *op. cit.*, p. 29; within a few years after King Leopold II had triggered off the Scramble for Africa in 1876, the continent became divided among the European powers and subsequently colonised. See also the chapter on "Central Africa and Europe" by Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: 1876-1912* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp. 11-23.

²⁰² See M.E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Longman, 1974), pp. 19-20.

²⁰³ See Robin Hallet (ed.), *Records of the African Association, 1788-1831* (London: Nelson, 1964).

²⁰⁴ In "Saving the Bey" and "Saving the Khedive", see Thomas Pakenham, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-122, 123-140.

discovery of diamonds in South Africa or the political intrigue on the Mediterranean littoral²⁰⁵. This view posits that the pre-partition era was foreshadowed by a process of the partition carried out by Africans themselves, though under the command of European officers²⁰⁶. The examples cited in support of the foregoing arguments, include the consolidation of Shaka Zulu's empire and the Mfecane migrations, the creation of the Trekker republics by the South African Boers and the West African *Jihads inter alia*²⁰⁷.

Such views, however, have never been left unchallenged²⁰⁸. A number of sources have indicated that Africa, at the eve of the colonial conquest and occupation, had its own system of governance, international relations and means of how to resolve its own conflicts. For example, many different forms of sociopolitical organisations existed in pre-colonial Africa, ranging from centralised Kingdoms such as Ashanti (Asante) and Benin in West Africa and the Buganda in East Africa; and stateless-societies such as in Western Sudan, where Gao, Jenne, Kano, Timbuktu, and Walata had been established many centuries before the advent of colonial rule²⁰⁹. Till by as late as 1800, with very few exceptions, Africans were enjoying their sovereignty and were very much in control of their own affairs and destinies. But within the incredibly short period between 1880 and 1935, all of Africa, save Liberia and Ethiopia, was seized by the European imperial powers of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain²¹⁰. As Thomas Pakenham has rightly put it, "Africa was sliced like a cake, the pieces swallowed by five rival nations ..." ²¹¹. From thence, Africans were converted from sovereign

²⁰⁵ See Robert O. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-137.

²⁰⁷ See H.S. Wilson, *The Imperial Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa Since 1870* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 24-30; and A. Nutting, *The Scramble for Africa: the Great Trek to the Boer War Contestable*, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁸ A counter-argument has been advanced that although African-based imperialism took place, that process was already concluded by the time the European partition commenced: and to ignore that fact would be to discount "significant elements of European purposiveness, premeditation and aggression". See H.S. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 50; and Makumi Mwangi, *The International Management of Internal Conflict in Africa: The Uganda Mediation* (Ph.D. Thesis, UKC, 1994), pp. 99-100.

²⁰⁹ See A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-26; Dorothy Dodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 15ff; and Paul Cammack, David Pool and William Tordoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-20.

²¹⁰ See Albert Adu Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge", in A. Adu Boahen (eds.), *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. vii, *Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 1.

²¹¹ See Thomas Pakenham, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

and royal citizens of their own continent into colonial and dependent subjects. So much that, by the 1900s, in place of the numerous traditional African societies and polities, a completely new and numerically smaller set of some forty artificially created colonies had emerged. These colonies were administered by governors and officials who were appointed by their metropolitan governments and were in no way responsible to their African subjects. Until the 1950s, the colonial system had been firmly imposed on virtually the whole of Africa, and varied explanations on these have since proliferated.

For example, the earliest writers, such as Hobson and Lenin, saw one explanation in the rise of the new imperialism in Europe, due primarily to the economic forces operating there during the last three decades of the nineteenth century and, more especially, to the need to look for areas where the surplus capital being generated by these forces could be invested.²¹² Some of the explanations that have hitherto been advanced on the European struggle for Africa range from those who see the event as more or less an accidental by-product of the diplomatic confrontations among the major European powers, particularly France and Britain. Others have often attributed the Scramble to a combination of internal African conditions and external European factors. For instance, Hopkins has argued that in areas where the transition from slave trade had been successfully made, where incomes had been maintained, and where peace had been established, “an explanation of partition will need to emphasise external pressures, such as mercantile demands and Anglo-French rivalries”. Hopkins similarly argued that in areas, “where the indigenous rulers adopted reactionary attitudes, where attempts were made to maintain incomes by predatory means, and where internal conflicts were pronounced”, more weight should be placed “on disintegrative forces on the African side of the frontier, though without neglecting the external factors”²¹³.

For Professor Anthony Asiwaju, “The establishment of formal colonial rule must be seen against a background of a major change in what came to be referred to as ‘balance of power’ in Europe following the rise of Germany, and increasing political instability occasioned by African wars of the nineteenth century which came to threaten peace in the African interior, and consequently European trade in the coast”. Asiwaju, therefore, contends that the partition

²¹² See J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965); V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983); G.N. Uzoigwe, “European Partition and the Conquest of Africa: an overview”, in *UNESCO General History of Africa, op. cit.*, pp. 10-24; and also Claude Ake, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-26.

²¹³ See A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973), pp. 165-166.

of Africa “cannot become fully intelligible except in terms of the convergence between the new situation in Europe and the prevailing political conditions in particular parts of Africa”²¹⁴.

Other African scholars have attempted to diffuse the long controversy in various works. Boahen, for example, finds Hobson and Lenin's particular explanations utterly unconvincing and inadequate, given that it was not economic conditions or the need to invest surplus capital alone that gave rise to the new imperialist spirit in Europe. Besides the strong economic forces, Boahen adds political and social forces as major precipitators of the Scramble that have long been ignored in the analysis of the African state²¹⁵. The most important of these political factors was an exaggerated spirit of nationalism in Europe following the unification of both Germany and Italy and especially after Germany's defeat of France in 1871. With the emergence of a strong national consciousness, nations began to think not only of their power and progress but also of their prestige, greatness and security. Boahen concludes that the main social condition that contributed to the rise of the new imperialism was the need to acquire colonies where the surplus labour produced by the industrial capitalist system as well as the large numbers of the unemployed could be settled without losing their mother country. Besides that, another point to note is that the European Scramble was not confined to Africa alone, given the proliferation of similar involvements elsewhere such as those in the whole of southeastern Asia - Burma, Indochina, Malaya, Java, Sumatra and the Philippines²¹⁶. Thus, it was the conjunction of all these factors or forces in Europe in the 1880s, and not any conditions in either Africa or Asia alone, that accounts for the Scramble for colonialism during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Despite the foregoing somewhat conflicting explanations about the Scramble, there was also a prevailing certain “ideology” on the “inner momentum” that brought Europe to carry out what was regarded as Europe's “civilising mission”. This European arrogance which allocated itself the mission to “civilise” the world justifies the link that existed between the early expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the imperialism of the nineteenth century. In all, the partition did not have long to wait, but took place on paper when Bismarck convened the African Berlin Conference in 1884-85. The real importance of the Berlin Conference is the

²¹⁴ See A.I. Asiwaju, Paper presented at the Nigerian National Open University. Quoted by A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives of Colonialism, op. cit.*, p. 28.

²¹⁵ See A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism, op. cit.*, pp. 31-57.

²¹⁶ Among other valuable readings on this would be W.D. McIntyre, *The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics, 1865-1875* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

actual realisation that partition was now practicable. By the time the Berlin Conference ended in February 1885, the Scramble for Africa could have been in full swing.

(a) The Berlin Conference, 1884-85 and the Partition of Africa

First and foremost, one major issue that has caused Africa a number of problems today in their social organisation is that of the nation-state, which is Europe's most enduring legacy, not only in Africa but also the rest of the World. This particular mode of political organisation is alien to Africa and that is partly why attempts to establish a coherent theory of the state in Africa have often failed²¹⁷. The state originated in European diplomatic history and statecraft, and developed with major sociological changes within European societies. The international states-system as it exists today is often traced to the peace treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the internecine Thirty Years War in Europe. As we have been reminded repeatedly by historians and students of diplomacy, it was upon the foundations of Westphalia that the entire superstructure of world diplomacy and international relations came to be constructed²¹⁸. Over two centuries later, a similar event took place when descendants of Westphalia convened the Berlin Conference to settle their disputes over territories in Africa. For a long time during the nineteenth century, European powers quarrelled among themselves over the shares of Africa that each wanted to get. But in 1884-85, in Berlin (then capital of a German empire), they agreed to invade and take Africa without fighting each other. They marked out 'spheres of interest', where each invaded the continent within its own 'spheres'²¹⁹. Like the Westphalia peace treaty that brought an end to the mutually destructive Thirty Years War in Europe, and most recently, in the way the Yalta Peace Treaty mitigated the frontiers of Eastern Europe after the Second World War, the Berlin Conference succeeded in settling the disputes arising from European activities in Africa. Thus, it established the undisputed sway of colonialism in Africa for nearly a century.

²¹⁷ See Z. Ergas (ed.), *op. cit.*; and Adrian Leftwich, "States of Underdevelopment: The Third World State in Theoretical Perspective", *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1(1993), pp. 55-74:63-70.

²¹⁸ I have no intention, whatsoever, of discussing Westphalia here, but the impact of its legacy has been mentioned by a number of scholars in the manner used here. See in particular Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*, pp. 373-375; Frederick L. Schuman, *op. cit.*, and William C. Olson and A.J.R. Groom, *op. cit.*; also Kal J. Holsti, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-44.

²¹⁹ See Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa, op. cit.*, p. 5.

As a matter of fact, the Berlin Conference, convened by Prince Otto von Bismarck, between 15th November and 26th February 1885²²⁰, did increase the intensity of the 'Scramble for Africa' in Europe. During the conference, European leaders set out the ground rules for the partition of Africa based upon what was termed "effective occupation" - whenever a European power occupied a parcel of land it could legitimately integrate that territory into its empire. Professor Boahen summarises the main rules agreed upon at the conference as follows:

The first was that before any power claimed an area, it should inform the other signatory powers so that any who deemed it necessary could make a counterclaim. The second was that all such claims should be followed by annexation and effective occupation before they could be accepted as valid. The third was that treaties signed with African rulers were to be considered as legitimate titles to sovereignty. The fourth rule was that each power could extend its coastal possessions inland to some extent and claim spheres of influence. Finally, it was agreed that there was to be freedom of navigation on the Congo and the Niger rivers²²¹.

Furthermore, the interested powers settled their individual claims in the lobbies and divided the territories concerned among themselves. For example in the treaty, they decreed an international free trade regime, and in the bilateral settlements they partitioned the area politically into exclusive spheres of influence which implied economic monopoly.

However, some contemporary African historians and observers alike, contend that the negotiations or proceedings of the conference are open to different meanings: for example, "They were about *Zollvereine* in Africa, they were about power politics in Europe; they were intended to avert a partition, they deliberately carved up Africa; they were designed to bring African people freely into the 'commercial republic of the world', they aimed at colonial expropriation; the philanthropy was well meant, it was humbug; the treaty signified little in Africa, the conference changed the course of events drastically..."²²².

According to Samuel Geis:

²²⁰ See G.N. Uzoigwe, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16; Ronald Robinson, "The Conference in Berlin and the Future in Africa, 1884-85", in Stig Forster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald Robinson (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-32; Thomas Pakenham, *op. cit.*, p. 217; A. Adu Boahen, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-33; and S.E. Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference, 1884-85* (London, 1942).

²²¹ All these rules were embodied in the Berlin Act, ratified on 26th February 1885. See Boahen, *African perspectives on Colonialism, op. cit.*, p. 33; in idem, *UNESCO General History of Africa, op. cit.*, pp. 29-31; and *General Act of the Berlin Conference, 26th February, 1885; Protocols and General Act of the Berlin Conference, C. 4361, 1885*, Prince Bismarck's opening address.

²²² See Ronald Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

Africa's colonial partition was not planned or executed in Berlin in 1884-85, but it was largely effected, though in a more complicated process, by decisions taken at the conference. The historical evaluation of the Berlin Conference is, therefore, faced with a paradoxical situation: its formal decisions remained largely on paper; the historical facts (partition of Africa) ascribed to it can only be linked to it as (direct or indirect) effects, but hardly as the clear-cut intention that is suggested by loose wording. The powers as a whole did not 'want' to carve up Africa into formalised colonies, but the Berlin Conference is, of course, more than a mere symbolic or allegorical footnote to the 'Scramble for Africa'²²³.

And Sybil E. Crowe argued *inter alia*, that the Conference did not partition Africa; that as a legal document the Berlin Act was noteworthy; it brought about an era of strict trade monopolies in Africa which negated its desire to ensure free trade in the basins of the Niger and the Congo rivers; and that the Conference's "effective occupation" resolutions were 'as empty as Pandora's box'²²⁴. In a way, Crowe regarded the Berlin Conference a failure.

However, such diverse political interpretations no longer conceive the Berlin Conference as a riddle of alternative half-truths. The conference has been mainly regarded both as an event of European diplomatic history, and a part of imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century that was responsible for the carving up of an innocent continent²²⁵. According to John Hargreaves, the Berlin Conference did advance the process of partition by precipitating, particularly a series of bilateral boundary agreements-some concluded as extra-mural activities by delegates to Berlin - which had the effect of changing the speed, and perhaps the course, of European penetration²²⁶.

At this point, we can ask, why is all the foregoing narrative of importance to us? The "Scramble for Africa", was prompted by a mix of economic and political motivations among competing European powers and was facilitated by the Berlin Conference. The Acts of the Conference, taken without any African input, proved disastrous for Africa because it led to the arbitrary carving up of the continent without consideration of indigenous factors, and consequently helped to produce a post-colonial continent of unstable, artificial, and relatively

²²³ See Forster, Mommsen and Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

²²⁴ See Sybil E. Crowe, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4, 103, 152-175; and G.N. Uzoigwe, "The Result of the Berlin West Africa Conference: An Assessment", in Forster, Mommsen and Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 541-552.

²²⁵ One book and most simple to read but details everything, is again Hosea Jaffe, *A History of Africa*, *op. cit.* Is quite convincing especially in its analyses of the tragic impact colonialism (achieved through partition) has had on the general political life of Africa.

²²⁶ See John D. Hargreaves, "The Berlin Conference, West African Boundaries, and the Eventual Partition", in Forster, Mommsen and Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-314.

meaningless state entities²²⁷. At Berlin, the European powers disregarded everything else except their own acquisitions and the need for a balance in Europe. So, at their independence, most African states inherited the borders as left by colonial powers. Thus, all state boundaries in Africa are of recent colonial creation²²⁸, and do not, therefore, coincide with nations such as is the case in Europe.

Europe's transfer of its own state-system to Africa was not accompanied by any prior calculation to make statehood coincide with nationhood. Neither was there any quest for cultural congruence between the unit of the state and the national unit, nor even cultural similarities among the different units being ruled by the same colonial government. The wisest thing the OAU founders did, when they gathered in Cairo in 1964, was to pass a resolution that demanded African states to respect the colonial borders, a simple way of averting potential border disputes²²⁹, thus, conferring legitimacy upon the arbitrarily drawn colonial frontiers advanced at Berlin. To date, very few, if any, of the new territorial units in Africa, could be described as nations in the classical European sense. One major point to note from the emergence of the African State-System in contrast to the European system is that African states have significant time constraints on state-building process for which Europe had approximately four centuries. African states, like their Third World counterparts, are also subject to international human rights and democracy norms which did not apply to European states during their formative years. Above all, colonialism distorted the process of state-making by stifling economic transformation and perpetuating traditional sources of authority²³⁰.

Despite the time constraints experienced by African countries in their formation, these very fragmented "Quasi-States", to use Robert Jackson's terminology, were embraced into the

²²⁷ See Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States, op. cit.*; and Stephen Wright, "The Foreign Policy of Africa", in Roy C. Macridis (ed.), *Foreign Policy in World Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992), pp. 330-356:332.

²²⁸ 5 See I. William Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 105-119; and Cammack, Pool and Tordoff, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

²²⁹ See Y. El-Ayouti and I. William Zartman, *The OAU after Twenty Years* (New York: Praeger, 1984); C.O.C. Amate, *Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); and Norman Kiondo, "Review of Conflict areas in Africa", in *Disarmament: Programme of Training on Conflict Resolution, Crisis Prevention and Management and Confidence-Building among African States*. Key Address in the Workshop for Senior African Military and Civil Officials (New York: United Nations, 1991), pp. 43-46.

²³⁰ See for example, Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State-Making, Regional Conflict, and the System International* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

community of nations, with its own rules, its own conventions and codes. International law itself is a child of European diplomatic history and has been adopted to bind the new members of the club of nation-states, Africa included. And one real cause of problems in most of Africa today began with the creation of the nation-state that has remained fractured, and whose major consequences have been the crisis of identity on the one hand, and that of authority and control on the other. African countries assumed equal representation in the international system without having consolidated enough required institutions for governing society. Thus, creating problems which Professor Ali Mazrui has rightly pointed out, "... the crisis of identity in Africa is a crisis whose main theatre is the nation, while that of authority and control is a crisis whose main theatre is the state"²³¹. From here, we can now turn to examine the concepts of the nation and the state in African politics.

3.2. 'Nation', 'State' and 'Civil Society' in Africa: a brief discussion

(a) The Analysis of the Concepts of Nation and State in Africa

What is 'the nation'? What is 'the state'? Are the kind of questions one would hope to address before any analysis of how they function in African politics. Unfortunately, 'state' and 'nation' are the type of concepts that have continued to defy any attempts for technical definition in the social sciences. According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*, "the 'state', though a very commonly-used word in the political vocabulary, is surprisingly opaque. Even the derivation of the term is obscure, and in many cultures (including early medieval European society, to take one example) it would be hard to specify what word should be translated as 'state'"²³². Defining the concept of the 'nation' is no less difficult.

Still, working definitions of such concepts have been devised in the social sciences. For example, there is a substantial agreement on referring to the state essentially, as the whole fixed political system, the set-up of authoritative and legitimately powerful roles by which people are finally controlled, ordered, and organised²³³. In other words, the state is the organised aggregate of relatively permanent institutions of governance. Thus, the police, the army and the civil service are aspects of the state, as is parliament and perhaps local authorities.

²³¹ See Ali A. Mazrui, "Africa: The Political Culture of Nationhood and the Political Economy of the State", *Millennium*, vol. 12, no. 3(Autumn 1983), pp. 201-210.

²³² David Robertson, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

²³³ See Raymond Duvall and John R. Freeman, "The State and Dependent Capitalism", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 1(1981), p. 106; and David Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

However, in International Relations, the state is given one specific definition: the national-territorial totality. For example, Hedley Bull defined the state as a political community²³⁴. Kenneth Waltz said it is in practice coextensive with the nation²³⁵. F.S. Northedge used it to refer to a territorial association of people recognised for purposes of law and diplomacy as a legally equal member of the system of states²³⁶. Allan James straightforwardly uses state to comprise ‘territory, people, and a government’²³⁷.

Unlike the international relations literature, sociological writings on the state do not take into account the social-territorial totality, but a specific set of coercive and administrative institutions, distinct from the broader political, social and national context in which it finds itself. For instance, Skocpol defines the state as a set of administrative, policing, and military organisations headed, and more or less well co-ordinated, by an authority²³⁸. Within the sociological approach alone, one finds many alternative definitions of the state. The history of the state, as Weber, Barrington-Moore, Mann, Tilly and others have shown, is of the imposition of administration and coercion on territories and population by competing groups of rulers, doing this for their own purposes, in appropriate myths of justifications. Thus, Weber’s precise definition of state embodies four major elements: “(1) a differentiated set of institutions and personnel, embodying (2) centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a centre to cover a (3) territoriality demarcated area, over which it exercises (4) a monopoly of authoritative binding rule-making, backed by a monopoly of the means of physical violence”²³⁹.

²³⁴ See *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 8.

²³⁵ See *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 172-178.

²³⁶ See *The International Political System* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p. 15.

²³⁷ See *Sovereign Statehood* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 13.

²³⁸ See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 29; and Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organised Crime”, in *Bringing the State back In*, *op. cit.*, and in idem (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).

²³⁹ See Max Weber, *Economy and Society, vol. 1* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 64; this definition can also be found in R.N. MacIver, *The Modern State* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), p. 22; S. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 5; Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making”, in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 27; and Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results”, in John A. Hall (ed.), *States in History*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

From a communitarian perspective of Hegel, the state can be defined as a sphere of common life for the concern of general or universal interest with the sense of community of its members that transcends individual's self-interest on the basis of solidarity and union, substantial unity, not a formal aggregation. As Hegel argued: "the state ... by itself is the ethical whole, the actualisation of freedom; and it is an absolute end of reason that freedom should be actual. The state is mind on earth and consciously realising itself there ..." ²⁴⁰. This particular communitarian position contends that the individual is embedded in existing social practices contained within defined political communities. In other words, it is the ethical community which is conferred ontological priority rather than the individual.

Of course there are other interpretations of Hegelian ethics which emphasise a project of reconciliation that allows the theoretical possibility of being both an individual and a social member of a community ²⁴¹. The communitarian understanding of the concept of the state seems useful and relevant in any analysis of the African society because, in most of them, the individual is subordinate to society so that the state as a superior entity should also carry the moral burden of caring for every individual within society.

As far as traditional thinking in political philosophy is concerned, the 'state' is often regarded as an essential element of democracy. For a long time under European conditions, democracy only applies to a state. The social contract theory -- as proposed by Grotius, Pufendorf, Barbeyrac, Burlamqui, Hobbes and Locke, and even Rousseau -- believes that the state was the outcome of a covenant or agreement among men. The purpose of the state became the protection of those people to which it owed its being, and the same theorists also agreed that the sovereign must have enough power to provide such protection. A state, or '*civitas*', is a civil partnership - '*civilis societas*'. This most pregnant term naturally translates to mean 'civil society'. In Roman law, *societas* is a partnership, implying free contractual agreement of the partners. This concept as applied to the state, connotes a civil partnership constituted by the free contract of citizens, and the terms of their contract are the laws of the state without which the state cannot exist ²⁴².

²⁴⁰ See paragraphs 257 & 258 of *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 155-159.

²⁴¹ See M.O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁴² See M. Salamonio, *De Principatu* (Milan: Giuffre Editore, 1955); quoted by Michael Lesnoff, *Social Contract: Issues in Political Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 26-27.

Unlike the state, defining and conceptualising the ‘nation’ is much more difficult because the essence of a nation is intangible. According to Walker Connor, this essence is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other people in a most vital way²⁴³. The nature of that bond and its well-spring remain shadowy and elusive, and the consequent difficulty of defining the nation is usually acknowledged by those who attempt this task.

The term “nation” often refers to a single inclusive group whose members-or the majority of them - share common traditions, history and ethnic identity²⁴⁴. When broadly defined, a nation encompasses both subjective and objective indicators. Objective indicators include: language, history, territory, culture, political organisation; subjective indicators include: a common sense of identity and commitment or loyalty to the group²⁴⁵. For example, a nation in its original connotation refers to Igbo or Yoruba in Nigeria; Kikuyu or Luo in Kenya, Baganda or Acholi in Uganda; Lotuko or Zande in South Sudan; the Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe; or Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda. Unlike in many European societies where the crystallisation of the structures of authority followed the sense of national identity, colonial arrangements brought the very opposite to most of Africa. Newly independent countries in Africa reversed the European sequence and instead, conflated the use of the term nation to mean “the people of a territory united under a single government, country or state”. Thus, authority and sovereignty evolved ahead of self-conscious national identity and cultural integration. In fact, some countries even purported to the introduction of one language such as in former British East Africa, where Kishwahili became a *lingua franca*²⁴⁶. To this extent,

²⁴³ See Walker Connor, “Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?”, *World Politics*, vol. xxiv (April 1972), pp. 319-355; and in idem “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a ...”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 4(October 1978), pp. 377-400.

²⁴⁴ See M.G. Smith, “Institutional and Political Conditions of Pluralism”, in L. Kuper and M.G. Smith (eds.), *Pluralism in Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 32.

²⁴⁵ See J. Isawa Elaigwu, “Nation-Building and Changing Political Structures”, in Ali A. Mazrui and C. Wondji (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. III: Africa Since 1935 (Oxford: Heinmann, 1993), pp. 437-437.

²⁴⁶ See the celebrated works of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, *op. cit.*; and Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, *Harambee: The Prime Minister of Kenya’s Speeches, 1963-1964*, also published by Oxford University Press, are a better illustration of post-colonial Nation-Building in Africa.

Rejai and Enloe were right to point out that whereas Europe produced nation-states, Africa and Asia produced state-nations²⁴⁷. As a result, the concept nation came to mean Kenya, Tanzania or Uganda, and not Kikuyu, Baganda or Chaga in East Africa.

In common parlance, the words country, state, and nation are often used synonymously, but they do not mean the same thing. For example, a country has geographical connotations, state expresses the local organisation of a society, and the term nation involves a socio-cultural perception of the group²⁴⁸. So that the hyphenated term nation-state aptly describes a socially and culturally homogenous group possessing the legal organisation to participate in international politics. Unfortunately, nation-state has come to be applied indiscriminately to all states, as one authority has noted that “a prime fact about the world is that it is largely composed of nation-states”²⁴⁹. Thus, the state is often perceived as the political extension of the nation²⁵⁰.

In African politics, the concept of the State has been dealt with at length in plentiful published sources²⁵¹. And the major task in this has been the desire to establish a coherent theory of the

²⁴⁷ See Mostafa Rejai and Cynthia H. Enloe, “Nation-States and State-Nations”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 2(June 1969), p. 140.

²⁴⁸ See Plano and Olton, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁴⁹ Louis J. Halle, *Civilization and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), p. 10; for another example of this practice of referring to states as nation-states, see Dankwart Rustow, *A World of Nations* (Washington: Brookings, 1967), p. 30.

²⁵⁰ Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a ...”, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

²⁵¹ A wide range of literature associates the concept of the State with the political analysis of Africa. See Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-81; Naomi Chazan, et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 38-46; Jean-Francois Bayart, *L'Etat en Afrique* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); J. Lonsdale, “States and Social Processes in Africa”, *African Studies Review*, vol. 24, nos. 2-3(1981); these two offer most useful discussions of state in Africa. And for a review of the concept of the State, see J.P. Nettl, “The State as a Conceptual Variable”, *World Politics*, vol. 20, no. 4(1968), pp. 559-592; Stephen D. Krasner, “Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics”, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 16, no. 2(1984), pp. 223-245; Peter Anyang' Gnawing', “The Economic Foundations of the State in Contemporary Africa”, *Presence Africaine*, no. 127/128(1983), p. 195; Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (London: Longman, 1981), *passim*; Peter Evans et al. (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Theda Skocpol, *The State and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and more.

state in Sub-Saharan Africa, but with less successful effect²⁵². The obvious failure in every effort has been the proliferation of terms which have been devised to characterise African states. Over the years, terms used to describe the African State include: 'patrimonial' and 'neopatrimonial'²⁵³; 'underdeveloped' states²⁵⁴; 'prebendal' states²⁵⁵; 'patrimonial administrative' states²⁵⁶; 'fictitious' states²⁵⁷; 'juridical' and 'Quasi-States'²⁵⁸.

The examination of the concept of the state is often a starting point in the analysis of post-colonial African politics²⁵⁹. Yet, in order for us to fully understand the post-colonial state in Africa, it is imperative that we briefly examine how the colonial state itself looked like. Patrick Chabal describes the colonial state as follows:

The colonial state was [...] the legal and political superstructure invented to control and manage the colonial territories acquired through conquest; derived essentially from the nature of the imperial state and from the nature of its objectives in Africa. All meant to establish imperial sovereignty on the conquered territories; legitimate their rule and to ensure their subjects' allegiance; set up the administration and infrastructure needed to rule colonies at minimal (financial and coercive) cost to the empire. All were charged with exploiting the resources of the colonies; all attempted to 'civilise' their colonial subjects in their own image. As a conquest state, it embodied the tensions of being both an outpost of the empire and an autonomous state²⁶⁰.

²⁵² See Z. Ergas (ed.), *op. cit.*

²⁵³ See Aristide Zolberg, *Creating Political Order: The Party States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966); G. Roth, "Personal Rulership, Patrimonialism and Empire-Building in the New States", *World Politics*, vol. 20, no. (1968), pp. 195-206; and R. Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1985).

²⁵⁴ See J-F. Medard, "The Underdeveloped State in Tropical Africa: Political Clientism or Neopatrimonialism", in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *Private Patronage and Public Power* (London: Pinter, 1982).

²⁵⁵ See R.A. Joseph, "Class, State and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria", *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. xxi, no. (1983), pp. 21-38; in idem, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁵⁶ See T.M. Callaghy, "The State as a Tame Leviathan: The Patrimonial Administrative State in Africa", in Z. Ergas (ed.), *The African State in Transition, op. cit.*, pp. 87-116.

²⁵⁷ See again R. Sandbrook, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-332.

²⁵⁸ See Robert H. Jackson and C.G. Roseberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist", in A. Kohli (ed.), *The State and development in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 259-282; and Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States, op cit.*

²⁵⁹ It should be noted from now onward that in African politics, the term 'nation' is often synonymously used to mean 'state'.

²⁶⁰ See Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa, op cit.*, pp. 74-76.

In other words, the colonial state needed local collaborators in order to rule - collaboration is always cheaper and infinitely preferable to force²⁶¹. Because it attempted to invent a new political community to suit its imperial designs, the colonial state rested on force, however much it appeared to rule by consent²⁶². The colonial state was also the architect of the political community. Thus, it defined the boundaries of the community, created its political infrastructure and invented the rules of the game, rules which could always arbitrarily be changed to suit the situation at hand. The colonial state dominated the economic sector and it created a currency, levied taxes, developed markets, codified the uses of labour, introduced new crops, controlled all sources of production and internal trade and export, and brought in foreign labourers or encouraged settlers. Above all, the colonial state sought to integrate the economies of the colonies into the imperial economy and in so doing it was at once the arbiter and the main agent of economic activity²⁶³. The colonial state was also a bureaucratic state, in the sense defined by Weber²⁶⁴.

So to say, the colonial state was *in toto* a construct of the *Metropolitan* society, *not* the colonial one. Thus, the colonial state and its immediate successor, the post-colonial state, did not grow organically from the class structure, internal politics or functional economic imperatives of the indigenous society, as both Marxist and Weberian theories suggest. The post-colonial state was not the product of the developmental history of its own society. On the contrary, it had been imposed from the outside. Its institutions were devised and deployed by the metropolitan power in pursuit of its own purposes which included facilitating the activities of metropolitan commercial interests. It followed, as Hamza Alavi argued in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, that "... the 'superstructure' in the metropole is therefore overdeveloped in relation to the 'structure' in the colony, for its basis lies in the metropolitan structure itself, from which it is later separated at the time of independence"²⁶⁵. At the core of

²⁶¹ See also Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism", in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theories of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972).

²⁶² Theories of collaboration were adopted at disguising. One example is J. Gallagher et al., *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

²⁶³ Quoted from G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980).

²⁶⁴ See Max Weber, *Economy and Society, Vol. I* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968); and Anthony Giddens, *Politics and Sociology in the Thought of Max Weber* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

²⁶⁵ For an argument on the overdevelopment of the colony, see Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", *New Left Review*, vol 74 (1972), p. 61.

this overdeveloped state in the colonial period was a bureaucratic military apparatus which controlled and subordinated the indigenous social classes. And it was this military bureaucratic apparatus which the post-colonial society inherited at the heart of its newly independent state.

In short, the colonial state left a mixed legacy to the African people and their leaders. The most destructive legacies are those of centralised and coercive governance that was inherited by post-colonial African leaders. The legitimacy of centralised governance depended solely on its ability to control and manage the political community it had created rather than on enabling representations of its constituent parts. However, that does not mean a centralised state lacks local structures of government but one in which local government is accountable to central government rather than to the citizens of the locality. The state was never defined in terms or in relation to its constituent parts; rather the constituent parts were defined in relation to the state. Local government was the transmission belt of central government, however sophisticated consultative or 'representative' councils appeared to be or however 'indirect' colonial rule was claimed to be²⁶⁶. The colonial state used the external political power to coerce the political community, as the colonial secretary was not accountable to his subjects but to the imperial government. Thus, the colonial state derived its power from legally sanctioned coercion unaccountable to the subjects of the state.

Finally, the rule of law and the use of force were, in the end, legitimated only by the colonial 'civilising' mission²⁶⁷. Generally, the concept of the post-colonial state, is at heart relational rather than structural. It contains the notion of the new dialectical relationship between state and civil society which was brought about by the rupture in political accountability caused by independence. According to Chabal, the state in Africa cannot simply be understood as a political 'entity', but rather that it must be seen as the focal point of the drive for political and economic hegemony²⁶⁸. It is the drive for hegemony, the political contest for supremacy between state and civil society, which is the hallmark of contemporary African politics. As to whether the state has managed to fulfil its hegemonic ambitions, has largely been determined by the politics of civil society, a concept which we now have to examine.

(b) The Category of African "Civil Society"

²⁶⁶ For a better example, see J. Iliffe, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁷ See Patrick Chabal (ed.), *Political Domination in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 146.

²⁶⁸ See Patrick Chabal, *op. cit.*, part IV, pp. 200-216.

The idea of civil society, like that of the state, has been at the fore of political thinking for centuries. However, growing emphasis among political scientists on the importance of civil society, as the focus of public life rather than the state, is relatively recent. According to the prevailing theory of democracy in political science, particularly in its liberal-western form, democracy requires a developed economy with a substantial middle class. In its modern format as a separation from other spheres of social formation such as the family and the state, civil society is in turn a sphere of economic and legal activities of each individual's collective relationship with others, or with society as a whole. Since the beginning of capitalism, civil society has followed the state in its formation, and its emergence in Western societies marked the achievement of modernity²⁶⁹.

Civil society is constituted mainly by the middle class, and as Robert Dahl emphasised, members of this class possess the know-how, wealth and time to organise groups which in turn successfully influence government decisions regarding interests of civil society in general²⁷⁰. But as Patrick Molutsi has argued on the Botswana experience, Africa's political tradition offers minimal support for organised group activity, and its economic sluggishness cannot spawn such groups²⁷¹. Thus in lieu of a pluralist structure to civil society, organised citizen influence has often taken the form of a series of village, clan or ethnic based participatory institutions. In the case of Botswana, village-based participatory institutions have succeeded in maintaining democracy and Botswana provides an alternative path to democratic politics in Africa²⁷². It is often argued that in cases like Botswana, a traditional political culture existed which could sustain the necessary multiple group linkages between civil society and government required for a democracy to persist overtime.

Thus, civil society denotes a social sphere in which men and women interact with each other in a series of overlapping relationships and self-conscious associations and institutions representing private interest groups - local, class, communal, civil, religious, economic, social

²⁶⁹ See *Hegel's Philosophy of Right, op. cit.*, pp. 122-155. I am not however, intending to detail Hegel's analysis of civil society here for reasons of precision.

²⁷⁰ See Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy, op. cit.*

²⁷¹ See Patrick Molutsi and John D. Holm, "Developing Democracy When Civil Society is Weak: The Case of Botswana", *African Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 356(July 1990), pp. 323-340.

²⁷² However, a problem arises in the use of Botswana experience for the simple reason that Botswana is a relatively homogenous society, a characteristic which is not common to all other countries in the African continent.

and cultural 'publics' which tend to emerge with the rise of a market economy²⁷³. It is 'the independent self-organisation' of society, the constituent parts of which voluntarily engage in public activity to pursue individual, group, or national interests within the context of a legally defined state-society relationship²⁷⁴. Such definition views the institutional and associational forms as mediating between the state and individuals qua economic actors, and thus having political significance.

The institutional and associational mediation role raises conceptual and practical questions with regard to how we view the political relations between the state and society in Africa. According to Julius Nyango'ro, if we view the problem of disengagement by peasants from the state through a network of relationships (which Goran Hyden has called the "economy of affection"²⁷⁵), then we actually cannot talk about political relations between the state and whatever institutional form to which the disengaged population belong; for indeed they are strictly not part of civil society if we were to follow Crook's formulation above in which overlapping relationships between associations and institutions that represent private interest groups exist²⁷⁶. This distinction is important because it will definitely affect the way one examines the potential and action of various organisations in African society in the present period of demands for political participation.

In the same vein, Cohen and Arato influentially argue that "only a concept of civil society that is properly differentiated from the economy (and therefore bourgeois society) could become the centre of a critical political and social theory where the market economy has already developed, or is in the process of developing, its own autonomous logic"²⁷⁷. The point they are making is obvious, because when one closely examines most of the world's societies, we can see that they either have a market economy or are actually developing one. Therefore,

²⁷³ Quoted from Richard Crook, "State, Society and Political Institutions in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana", see Julius E. Nyango'ro, "Reform Politics and Democratization Process in Africa", *op. cit.*, pp. 133-149:131.

²⁷⁴ See Yehuda Mirsky, "Democratic Politics, Democratic Culture", *Orbis*, vol. 37, no. 4(Fall 1993), p. 571; Mercia A. Weigle and Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 23, no. 4(1992), pp. 1-23.

²⁷⁵ See Goran Hyden, *Political Development in Rural Tanzania: TANU yajenga nchi* (Dar es Salaam: East African Publishing House, 1983).

²⁷⁶ Julius E. Nyango'ro, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁷⁷ See Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. viii.

Cohen and Arato define civil society as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. The argument is that modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilisation. In a way civil society is institutionalised and generalised through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilise social differentiation. While the self-creative and institutionalised dimensions can exist separately, in the long term both independent action and institutionalisation are necessary for the reproduction of civil society²⁷⁸. What is important here is the recognition of the dialectical relationship between economic and political organisation.

On the other hand, the concept of civil society also acquired special salience for the democratisation purposes during the 1980s when it was taken up by dissident intellectuals from behind the iron curtain, such as Adam Michnik and Leszek Kolakowski, as a social model to be pitted against the totalitarian state. Under communism, Kolakowski had written that "... the division between civil society and the state is done away with, leaving the individual wholly absorbed into the state"²⁷⁹. But under capitalism, there is a clear distinction between civil society and the state. In a similar development, Samir Amin explains that the very concept of civil society is peculiar to capitalism, for the simple reason that the very existence of civil society implies an autonomy of economic relations *vis-a-vis* the political. Bourgeois democracy - with all the historical limitations that it involves - is based on this separation of civil society and the state²⁸⁰. However, the separation between the two should not be that of total divorce, but it should allow mutual relations where ideas and views are exchanged on how society must be governed in a state. But in Africa, the state has not allowed for the separation between itself and civil society. Instead it often opts to structure the relationship under what Nyang'oro terms the 'formula of state corporatism', where the civil society has often remained subordinate. In reality, the state is unable to separate itself from civil society because of the relatively undifferentiated social structure resulting from an undifferentiated political economy²⁸¹. And such is what makes Samir Amin to think that the

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. ix.

²⁷⁹ See Leszek Kolakowski, "Marxism and Human Rights", *Daedalus* (Fall 1983), p. 85; also Zbigniew Rau (ed.), *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1991).

²⁸⁰ See Samir Amin, "Preface: The State and the Question of Development", in Peter Anyang Nyong'o (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13:2.

²⁸¹ See Julius E. Nyang'oro, "Reform Politics and Democratization Process in Africa", *op. cit.* p. 146.

absence of autonomous economic life in relation to state power renders any discourse on democracy meaningless²⁸². It could be discerned from Amin's expression that in such conditions, democracy becomes truly impossible. Because of such practical reality, the political economy of Africa will somehow continue to militate against the possibilities of introducing liberal democracy continentally.

Furthermore, civil society is composed of individuals who are independent persons. It is a contract of autonomous individuals who have freedom and right of property as an essential condition for that individual freedom. As Hegel pointed out correctly, in civil society, there is "free play for every idiosyncrasy, every talent, every accident of birth and fortune, and where waves of every passion gush forth"²⁸³. Hence, civil society creates a breathing room for the individual to join, or to be left alone, or both; it thus fosters human dignity. For example, outside European societies, civil society has played a significant role in bringing about and sustaining democracy²⁸⁴. However, as John Lucas has also correctly pointed out, while the democratic potential of Africa's civil societies has been frequently acknowledged, the relationship of these societies to class remains largely unexplored²⁸⁵.

As we noted earlier, in the post-colonial African context, where the state preceded the nation, civil society is necessarily determined first and foremost in its relation to the construction of the state. Studying interactions between the state apparatus and civil society is very enlightening and instructive when it comes to both short term issues on the pace of political liberalisation and longer term concerns about the durability of democracy. Political accountability is an essential condition for democracy, but the degree of accountability in turn depends upon the capacity of a robust, autonomous civil society to curb the hegemony of the state. At a time when most African countries were characterised in the 1970s and 1980s as "strong societies and weak states"²⁸⁶, the tendency to afford the state 'ontological primacy' in explaining the nature of African political economy was being challenged. One manifestation of

²⁸² See Samir Amin (1987), p. 3.

²⁸³ See Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

²⁸⁴ This has been argued by among others, Larry Diamond (ed.), *The Democratic Revolution: Struggle for Freedom and Pluralism in Developing World* (New York: Freedom House, 1992).

²⁸⁵ See John Lucas, "The State, Civil Society and Regional Elites: A Study of Three Associations in Kano, Nigeria", *African Affairs*, vo. 93, no. 370(January 1994), pp. 21-38: 21.

²⁸⁶ See for example, Atul Kohli (ed.), *The State and Development in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); and also Goran Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

this has been a shift in scholarly attention to those intermediary and autonomous organisations which function and sometimes flourish in the space that exists between the state and the household—namely, the various groups which comprise civil society²⁸⁷.

A host of private and voluntary associations have historically had profound impact upon individual and collective behaviour in both rural and urban Africa. Current interest in these organisations is part of a broader search to identify institutions which might better link the state and society together, to make the state more responsive to the needs of the governed, and thereby enhance its legitimacy. They not only provide links between the state and societal interests, but also perform an important mediating role whereby the macro-policy objectives of the state and the particularistic interests of society's groups are adjusted to each other by process of bargaining²⁸⁸. In this regard, expanding the sphere of 'civil society' increases the likelihood of a more pluralistic and democratic political order because such intermediary organisations have massively contributed to the process of economic development in Africa by providing needed infrastructure, as well as an array of social welfare services which the state is unwilling or unable to deliver, especially to small towns and rural areas.²⁸⁹ A few well-known examples worth cited here include the provision of primary and secondary schools, basic health services, water, and cattle dips by Harambee Self-Help Groups in Kenya²⁹⁰; the provision of loans to small farmers by rural credit unions in Zimbabwe²⁹¹; and the provision of women's associations in West Africa²⁹².

3.3. Theoretical Points of Departure: Interpretations of African International Relations

²⁸⁷ See Michael Bratton, "Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa", *World Politics*, vol. 41, no. 3(1989), pp. 407-430.

²⁸⁸ See Joel D. Barkan and Frank Holmquist, "Peasant-State Relations and the Social Base of Self-Help in Kenya", *World Politics*, vol. 41, no. 3(1989), pp. 359-380.

²⁸⁹ See Michael Bratton, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

²⁹⁰ See Barkan and Holmquist, *op. cit.*; Philip M. Mbiti and Rasmus Rasmusson, *Self-Reliance in Kenya: The Case of Harambee* (Uppsala: SIIS, 1977); and Barbara P. Thomas, *Politics, Participation and Poverty: Development Through Self-Help in Kenya* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

²⁹¹ See Michael Bratton, "Farmer Organizations and Food Production in Zimbabwe", in *World Development* (Oxford), vol. 14, no. 3(1986), pp. 367-384.

²⁹² See Joel D. Barkan, Michael L McNulty and M.A.O. Ayeni, "'Hometown' Voluntary Associations, Local Development, and the Emergence of Civil Society in Western Nigeria", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3(1991), pp. 457-480.

(a) Africa and the International System

Though most of Africa officially first entered the international scene in the second half of this century, the era of slave trade had long integrated black Africa into the global division of labour in the sixteenth century. As we mentioned earlier, the first and largest period of African studies began around this time, with the establishment of trade relations between the continent and the emerging, and European-based capitalist world economy of the Middle Ages²⁹³. These years of Afro-European relations, would, strictly speaking, count as the beginning of Africa's international relations. However, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, most of Africa was not legally incorporated into the global political system.

According to Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, Africa started to acquire new strategic significance after the opening of the Suez Canal, that marked Egypt's importance to British imperial policy²⁹⁴. In other words, Africa's major appearance in the international scene took place during the era of the European scramble that led to the subsequent establishment of colonial domination in the continent. Though colonialism was terminated in the 1960s, its legacy has remained a strong influence upon Africa's role in international politics. Post-Independence African politics in general produced two major interpretations of colonialism. First of all, colonialism has been treated as a phenomenon characterised by a huge infusion of European ideas, technology and capital which, albeit in an authoritarian and arbitrary manner, laid down the basis for African modernisation²⁹⁵.

Even Karl Marx, in the Communist manifesto of 1848 as well as in his latter writings on the colonial process, believed that colonialism by its own contradictory logic (destroyer of pre-capitalist systems and creator of new progressive ones) would lay down the basis for the emancipation of colonial society²⁹⁶. The second argument -- largely based on global analysis of the flow of capital -- interpreted colonialism as the highest and encompassing stage of the

²⁹³ See Roland Oliver and J.D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, *op. cit.*; Hosea Jaffe, *A History of Africa*, *op. cit.*, particularly pages 43-64; Naomi Chazan et al. *op. cit.*, p. 377; and Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁹⁴ See Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

²⁹⁵ See L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Burden of Empire: A Critical Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of the Sahara* (London, 1967).

²⁹⁶ On Marx's perception of colonialism as an emancipatory phenomenon, see Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 51-60.

subjugation of Africa to the world capitalist system²⁹⁷. It is such interpretations which first dominated post-colonial African historiography of the 1960s. Thus most text books on African history and the national history of African states were conceived in this optimistic mould²⁹⁸. The motives which took Europe to Africa, might or might have not been economic, but during the late nineteenth century, European powers acted with the presumption, which they themselves initiated and elaborated, that Africa did not really belong to Africans. It was *res nullius*, a continent without owners, ready to be shared among those who equated might with right. France and Great Britain were, of course, the continent's most intrepid colonisers, while other European states such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain took smaller portions of it. Therefore, Africa's international relations at the very beginning was dominated by such interpretations of debate and the ties it continued to maintain with its former colonial governments.

To be sure, African countries first acquired their independence at the zenith of Cold War politics. When they emerged in the 1960s, African countries appeared fragile and less influential in world politics. However, the continent shortly became greatly affected by the interests and ambitions of external powers. The two superpowers of the post-war era, notably the former Soviet Union and the United States of America, gradually increased their involvement in Africa, with China to a more modest scale. For the Soviet Union, decolonisation paved way for forging friendly ties with the new states especially where strong anti-imperialist movements emerged. While for the United States, African independence posed the challenge of keeping the former European colonies inside the Western orbit of influence. East-West rivalry on the African continent intensified considerably during the Congo crisis of 1960²⁹⁹. This was one of the first major issues in inter-African relations that drew external intervention for the first time. Thus, it created the dialectic between African autonomy and external interventionism. While Africans have sought to enhance their freedom of action, the great powers have often intervened in accordance with their own agendas. That made it quite difficult for Africa to turn or exploit the situation for their maximum gains as it happened, for example, in the Renaissance period where the "bipolar" rivalry between the papacy and the empire precisely enabled the city-states to capture the opportunity of becoming

²⁹⁷ See one person who traces African dependence from the sixteenth century, Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, *op. cit.*; and another contemporary is Samir Amin, see for example his "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Historical Origin", *op. cit.*, pp. 105-119.

²⁹⁸ See precisely Roland Oliver and J.D. Fage, *op. cit.*

²⁹⁹ See Ernest W. Lefever, *Crisis in the Congo: a United Nations force in action* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1965); and R. Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjold: The Congo Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

“independent” City-States. Thus the City-States were able to distance themselves from earlier dependencies on the empire/papacy by seeking the support of the “other” side. Though it was a delicate enterprise, these smaller entities were able to exploit the rivalry of the great powers for their own independence.

In the case of Africa, the Cold War framework was different, because it involved among other things, attention to regions outside Africa such as Asia or Latin America. In addition, Africa's interests in autonomy and economic development have often been subordinated to this globalist logic of great power rivalry. For example, United States policy was often that of containment to prevent Soviet Union from making any gains in the continent. Though much less effort was put in terms of developing or modernising allies, this Soviet-U.S competition marked the emerging significance of Africa in international relations during the Cold war. It was at this very moment in time that the international experience of Black peoples or ‘Black Diplomacy’, to use Professor Mazrui's terminology, began to emerge³⁰⁰.

Patterns of communication between Africa and the rest of the world began to establish. In 1963, at a conference in Addis Ababa, African leaders decided to form the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), that would partly solve member states conflicts and maintain territorial integrity of its members³⁰¹. And in order to avoid entanglement in the ideological and military issues which divided the West from the Communist world, the OAU member states decisively joined the non-alignment movement³⁰². This was yet another major antecedent in the development of African international relations, where Third World collective diplomacy began to emerge in which African states also started to participate energetically. The emergence of organisations such as the non-alignment movement, the Group of 77, ASEAN, and the OAU provided a framework for Third World active involvement in international affairs. So much that from the 1960s onward, African leaders developed extensive relations with other developing countries of Latin America and Asia. Notions such as ‘Afro-Arab partnership’,

³⁰⁰ See Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³⁰¹ See Yousif El-Ayouti and William Zartman (ed.), *The OAU After Twenty Years* (London: Praeger, 1984).

³⁰² See Bojana Tadic and Ranko Petkovic (eds.), *Non Alignment in the Eighties: International Round Table* (Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and economics, 1982); H. Kochler (ed.), *The Principles of Non-Alignment: The Non-Aligned Countries in the Eighties* (Third World Centre, 1982); Uma Vasudev (ed.), *Issues Before Non-Alignment: Past and Future* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1983); A.W. Singham and Shirley Hune, *Non-Alignment in an Age of Alignments* (London: Zed, 1986); and Roy, Alison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

'Afro-American links' 'Eurafrica' or 'Black Diplomacy' received considerable attention. Such partnership enabled African states, which individually could wield little power in international politics, to become particularly attracted to the strategy of acting collectively with other developing states. This was a clear refusal to be tied to a military alliance with one of the major two powers. Gradually, non-alignment developed into a broader concept of autonomy and the right to experiment, a reaffirmation by small powers that they were entitled to an independent say in world affairs. Though issues of trade and the use of world resources were still substantially outside the non-alignment movement as such, the first major economic factor to enter the movement was the issue of foreign aid³⁰³. As a result of this, a doctrine of balanced benefaction arose, where diversification of benefactors was preferred to a uni-patronised dependent.

To this extent, Africa became an important strategic arena at the brink of Cold War politics. At this very moment, none of the great powers was interested or cared about Africa's domestic governance, because they were simply interested in the distribution of power and seeking zones of influence on the continent. And when faced with domestic problems, African elites in return turned to their external patrons for help and support. Early examples that merit mention include the Congo crisis of 1960, Biafra, Ogaden and Angola. And from the mid-1970s, the renewal of competitive turbulence was witnessed: the oil shock, the revolution in Ethiopia that brought Haile Selassie's regime to an end, the emergence of Zimbabwe and the final withdrawal of Portugal. In the 1980s, hostilities over Libya and unrest in South Africa also raised tensions in both ends of the continent. It was only when the economic crisis of the 1980s befell the continent that Western pressure on African governments began to gain the momentum. At the same time arresting Africa's economic decline started to dominate most analysts of African society as a precondition for reasserting African political economy. For years, African economies were/are still tied to a global division of labour that is highly constraining. For example, Africa still faces the issue of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and the conditions exerted by the IMF and the World Bank³⁰⁴.

³⁰³ See Herbert Feis, *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964); John Dickey Montgomery, *Foreign Aid in International Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967); M.I. Goldman, *Soviet Foreign Aid* (London: Praeger, 1967); Joan M. Nelson, *Aid, Influence, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Jagdish Bhagwati and Richard S. Eckaus (eds.), *Foreign Aid: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); D. McNeill, *The Contradictions of Foreign Aid* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); and Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁰⁴ See *The IMF, World Bank and Africa: Report of a Conference on the Impact of the IMF and World Bank Policies on the People of Africa*, held at City University, London, on 7th-11th September 1987; also Dharam Ghai (ed.), *The IMF and the South: The Social Impact of Crisis and Adjustment* (London: Zed Books, 1991); David Woodward, *Debt, Adjustment, and Poverty in developing*

Because of the fact that most African economies were established by the former colonial governments, at least one-third of the trade of most African countries remained with the former metropole states. In many cases, particularly with the Francophone states, the concentration was much higher³⁰⁵. For example, France accounted for three quarters of the external trade of Benin, Chad, Niger and Senegal at independence. More to that, most countries had given preferential tariff treatment to imports from the metropole during the colonial period. Similarly, most countries tied their domestic currency to the value of that of the metropole such as the Franc or the Pound. Colonial powers had typically monopolised foreign investment in their colonies. A similar concentration was found in aid receipts. However, the project of complete decolonisation offered relative opportunity to African governments to diversify their economic links and to reduce their economic dependence on the former colonial power³⁰⁶. Though in 1975 ACP countries were offered free access to European markets in the Lome Convention³⁰⁷, Great Britain and France continued to monopolise trade with their former colonies. In any case, no other European state in history maintained an African policy comparable to that of France. Because of its close ties with the former colonies, France remained a very influential actor in African affairs and took the lead in fashioning a close economic relationship between Africa and the entire then European Economic Community (EEC). Culturally, economically, militarily, and thus politically, the newly independent Francophone states have remained bound to the metropole, and successive French leaders since de Gaulle until very recently have cultivated and even extended this sphere of influence. France's strategy was to maintain maximum influence in its former colonies in Africa *via* financial and technical aid combined with highly personalised relations

Countries (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992); Reginald Herbold Green and Mike Faber (ed.), *The Structural Adjustment of Structural Adjustment: Sub-Saharan Africa, 1980-1993* (Brighton, Sussex: Institute of development Studies, 1994); and also Giovanni Andrea Cornia and Gerald K. Helleiner (ed.), *From Adjustment to Development in Africa: Conflict, Controversy, Convergence, Consensus?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

³⁰⁵ See Naomi Chazan et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 275-319.

³⁰⁶ See the struggle between Nkrumah and de Gaulle outlined by Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations, op. cit.*,

³⁰⁷ There is a wide range of literature that outlines the European relations with the Developing World as guided by the Lome Convention. However, for a general view of the Lome agreements, see F. Long (ed.), *The Political Economy of EEC Relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific States: Contributions of the Lome Convention on North-South Relations* (London: Pergamon Press, 1980); John Ravenhill, *Collective Clientism: The Lome Convention and the North-South Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); and Marjorie Lister, *The European Community and the Developing World: The Role of the Lome Convention* (Aldershot: Brookfield, 1988).

with Francophone African leaders. For example, Presidents like Leopold Sedar Senghor and Felix Houphouet Boigny had strong attachments to France³⁰⁸.

Despite its extensive involvement in colonial Africa, Great Britain has, on the other hand, played a declining role in African Affairs since independence. While Paris has for a long time maintained ties with almost all of Francophone Africa, London has often remained selective maintaining partnership with only a few states of economic interest such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia, besides its central role in former Rhodesia and South Africa during the conflict years and after. Indeed that could be explained by other factors given that Britain has been embroiled in a series of crisis in its former colonial territories, including the civil war in Nigeria and the massive expulsion of its Indian citizens from Uganda during Idi Amin's regime. Occasionally, African issues have been central during Commonwealth meetings, Britain's favoured instrument for the management of post-colonial relations³⁰⁹.

Al though the Commonwealth has often been fashioned as Britain's primary forum for Third World relations, British governments have frequently treated Africa as but one component of a larger scheme. However, when generally viewed, Britain's major interest has been the promotion of its own investment and trade in Africa. This has been explicit in its continued defiance of calls to terminate ties with Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa. In other countries of continental Europe, West Germany captured a substantial share of the African arms market and opened up dynamic cultural centres in many African countries in an effort to cultivate interests and links. Italy, on the other hand expended its links with Libya, Ethiopia and Somalia. Portugal fought the ties of independence until the mid-1970s before belatedly joining the era of decolonisation. Belgium also maintained its partnership with Congo-Leopoldville (now Republic of the Congo) and former Rwanda-Urundi (now republics of

³⁰⁸ See the literature on that, and Tamar Golan, "A Certain Mystery: How Can France Do Everything That It Does in Africa and - and Get Away with It?", *African Affairs*, 80(January 1981), pp. 3-11.

³⁰⁹ See D. Austin, *West Africa and the Commonwealth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957); Herbert Victor Wiseman, *The Cabinet in the Commonwealth: Post-War Development in Africa, the West Indies, and South-East Asia* (London: Stevens, 1958); *Racism in Southern Africa: The Commonwealth Stand: an account of the contribution of the Commonwealth to the battle against racism in Southern Africa* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987); Commonwealth Secretariat, *Beyond Apartheid: Human Resources for a New South Africa: Report of a Commonwealth Expert Group Prepared for the Heads of Government Meeting at Harare* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat in Association with James Currey, 1991); and following publications by Stephen Chan, *The Commonwealth Observer Group in Zimbabwe: a Personal Memoir* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985); *The Commonwealth in World Politics: A Study of International Action, 1965-1985* (London: Lester Crook, 1988); and *Twelve Years of Commonwealth Diplomatic History: Commonwealth Summit Meetings, 1979-1991* (Lewiston; Lampeter: E. Mellen Press, 1991).

Rwanda and Burundi). Besides Europe, USA and former Soviet countries, relations with other regions of the world have also proliferated. For example, the newly industrialised countries of south east Asia (the NICs) have also sought economic ties with Africa. Japan has picked up relations with Africa through a number of development agencies it has successfully established in most of the continent and in the area of trade. Canada, Australia and New Zealand have also had links with most of Africa, mainly through Commonwealth meetings. In one way or another, most of these countries are also now involved in helping the continent in the current transition to democracy.

(b) The International Environment and the Liberation Struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia

Strategically, both Eritrea and Ethiopia are located on one of the world's busiest routes that links Europe and the Indian sub-continent and the far east. The region attracted the attention of major world powers that, unfortunately for one reason or another, sided with Emperor Haile Selassie's regime in the early days of the conflict. The United States in particular had acquired a very important communication facility in the region at Kagnev, near Asmara, and as a result became closely engaged in buttressing Emperor Haile Selassie's position. In reaction, Eritrea's Arab neighbours led by Egypt and Syria were drawn into the conflict, and the Emperor turned to his Israeli ally for expertise in combating the guerrillas. This foreign involvement internationalised the conflict in Eritrea but mainly in favour of the regime(s) in Addis Ababa. Moreover, after the collapse of the *ancien regime*, the *Dergue*, its successor revolutionary government, continued the shrewd diplomacy deployed by his predecessor to block efforts that may raise the conflict in international gatherings.

In the 1970s, the *Dergue* intensified the dimension of international involvement in Eritrea when they persuaded their Soviet allies to supply both armour and defence advisors to defeat the Eritrean challenge. The Soviet involvement decisively reversed the Eritrean Fronts' fortunes for a period of ten years of survival beginning from 1978 until the late 1980s when the EPLF regained its strength to push ahead for the total liberation of the country. This external involvement also affected badly the other ethnic-based liberation movements in mainland Ethiopia³¹⁰. Certainly the involvement of the powerful individual countries on the side of the Ethiopian regime, contained any further advances liberation movements would make. This was then backed by the silence of both the UN and the OAU, who were not only naive towards the liberation wars in Africa but shunned them as major causes of instability and anti progress and development.

³¹⁰ See chapter five for details of other Liberation Fronts in Ethiopia.

The UN unwritten law or formality is that regional matters must first be addressed by regional organisations, in which case the OAU, as Africa's regional body, would have been so addressed. But the OAU too does not permit interference in what was termed as "internal affairs", where the conflict in Eritrea was seen as Ethiopia's internal matter³¹¹. However, both the UN and the OAU were supporting liberation movements against colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, and not movements that fought indigenous regimes. Moved by the desire to remove white colonial rule, the General Assembly solemnly proclaimed in paragraph 2 of article one of Resolution 1514 (IV):

‘The necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations’, and further declared that ‘all peoples have the right to self-determination’ and that immediately steps should be taken to transfer all powers to the peoples of the territories not yet independent without any conditions or reservations; and denied that inadequacy of preparation should ever be a pretext for delaying the exercise of the right of self-determination³¹².

Similarly, most important in the OAU Charter is the principles of self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of member-states, similar to that of the UN³¹³. Since the OAU charter upheld existing borders, the case of Eritrea was never debated in its foras on the pretext of preserving the norm of non-intervention³¹⁴. Accordingly, the OAU member-states turned a deaf ear to post-colonial liberation and secessionist movements such as those in Biafra, Katanga, South Sudan, and of late in Ethiopia. In fact, article 3(2) of the OAU Charter which forbids interference in the internal affairs of states has caused what others have termed a "serious conflict management crisis", and a re-evaluation of the article has more often been requested³¹⁵.

³¹¹ See Article 3(2) of the OAU Charter; and for a concise analysis of it, see Makumi Mwagiru, "Who Will Bell the Cat? ...", *op. cit.*

³¹² See *General Assembly Resolution 1514(IV)*, December 14th 1960.

³¹³ For the aims of the OAU, see T.O. Elias, "The Charter of the Organisation of African Unity", *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 59, no. 2(April 1965), pp. 243-267:246-250.

³¹⁴ See Bereket Habte Selassie, "The OAU and Regional Conflicts: Focus on the Eritrean War", *Africa Today*, vol. 35, no. 314(1988), pp. 61-67.

³¹⁵ For a thorough study of the effects of article 3(2) of the OAU Charter, see Makumi Mwagiru's Ph.D. thesis "The Internal Management of Internal Conflict in Africa: The Uganda Mediation of 1985", *op. cit.*; and in idem, "Who Will Bell the Cat? ...", *op. cit.*

In other words, both organisations legalised support for the decolonisation of Third World countries and not what were then widely perceived as domestic conflicts. Thus, the UN only legitimised support against colonialism up to the extent of forming the UN's Decolonisation Committee (UN-DC)³¹⁶. In the same vein, regional organisations such as the OAU, ASEAN, or the Arab League developed open diplomacy that only supported liberation from European-white-colonialism. And as a result, the OAU Liberation Committee (OAU-LC) was formed to carry out the task of supporting liberation movements against colonialism in Africa. Any other liberation movements such as those which are the subject of this study were vilified and vigorously opposed and shunned by the whole continent³¹⁷. Most OAU leaders who quickly realised the problems they would face while in power began plotting means of how to contain any crises that may arise.

³¹⁶ See in particular Zoltan Szilagy, *The United Nations' Role in the Liquidation of Colonialism* (Budapest: Institute for World Economy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1986), pp. 62-66.

³¹⁷ For a thorough study of what were known in Africa as internal matters (South Sudan, Biafra, Eritrea, or Katanga), see Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-128, 177-195.

CHAPTER FOUR: INDEPENDENCE THROUGH LIBERATION: ERITREAN SELF-VIEWS

Introduction

The dynamics and long development of the Eritrean struggle for independence began in the first half of the twentieth century, between 1941 and 1951, when the first generation of Eritrean nationalists started to battle the creeping European colonialism in the region³¹⁸. However, it has been also pointed out that these anti-colonial nationalists had failed to construct a coalition capable of establishing a unified Eritrean nation-state to counter the then looming Ethiopian dominance³¹⁹. Like its other African counterparts, Eritrea is not made up of a single nationality. It is a conglomerate of different communities which are themselves in most cases akin by culture to their neighbours in Ethiopia, the Sudan and French Somaliland (today's Djibouti)³²⁰. However, it has become common to say the long struggle is responsible for the creation of what has been termed "an all-encompassing national identity" among diverse communities of Eritrea. For years such diversity has been highly manipulated by successive Ethiopian regimes to impose a single Ethiopian identity, that was meant to swallow and contain Eritrea. To that effect, both the Imperial and *Dergue* regimes were able to contain Eritrean nationalism and impose their hegemony mainly through coercion.

In response Eritreans did not only develop strong resistance against Ethiopian hegemony, instead they grew a sense of solidarity and a shared identity amongst their nine ethnic nationalities and the two major religions - Christianity and Islam. United in their quest for a nation, Eritreans began to demand what Nuriddin Farah terms "*A room of one's own. A country of one's own. A century in which one was not a guest*"³²¹. According to most historians, and in my own encounters with most Eritrean nationals, the struggle began with the

³¹⁸ This has been well documented by G.K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941-1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); well supplemented by Lloyd Ellingson, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950", *The Journal of African History*, vol. 18, no. 2(1977), pp. 263-265; convincingly narrated by Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993* (Cambridge, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 61-81; and for the different stages of the struggle, see EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 17-19, 27-30.

³¹⁹ See in particular Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*

³²⁰ See particularly S.F. Nadel, *Races and Tribes of Eritrea* (Asmara: British Military Administration, 1944); G.K.N. Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p. 11; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³²¹ See Nuriddin Farah, *Sardines, 3rd edn.* (Saint Paul, M.N.: Greyeolf Press, 1992), p. 4.

dream of a country of one's own. Such a dream was not just a claim but a right that was denied the Eritreans since the period of European colonialism. Worse still, that dream became compromised when a "federal" arrangement was imposed between 1952-1962³²².

Eritreans were three times denied their dream and aspiration to a "country of one's own". The first attempt was in 1941 when the Italian colonial rule came to an end. Unfortunately, a British caretaker administration was instituted to replace Italian rule until 1951. The second chance was missed when in 1952 another demand for a country of one's own became compromised under federal arrangements and reduced to a room of one's own within the Ethiopian larger and more powerful structure. This arrangement was favoured mainly by the Americans and the British who wanted to appease Ethiopian claims in the post-war period. It is worth citing that at that time, the UN muscles were still strong and its resolution to federate Eritrea under the Ethiopian Crown prevailed. Thus, Eritrean autonomy was eliminated and Ethiopian hegemony became institutionalised. The third major chance was missed when in 1974 the Ethiopian Crown was overthrown and replaced by what later turned out to be a Marxist dictatorship. The Ethiopian revolution had aroused particular hopes that the new regime might bring a solution to the Eritrean question by recognising the Eritrean claim and demand for self-determination. On the contrary, such hopes became shattered due to the behaviour of what came to be widely known as the *Dergue* regime, and the struggle continued unabated till the total liberation of the country in 1991 which was then followed by a referendum two years later. Eritrea finally formalised its sovereignty when it got its independence on 24th May 1993, and became a *de facto* member of the international community.

This chapter covers four main areas, two of which trace the genesis of the Eritrean struggle for independence through liberation. While the first part discusses some major historical antecedents to the Eritrean question, the second presents briefly the early days of the struggle under various organisations up to the final days when a total unification was forged under a nationalist banner, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The third part details Eritrean self-views concerning the long history of the yearning for a country of one's own, bringing in individual self-views and experiences about the struggle. Most of these views have been expressed by Eritreans themselves in their own writings and in interviews. These self-views are also complemented by official documentation in Eritrean archives, newspapers and

³²² See Semere Haile, "Historical Background to the Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict", in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, pp. 11-31:21-29; EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-97.

magazines. To talk about Eritrean self-views means talking about their experiences, perceptions and analysis of events that dominated the struggle from the 1950s to 1991. In this case, the experiences also tell how Eritreans made the revolution and how the revolution made them in turn. The fourth part of the chapter examines the role of the Eritrean elites during the struggle and the subsequent involvement of the masses.

4.1. The Genesis of the Eritrean Struggle for Independence

(a) Historical Antecedents of the Eritrean Question

The literature on the Eritrean question is divided into two groups. On the one hand there is a large amount of the literature written by Eritreans themselves and by scholars who are close to and sympathetic to the struggle which emphasises the deliberate denial of independence to Eritreans and regards Ethiopia as a colonial power³²³. On the other hand, there is also an enormous literature by Ethiopians and non-Ethiopian scholars sympathetic to the despair about the break up of the 'Great' Ethiopia which gives a different version of the story and emphasises that Eritrea has no history of its own and must remain part and parcel of

³²³ Such writings of supporters of Eritrean nationalism and identity include: Osman Saleh Sabbe, *The History of Eritrea*. trans. Muhammad Fawaz Al Azein (Beirut: Dar Al-Mazirah, 1974); Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); in idem, *Eritrea and the United Nations* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1989); Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe, and Bereket Habte Selassie (eds.), *Behind the War in Eritrea* (Nottingham: Bertrand Russell House, 1980); David Pool, *Eritrea: Africa's Longest War* (London, 1979); G. Dilebo, *Historical Origins and Development of the Eritrean Problem, 1882-1962*. *Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, 7: 221-244 (1974); Richard Sherman, *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980); Semere Haile, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea*, *op. cit.*; Araya Tseggai, "Historical Analysis of Infrastructural Development in Italian-Eritrea, 1885-1941", *The Journal of Eritrean Studies* (Gambling, LA), vol. 1, no. 1(1986), part. 1, pp. 19-33; Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "European Colonial Rule and the Transformation of Eritrean Rural Life", *Horn of Africa* (Summit, NJ), vol. 6, no. 2(1983), pp. 50-60; in idem, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1989); Tekeste Negash, *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940* (Uppsala: Reprocentralen HSC, 1986); Richard Caulk, "'Black Snake, White Snake': Bahta Hagos and his Revolt against Italian Overrule in Eritrea, 1894", in Donald Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London: James Currey, 1986); Gebre Hiwet Tesfagiorgis, *Eritrea: A Case of Self-Determination, Working Paper No. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Eritreans for Peace and Democracy, 1990); Roy Pateman, *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1990); in idem, "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite: Aspects of the Eritrean Revolution", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3(September 1990), pp. 257-272; and Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea: A Pawn in World Politics* (Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 1991). And for examination of Italian motives and achievements, see Yemane Mesghenna, *Italian Colonialism: A Case Study of Eritrea, 1869-1934* (Maryland, 1989).

Ethiopia³²⁴. Either way, both arguments can be contested because the claim of sovereignty over Eritrea by Ethiopia was as spurious as the claim that Eritrea had previously constituted a distinct entity.

Etymologically, Eritrea originates from the name of the ancient Greek for the Red Sea *Sinus Aerithreus*³²⁵. However, during the ancient times, Eritrea was known by three distinct names: *Medri Geez*, the land of the free, *Medri Bahri*, the land of the sea, and *Mareb Mellash*, the land beyond the river³²⁶. In the eyes of most Eritreans and their sympathisers, these names indicate the divergent histories and cultures of Eritrea and Ethiopia, an interpretation which is highly rejected by the latter's centralists who have for years claimed that Abyssinian control extended to the Red Sea throughout most of history³²⁷. For example, in the middle of the 1980s, an article even sanctioned such claims that the entire Horn of Africa was under the control of the Ethiopian Emperors from about the beginning of the Christian era until the sixteenth century³²⁸. Such claims, to most Eritreans, portray a version of the past which is not

³²⁴ Writings by supporters of Ethiopia's cultural and historic unity who reflect traditional concerns with Semitic ties, royal chronicles, the imperial state, and the Abyssinian Great Tradition include: E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Eritrea on the Eve: The Past and the Future of Italy's "First-Born" Colony, Ethiopia's Ancient Sea Province* (Essex: Lalibela House, 1952); E. Sylvia Pankhurst and Richard K.P. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: The Last Phase of the Reunion Struggle, 1941-1952* (Essex: Lalibela House, 1953); Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976); Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and the State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Melaku Tegen, "Eritrea: Problems of the National Movement", *Proceedings 4th International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York, 1989); Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978: War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1983); in idem, *Ethiopia and the Challenge of Independence* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986); Getachew Haile, "The Unity and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3(September 1986), pp. 465-487; Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Paul Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia: Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime* (Santa Monica, 1985); Getachew Haile, "Eritrea, Part of My Ethiopia: auf W iedersehen!", *Ethiopian Review* (February 1993), pp. 28-30; and Patrick Gilkes, "Even the Camels Know this Land is One", *Ethiopian Review* (August 1993), p.9.

³²⁵ See *Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner During 1951, vol. III* (Reprinted with a preface by the ELF - The People's Liberation Forces, September 1977), p. VIII; and for Fred Halliday, this indicated the uncertain status of the area during the contentious years of the war with Ethiopia, see Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", *New Left Review*, 77(1969), p. 60. (emphasis added).

³²⁶ See Robert Machida, *Eritrea: The Struggle for Independence* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1987), p. 5; Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 12; and Roy Pateman, *Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning, op. cit.*, p. 29.

³²⁷ See in particular Sylvia K.P. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia and Eritrea, op. cit.*, p. 13.

³²⁸ See Gatechew Haile, "The Unity and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia", *op. cit.*, p. 465.

an objective historically factual documentation of the past, but rather constitutes an imaginative reconstruction of the past in favour of the Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea³²⁹. Whatever the case, it would be better to first establish the Eritrean claims by tracing rudiments of their 'history'.

After the fourteenth century, Eritrea was virtually occupied by people of various origins: the Nilotic, the Beja, and the Semites. Most records indicate the Nilotic were the earliest inhabitants of present day Eritrea. The Beja were first in Egypt c.2700 B.C., and then moved into northern and northwestern Eritrea some time later. And the Semites came across the Red Sea and only later established themselves in the highlands of Eritrea. It was these Semitic immigrants who constructed a number of city-states in today's Eritrea similar to the Greek *polis*, and built a kingdom centred in Aksum, then Headquarters of the Province of Tigray in northern Ethiopia. Historical evidence regarding the existence of the Aksumite Kingdom are drawn from the archaeological remainders of Eritrea and Ethiopia³³⁰. Most observers also hold that the Aksumite kingdom corresponded very little with the modern state beyond the limits of Tigray. This very observation is responsible for the argument that the Aksumite civilisation was "more of an Eritrean history than of present day Ethiopia" because of the fact that Aksum is more geographically proximate to the State of Eritrea than mainland Ethiopia³³¹. This again, to Eritrean nationalists and their sympathisers, clearly indicates the two countries have always had separate historical tales of nationhood, though sharing a similar culture.

Following its establishment, Aksum acquired a very strong and prosperous commerce during the third century A.D. And according to most historians, Aksum ranked among the great powers of its contemporaries. This became evident in its well established contacts with other great powers of the world such as Byzantium, Persia, India, and Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). It also had an open market that attracted traders from as far as Greece and Egypt³³². However, when in the fourth century Aksum became dominated by religion, its stability

³²⁹ See Frank Hearn, "Remembrance and Critique: The Uses of the Past for Discrediting the Present and Anticipating the Future", *Politics and Society*, vol. 5, no. 2(1975), p. 201. (emphasis added).

³³⁰ See Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 19; and Robert I. Rotberg, *A Political History of Tropical Africa* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 30.

³³¹ See Stephen Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 13; and Araya Tseggai, "The Case for Eritrean National Independence", *Black Scholar*, 7(June 1976), p. 20. (emphasis added).

³³² For Aksum's commercial influence, see Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia, op. cit.*, p. 7; and G.K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, op. cit.*, p. 5.

quickly started to crumble. It began embracing Christianity and started indulging in expansive ventures to dominate most of the region as far north as Meroe in the Sudan and across the Red Sea into Yemen³³³. To be sure, Aksum's power was based on the control of the Red Sea trade route. However, at the close of the sixth century, Aksum had earned the wrath of other foreign empires such as Persia which had to cut off Aksum's influence on Arabia. Because the Persian Empire wanted to expand Islam, Aksum became affected and automatically delinked from the rest of the world. By 710 A.D., Aksum had become totally undermined and its port *Adulis* (now Zula), was destroyed³³⁴. With such events, Aksum consequently lost its glory, particularly the monopoly of trade. Thus, the Islamic expansion did encourage the Beja, who first settled in Egypt, to take over the kingdom of Aksum. What followed throughout the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, was the establishment of five independent kingdoms in today's Eritrea and northeastern Sudan by the Beja³³⁵.

According to Margery Perham, there was a clear boundary between Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) and the five kingdoms of the Beja (parts of which are constituted in today's Eritrea). And the rulers of Tigray and Abyssinia did recognise *Medri Bahri* as a vassal state, and in Perham's words, Medri Bahri became "*the vassal state of a vassal state*"³³⁶. Even though Medri Bahri (Eritrea) was an independent entity, it had to stand against constant invasion by the rulers of Tigray and Abyssinia who later succeeded to destroy *Zula* and *Hirgigo*, Eritrean villages. Despite the fact that the local forces had successfully repulsed the Abyssinians at a frontier on the Mereb River³³⁷, in 1540-41 an Abyssinian-Portuguese allied army thrust into the territory but failed to sub-due Medri Bahri. Such resistance has become a tale of Eritrea's enduring resilience from the ancient days to the contemporary victory in the 1990s. Taking into consideration the foregoing narrative, one can say that Eritrea's struggle for survival as a nation did not only begin with the fight against the Imperial and *Dergue* regimes in the twentieth century. The earliest history of the region was dominated by constant upheaval

³³³ For the history of Christianity in Aksum and the domestic reasons that led to its subsequent decline, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, *op. cit.*

³³⁴ See Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³³⁵ These kingdoms were Negash, Belgin, Bazin, Zarin, and Quaita'a. See Semere Haile, *op. cit.*; and Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 49-50.

³³⁶ See Margery Perham, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

³³⁷ Mereb River still marks the modern frontiers between Eritrea and Ethiopia. See in particular Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 60.

between kingdoms and/or territories³³⁸. In other words, the land itself has been a subject of contest for a long time. That is why in 1770, the Scots explorer, James Bruce, who had adventured through Eritrea concluded in his findings that Eritrea and Ethiopia were not only separate entities, but were also in constant conflict with each other³³⁹. Despite its successful resistance against the constant regional invasions and upheavals, Eritrea was yet to undergo foreign occupations over a period of five hundred years.

(b) The Impact of Early Foreign Occupations of Eritrea

Eritrean resilience was proven not just against the Imperial and *Dergue* regimes of present day Ethiopia in the 1970s to 1991, but also against a number of great foreign powers such as the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, the Egyptians in the nineteenth century, and the European colonialists in the twentieth century³⁴⁰. Having said that, this foreign occupation did also contribute a lot in furthering Ethiopian claims over Eritrea as part of its territory in this century. As we shall see, Ethiopia had actually fought most of these foreigners in their attempts to also conquer Abyssinia. One of these foreign occupations was carried out by the Ottoman Empire. After having successfully conquered the Arab countries, the Ottoman Turks extended their conquest across the Red Sea in 1517. By 1557, they had formally occupied Massawa and much of the coastal plain of Eritrea as far as Deba-ruba and built their fortifications in 1558 there. They also expanded to western Eritrea as far as Keren and Sahel and occupied those areas until the nineteenth century. At the same time, the Fung (also Funj) Dynasty had also occupied the remaining parts of western Eritrea and Sennar in the Sudan. However, both occupations came to their end in 1865, but only to be replaced by another occupant in the same year, Egypt.

The Egyptian participation in the contest for land in the Horn of Africa was necessitated by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. In addition, the British were also concerned with their position in Egypt and the sea routes to India, and thus encouraged the Egyptians to occupy the

³³⁸ A.M. Babu is right to point out that upheavals are not a new phenomenon to Africa, though the contemporary ones in Eritrea and Ethiopia were qualitatively different from those elsewhere in the continent. See A.M. Babu, "A Hopeful Dawn of Post-Colonial Initiatives", *SAPEM* (April 1996), pp. 14-17.

³³⁹ For details of Bruce's adventures, see James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, Book V* (Dublin: Porter, 1791).

³⁴⁰ See Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (London: Hollywood Press, 1977); G.N.K. Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-20; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*

Red Sea port of Massawa, Keren (Bogos) town, and southcentral Eritrea³⁴¹. As a result, Egypt occupied the entire Ottoman territories and by 1872 the conquest of Massawa and Keren were complete, and raised their flags throughout the former Ottoman areas of Eritrea. But when in 1875 Egypt attempted to extend their rule into Abyssinia, it was pushed back by the strong army of Emperor Yohannes IV, at Gundet in November the same year and at Gura in March 1876 respectively. Both towns belong to Eritrea near the border with Ethiopia. Because Yohannes had successfully driven back the Egyptian army out of Gundet and Gura, he took control of the Eritrean highlands from 1876 to 1889. During the same period, the Mahdists were also intensively resisting the Egyptians in the Sudan, and thus, Egypt was totally forced out of Eritrea.

The rise of the Sudanese Mahdia against the Egyptians, together with the previous loses to the Abyssinian monarchy augured direct British involvement in the crisis. The British opted to mediate between Egypt and Emperor Yohannes to facilitate a smooth Egyptian withdrawal from the Sudan, and at the same time conspiring with Abyssinian assistance against the Mahdi. In order to fulfil the British request over Egyptian evacuation, Yohannes sought the occupation of Massawa and Keren as a *quid pro quo*. Thus, an agreement was signed to that effect, the Hewit Treaty of 1884. The Emperor adhered to his side of the bargain and facilitated a smooth evacuation of five Egyptian garrisons from Massawa and Keren in early 1885³⁴².

However, instead of helping Emperor Yohannes in the taking over of Massawa, the British encouraged the Italians to expand from the southern port of Assab to occupy Massawa, which they had declared since 1882 and 1885 as colonies. According to Trevaskis, the British preferred Italian influence in the Red Sea to counter the French encroachment from Djibouti³⁴³. These British-Italian manoeuvres are quite significant because they provide the readers with another fashion of evidence that the Italians actually never took Eritrea from Ethiopia, as the latter has always claimed in assertion of its legitimacy over the former. And according to Margery Perham, it was from the collapsing Egyptian occupation that the Italians took Massawa which the Egyptians themselves had taken from the Turks, and not from Ethiopia³⁴⁴. Thus, it could be discerned from the foregoing that Ethiopia's attempts to

³⁴¹ See Colin Legum and Bill Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 20; also Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

³⁴² See Sir E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 vols.* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), 2: 422-23.

³⁴³ See G.K.N. Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p.8.

³⁴⁴ See Margery Perham, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

conquer Eritrea were short-lived, first by the advent of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa. Second, the Ethiopians could not afford to sustain fighting two enemies: the Italians on the one hand, and the increasing Mahdist threat from the Sudan on the other. And third, from the fourteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, multiple regional dynasties with no strong central authority had proliferated in Ethiopia.

However, from 1889 a big rivalry emerged from the multiple dynasties and Yohannes had to choose between fighting either the Mahdists of the Sudan, or his new biggest rival, King Menelik II of Shoa³⁴⁵. In 1889, Yohannes chose to fight the Mahdists where he met his death and was subsequently succeeded by King Menelik II. It is Menelik, rather than Yohannes, who is the sole architect of the modern empire-state of Ethiopia, one that still excluded Eritrea. The argument that emanates from most Ethiopian centralists regarding the question of Eritrea is that despite the successful defeat of the Italians at Adowa, King Menelik II had not enough strength to be sure of another victory over Italians for Eritrea. Because of that, Menelik decided to abandon the territory under Italian control and it was only early this century that Ethiopia expanded its borders to include Eritrea. King Menelik II's surrender of the territory has been likened by most Eritrean nationalists to the amputation of a hand which it is impossible to reconnect. Therefore, Eritreans have all along accepted Italy as their sole coloniser until it handed over the territory to the British Military Administration between 1941-1951, who in turn handed over Eritrea to the Emperor in 1952. But how Italy first got possession of Eritrea, is a question we shall try to answer briefly by looking at the history of Italy's involvement in the region.

(c) Eritrea Becomes an Italian Colony in 1896

When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, it accelerated what Gebre-Medhin calls the plunder by capitalist Europe of the Red Sea coastlines of Africa³⁴⁶. For many reasons, one is right to say that Eritrean modern history began with Italian colonialism³⁴⁷. Because to many Eritreans, it is

³⁴⁵See Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

³⁴⁶ See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

³⁴⁷ For a brief history of colonial Eritrea under Italy, Britain, and Ethiopia, see Jordan Gebre-Medhin, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-69. And for a detailed study see Tekeste Negash, *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake*, *op. cit.*; in idem, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea*, *op. cit.*; J. Baker, *Eritrea, 1941 for the Fullest Treatment of the Military Campaign* (London: Faber, 1966); Richard Caulk, "'Black Snake, White Snake': Bahta Hagos and his Revolt against Italian Overrule in Eritrea, 1894", in Donald Crummey (ed.), *op. cit.*; Harold Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States 1941-1974*, *op. cit.*, and Stefano Poscia, *Eritrea: Colonia Tradita* (Rome: Edizioni Associate, 1989).

the Italian rule that had reduced Eritreans to an oppressed, dominated, and colonised nation for long³⁴⁸. In the same year after the Suez Canal had opened, a group of Italian Missionaries were sent to explore the Red Sea coast of the Horn of Africa, and in September they bought a piece of land in the Eritrean Danakel province. According to most historians, the missionaries had the support and blessing of both the Rubattino shipping company and the Italian government³⁴⁹. Although the Italian missionaries first camouflaged themselves as the sole harbingers of the Gospel, they were destined to collect information about the area and its inhabitants before returning to Italy in early 1872³⁵⁰. Following their return to Italy, the Rubattino shipping company, well equipped with the information from the missionaries, was then sent and authorised by the Italian government to purchase Assab (the present capital of Danakel region) from the local Sultan as a fuelling station. But the motive behind this was to facilitate a future occupation of Assab which was later accomplished when Italian forces took possession of the port in 1879. Thus, Assab became colonised (*colonia di Assab*) and fell under the authority of the King of Italy.

While this was taking place, the first people to protest against the Italian encroachment in the region were the Egyptians and Turkish who both claimed sovereignty over Eritrea and not the Ethiopians³⁵¹. In another development, though Ethiopia was not one of the first to protest against Italian occupation of parts of Eritrea, it was one of the first to counter Italian expansionist tendencies on the ground in the entire region. For example, when on February 5th 1885 Italian troops occupied Massawa, they pushed into the interior of Eritrea and were met by the forces of Emperor Yohannes' General, Ras Alula, who was himself Governor of Hamasien and Seraye (Eritrean Provinces). As was pointed out earlier, this region had fallen under Yohannes' rule during the period of Egyptian evacuation. The first major setback for any European power at the hands of an African army happened when the Italians were badly defeated at the battle of Dogali in 1887.

³⁴⁸ According to G.K.N. Trevaskis, throughout the Italian regime the Eritrean remained content, docile and obedient to his rulers. See his *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition*, *op. cit.*, p. 29; and also Mebrat's story recorded by Amrit Wilson, *Women and the Eritrean Revolution: The Challenge Road* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1991), pp. 9-32.

³⁴⁹ See John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia At Bay* (Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), p. 102-188; Robert Machida, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-21; and Stefano Poscia, *Eritrea: Colonia Tradita*, *op. cit.*

³⁵⁰ See Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 16 (emphasis added).

³⁵¹ See *The Royal Institute of International Affairs, The Italian Colonial Empire, Information Department Papers, no. 27* (London: The Broad Water Press, 1940), p. 9.

Because of such a resounding defeat, the Italians reversed their channels of expansion and resorted to diplomatic manoeuvres by exploiting the regional rivalry between Tigrayan and Shoan monarchies. They did that by signing a friendship and commerce treaty with King Menelik II of Shoa, in hope of using him against King Yohannes³⁵². In this way, the Italians supported Menelik's bid for the Abyssinian throne, and upon his accession he ratified relations with them. In another development, Yohannes' conflict with the Mahdists gave the Italians an advantageous position which they efficiently seized without delay. From the middle of 1888, the Italian forces moved into Keren and Asmara on 2nd June and 3rd August, respectively. When at the same time Emperor Menelik II started feuding with his rival, General Baldissera's forces also seized the opportunity and marched as far as the River Mereb, the traditional frontier between Abyssinia and the modern state of Eritrea that was adopted in 1993 when Eritrea achieved its formal independence.

Thus, Menelik II consolidated his position by signing the Treaty of Wichale (Ucciali) with Italy on May 2, 1889, where he became recognised as *de facto* Emperor against any potential challenger, particularly from Yohannes's progenies in Tigray³⁵³. Some four months later, the Treaty was ratified by Umberto I of Italy on 29th September 1889³⁵⁴. Thus, frontiers between the newly acquired Italian colony of Eritrea and Abyssinia became clearly defined in Article III of the Treaty³⁵⁵. And it was after the Treaty that Italy declared its new territory in the Horn to be a colony in East Africa on 1st January 1890. Following the Greek etymological derivation of the term, the Italians named it Eritrea and that marked the establishment of a nation and colony under Italian rule. As was mentioned earlier, the British intention to encourage Italy on the one hand and discourage France on the other became manifest³⁵⁶. However, the Italian colonial expansion did not proceed smoothly, because new problems arose between Menelik II and his Italian counterparts over the provisions of the Treaty. The Amharic version of Article 17 of the Treaty was in a marked contradiction with the Italian text which stated that Italy acquired a virtual protectorate over Abyssinia, and Menelik consented to "*avail himself of the*

³⁵² Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 55.

³⁵³ For the texts of all relevant treaties up to and including 1908, see Sir E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ For details, see Clive Perry, *Consolidated Treaty Series, vol 172, 1889-1890* (New York: Ocean Publication, 1978), pp. 100-101.

³⁵⁶ See Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1884-1913* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 82.

Italian Government for any negotiations which he may enter into with other powers or Governments"³⁵⁷. According to Frank Hardie, when in 1889 the Italians pronounced or proclaimed their legitimacy over Abyssinia as a protectorate, Britain recognised it while France and Russia rejected it³⁵⁸, which showed a clear ambiguity of the treaty itself as perceived by other rivals. Thus in 1890, with material aid and support from the French and the Russians, Emperor Menelik II began to resist Italian claims over Abyssinia, and in February 1893 denounced and abrogated the Treaty of Wichale in order to maintain the independence of Abyssinia.

Despite Menelik's resistance, Italian forces continued to advance into Tigray, and on the 1st of March 1896 they clashed at Adowa. Italian arrogance and intransigence was met with a humiliating defeat at the famous battle of Adowa, whose one hundred years anniversary was celebrated in 1996. Because of this, Abyssinia was able to earn itself respect from European powers who were now ready to negotiate matters on the basis of equality and independence with Abyssinia. The Treaty of Wichale became abrogated particularly when another peace Treaty at Addis Ababa was signed on 26th October 1896, where Abyssinia's absolute independence was proclaimed³⁵⁹. However, in return respect for the boundaries between the Italian colony of Eritrea and Abyssinia was pledged, an event which most Ethiopian centralists regard as a mistake. And in 1897, the boundaries between the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia were negotiated and fixed, though slightly revised in 1908 in Italy's favour.

Though on 2nd August 1928 Emperor Haile Selassie I had concluded a friendship Treaty with Italy, Italy invaded Ethiopian territory on 3rd October 1935. By the Spring of 1936 the mission was accomplished with the establishment of *Africa Orientale Italiana*, or what came to be known as Italian East Africa constituted by Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie fled his empire and was in exile till the allied forces led by Britain successfully drove Italy out of Abyssinia, and Eritrea and Italian Somaliland were entrusted to the British Military Administration in 1941.

(d) From the British Administration to the Termination of the Federation

³⁵⁷ See *Royal Institute of International Affairs, Abyssinia and Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 5; and EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

³⁵⁸ See his *The Abyssinian Crisis* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1974), p. 12.

³⁵⁹ See Sir E. Hertslet, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

With the defeat of the Axis powers during the Second World War, Eritrea was handed over to the British Military Administration from 1941-1952, who then assumed a formidable task of governing it for eleven years³⁶⁰. During their administration, several attempts were made to partition Eritrea with the aim of first, joining the western and northern parts of the territory to the then British-held Sudan. The second idea was that the southern and eastern coastal regions, including the ports of Massawa and Assab, were to be given to Emperor Haile Selassie's Ethiopia. Had that plan materialised, it would have marked the total demise of today's State of Eritrea. Fortunately for the Eritreans, British hopes of partitioning the country had failed because Britain was already facing resistance from the Mahdist nationalists in the Sudan. Thereafter, the future of the former Italian colony became central in the UN debates from the 1940s to the 1950s. Eritrean expectations were that the UN would find a favourable solution to the Eritrean question, which for them could be solved only through total independence. On the contrary, in 1952 the UN decided to hand over Eritrea to Ethiopia under a highly contested federal arrangement, one that angered most Eritreans³⁶¹.

Prior to that, decisions about the future and status of the strategically-located former Italian colonies began in August 1945 at the Postdam (Berlin) Conference between Truman, Churchill and Stalin. Because of their conflicting interests the powers decided to postpone consideration until the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers convened in London the following month. The debate was later continued in the Paris Peace Conference between 29th July and 15th October 1946. It was decided that the final disposal of the former Italian colonies be determined by agreement among the Big Four Powers within one year, and the matter be submitted to the UN General Assembly for disposition³⁶².

Unfortunately, the Four Powers failed to agree on the matter and the 15th September 1947 deadline date passed. Instead the Four Powers were able to approve a Peace Treaty with Italy on February 10th 1947, which the latter ratified on 2nd August the same year³⁶³. The Treaty was also later approved by other states which had declared war on the Axis Powers. Under the terms of the Treaty, Italy denounced her rights and titles to her former colonies. As a

³⁶⁰ See Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia, op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁶¹ For details of the debates and the federal arrangements, see Bereket Habte Selassie, *Eritrea and the United Nations, op. cit.*, pp. 27-56; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-97.

³⁶² For Article 23, see again *Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea During 1951, vol. III, op. cit.*, pp. XI-XIX.

³⁶³ See *United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 49 (1950)*, p. 139.

result, their future status was now left in the hands of the Four Powers as provided by Article 23(III) of the Peace Treaty. In October 1947, a Four-Power Commission of Investigation was formed and sent on a mission to visit the three former Italian colonies namely, Eritrea, Libya, and Italian Somaliland, in order to furnish the Four Powers with adequate information regarding the political situation in those territories. Though the commission submitted its report in May 1948, the report lacked the basis on which the Big Four could agree.

Because of such stalemate in policies, the whole question was referred to the UN General Assembly according to Article 23 of the Treaty and its annex XI(3) which called on the UN to settle the question of the disposal of the former Italian colonies. Thus, the UN General Assembly became entrusted with the task of making a final and binding recommendation on the issue. At this stage, the Bevin-Sforza plan, named after the British and Italian foreign ministers, became the background of the disagreement among the Four Powers regarding the disposal of the former Italian colonies. Their formula stipulated the division of former Italian colonies of Libya and Italian Somaliland as trusteeships of Great Britain, France and Italy. Consequently, Libya was to be divided into three parts: (a) Cyrenaica for the British; (b) Fezan for the French; and (c) Tripolitana for the Italians. In addition, Somaliland was also to remain under Italian administration, while Eritrea was to be partitioned according to the long-time wish of the British.

Despite bitter opposition from Eritrean nationalists, the first committee approved the Bevin-Sforza proposal and recommended it to the UN General Assembly for a final approval. Eritreans were fortunate that a combination of Asian, Arab, and Soviet votes blocked the proposal³⁶⁴. Thus, the fate of former Italian colonies was postponed until the Fourth Session of the UN General Assembly resumed, whose resolution 287(III) of 18th May 1949 granted Libya independence by February 1952, entrusted Somalia under a ten-year Italian trusteeship before getting independence in 1960, and sent a second commission of enquiry to Eritrea.

The main tasks of the second commission of enquiry for Eritrea was: "... to ascertain more fully the wishes and the best means of promoting the welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, to examine the question of the disposal of Eritrea and to report to the General Assembly, together with such proposals as it may deem appropriate for the solution of the problem of Eritrea"³⁶⁵. The commission was constituted of representatives from Guatemala, Pakistan,

³⁶⁴ See *General Assembly Official Record: Third Session, Part II, Plenary Meetings, 5th April-18th May, 1949*, p. 596.

³⁶⁵ See *General Assembly Resolution 289-A(IV) of 21st November 1949*, p. 30.

Burma, South Africa and Norway. The group visited Eritrea from 14th February to 6th April 1950. This period was subsequently regarded by Eritrean nationalists and their supporters as far too short to allow any well-founded conclusions. Even though this was reported to the Fifth Session of the General Assembly, the decision of the members of the commission was not unanimous. Instead they divided into minority and majority plans. The minority plan favoured a trusteeship for Eritrea after which independence could be granted (mainly Guatemala and Pakistan), while the majority plan favoured the federation with Ethiopia (mainly Burma and South Africa), with Norway proposing radically for a total union of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation for a federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia were finally adopted. Thus, the General Assembly Resolution 390-A(V) of 2nd December 1950 provided for the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation Plan and decided only for: "(1) Full autonomy for the Eritrean Government in all domestic affairs with definite limitations of the respective jurisdictions of both the Eritrean and Ethiopian Governments, and (2) A democratic regime in Eritrea with all its requisites and safeguards: respect for human rights and fundamental liberties and government of the people by the people"³⁶⁶. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister pledged before the General Assembly his country's respect and honour of the terms of the federation resolution. Precisely, the federal resolution provided for the division of powers and responsibilities between the Federal Government and the Governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia, with the residual power remaining with the members of the federation. Thus, with such an understanding, the UN Resolution 390-A(V) was given the benefit of the doubt by the Eritreans³⁶⁷. This is because it was vested in paragraph 5 of the UN Federal Resolution that Eritrea must participate in the Federal organs: legislature, executive, and judiciary. In addition, the Federal Constitution of Eritrea unequivocally stated that: "The citizens of Eritrea shall participate in the Executive and Judiciary branches, and shall be represented in the Legislative branch of the Federal Government"³⁶⁸.

However, when one examines closely the UN Resolution that federated Eritrea and Ethiopia, the resolution did not specify the establishment, organisation and working of the federal institutions, though it described and explained more fully the position and participation of the eleven (11) Eritreans in the Federal Government, and defends the concept of a strict federalism as the essential basis for the success of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation. Paragraph 5 of the

³⁶⁶ See *G.A.O.R: Fifth Session, Plenary Meetings, op. cit., p. 564.*

³⁶⁷ See *G.A.O.R: Seventh Session, Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, Supplement NO. 15 (A/2188), 1952, pp. 7 & 47.*

³⁶⁸ See *para. 5 of the resolution in ibid.*

UN Resolution 390-A(V) and the Federal Act, and Article 7 of the Eritrean Constitution only stated that: “An Imperial Federal Council must compose of five Eritreans and five Ethiopians who would meet at least once a year to advise upon the common federal affairs, etc., of the federation. The Council therefore acted as a liaison between the Eritrean government and Emperor Haile Selassie”³⁶⁹. To effect and implement the directives, the UN Commissioner in Eritrea was mandated the authority to implement the Eritrea-Ethiopia Federation under paragraphs 12, 13 and 15 of the Federal resolution. Be that as it were, the federal arrangement had no built-in guarantee to protect Eritrean autonomy, which meant that in the event of Ethiopian violation of the terms of the settlement, the UN would have the ultimate responsibility to guarantee against any violation or to provide remedies for any violations. Such was the view of the legal panel that drafted the final report³⁷⁰.

On the other hand, though the federal constitution had denied the Eritrean people their right to determine their own destiny, it did recognise their national identity and that of Eritrea as a territorial entity. It also provided for an autonomous Eritrean government and for the respect of the institutions, religions, and languages of the Eritrean people. It further promised all persons in Eritrea the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms through the provisions of a Bill of Rights. Moreover, it did enshrine the democratic principle in Article 16 of the Eritrean constitution derived from Resolution 390-A(V), which was not to be amended under any circumstances. In spite of all this, the federal arrangement proved simply a window-dressing when instantly after the federation came into effect in September 1952, the Emperor's government began to undermine the federation. Violations of the terms of the Federal Act took place at all levels, draining the federal and democratic principles of their essence outlined above, and reduced Eritrean autonomy quite drastically. Such violations of human and democratic rights provoked Eritreans to send urgent petitions to the UN and to organise unconventional protests and demonstrations but none were accorded any attention. The gravest consequence of this was the immediate substitution of the official Eritrean languages with the Ethiopian national language of Amharic, both for purposes of official communication and for instruction. This has to date left a whole generation of Eritreans educationally handicapped. In addition, political parties and trade unions were banned, as were all meetings of any kind organised by Eritreans.

Finally, in November 1962, the Emperor himself delivered the *coup de grace*, unilaterally abrogating the federation, sending his troops of occupation and declaring Eritrea a simple

³⁶⁹ See Semere Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁷⁰ See *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner to Eritrea, Ch. II, Para. 201, op. cit.*

fourteenth province of Ethiopia. According to most historians, Eritreans tried their best through protests and by sending petitions to the UN, but all unfortunately fell on deaf ears³⁷¹. In the face of a flagrant violation of the federal arrangement which it worked hard to fashion, the United States government and the entire world community remained silent. For most Eritreans, this silence did in retrospect confirm the U.S government awareness of the Eritrean people's favour of independence rather than federation, which the US simply undermined in support of the Emperor's territorial claim over Eritrea. Emperor Haile Selassie was favoured by the Americans because he had promised the latter, apart from mere loyalty, important naval and air base and communication facilities in Eritrea.³⁷² It could be argued after the foregoing review that the Eritrean peoples took up arms as a last resort after all pleas for a peaceful settlement of their question did not yield favourable consequences.

4.2. The Take-Off of the Eritrean Struggle for Independence - Eritrean Fronts: ELM, ELF, and EPLF

The Eritrean struggle for independence began just under a few years before the termination of the federation. By the time Haile Selassie abrogated the federal constitution and annexed Eritrea as a fourteenth province of his empire, a number of opposition leaders had already fled into exile in neighbouring Sudan and Egypt in protest against the federal arrangement itself. For example, Woldeab Woldemariam had found a safe escape to Egypt where he was accorded a warm welcome and allowed to use the radio in Cairo for broadcasting as early as 1956 by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Woldemariam's daily broadcast became a strong encouragement to other dissident nationalist forces, mainly students and workers, to get organised inside Eritrea. Unlike Ethiopia, trade unions had been allowed to operate in Eritrea and these provided the nucleus of a working-class leadership³⁷³. The unions became charged with the role of addressing political grievances that were compounded by economic grievances since the territory's economy began to slow down because of the departure of many Italian investors and entrepreneurs. Eritrean patriots both inside and outside in the diaspora felt they

³⁷¹ See for example Stefano Poscia, *op. cit.*, p. 45; and EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁷² See Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁷³ According to John Markakis, the federation was an auspicious start, complete with a model constitution, elections, a free press, and a budding trade-union movement; all in stark contrast to the feudal regime across the border in Ethiopia. See his, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1(1988), p. 53.

were now left with one choice, to continue the struggle by arms, which marked Eritrea's formal response to Ethiopia's long interference in their autonomy³⁷⁴.

From then, Eritreans started to mobilise themselves in a much more organised manner to fight for their independence. Thus, new leaders emerged with new strategies and means of resistance to salvage Eritrea's future as a distinct political entity, a people with a country of their own. What this means is that party politics of the 1940s and 1950s was now overhauled and its traditional power brokers became replaced by young exiles who focused more on the task of reconciling the fragmented nationalism that had failed during the federation years. The young exiles organised widespread acts of civil disobedience and constant political protests that received popular support. The new leadership appealed for national reconciliation and mobilised the masses through social gatherings, sports, where tea-houses became sole mobilisation centers for youth, workers, and small traders. Cultural symbols were now used to help iron out the schism between the Muslim and Christian populations. We will now briefly outline the history of clandestine organisations that shaped and were shaped by the Eritrean struggle.

(a) Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM)

The Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) was founded in November 1958. A number of young Eritrean exiles and emigrant workers residing in Port Sudan were instrumental in its formation³⁷⁵. Though this group had no previous links with the Eritrean political parties of the past, they were inspired by the tenets of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). The Sudanese Communist Party was one of the best organised groups in black Africa at the time and since these young exiles were in the strategic Red Sea town of Port Sudan, they adopted SCP's structures of recruitment and mobilisation³⁷⁶. The ELM charter emphasised the salience of

³⁷⁴ Ethiopia's interference did not only drive the earlier advocates of independence to rebellion but, as Trevaskis had predicted, alienated the former unionists also to the point where they gradually defected to join the movement. See G.K.N. Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p. 130; John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 54; and Araya Tseggai, "The History of the Eritrean Struggle", in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

³⁷⁵ These revolutionaries included Mohammed Said Nawud, Saleh Ahmed Iyay, Yasin El Gade, Mohammed El Hassan and Said Jabr. See John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 106; in idem, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 55; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³⁷⁶ See Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in the Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 163-183. Discusses more about the impact of the SCP in the rest of the continent.

unity among Muslims and Christians because its leadership was conscious of the harmful effects of religious divisions of the 1940s³⁷⁷. ELM recruited from the working class, traders, social groups from which the leadership was derived and from teachers and students who resented the *Amharisation* of schools³⁷⁸. Thus, class divisions, politics of patronage, and inter-elite alliances as practised by traditional leaders or parties in the 1940s and early 1950s were phased out. Eritrea was, therefore, redefined to mean a politically distinct, pluralist and secular state. Independence, and the restoration of Eritrean constitutional rights were sought. Initially, ELM did openly reject the consolidation of Ethiopianism and denounced elite nationalism based on patronage politics and confessionalism. But since the anti-colonialist elite politicians of the 1940s had failed to construct a common platform for Eritrean nationalism, ELM leadership had to develop new methods, networks, and institutions to ensure the future survival of a secular, independent Eritrea³⁷⁹.

With such developments, ELM became widely known abroad by its Arabic name of *harekat al-tahrir Ertrya* and internally by its Tigringya name *Mahber Showate*. In Tigringya *Mahber Showate* means “group of seven”, and implied that the ELM group was organised in secret cells of seven members each, mainly in the urban centers. The organisation of clandestine cells at the grass-root level was a clear manifestation of the new methods adopted by the ELM. According to Poscia and Iyob, “the cells consisted of a basic group of seven, each of whom was entrusted with the task of recruiting six other members. Induction into the organisation included an oath to support the aims outlined in the organisation's preamble, an undertaking to donate 3 percent of earnings to the nationalist cause, and attendance at bi-weekly meetings”³⁸⁰.

Operating with such methods, the ELM structure superseded that of party politicians and traditional rulers in the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, it won the support of Eritreans of different ages, faiths, and economic classes. This created, in a short time, what Markakis has

³⁷⁷ For ELM, the realisation of the Eritrean nation lied very much on the unity of the two religions, a fact that later brought eminent success for the EPLF. Thus, the ELM statutes declared: “Muslim and Christians are brothers and their unity makes Eritrea one [nation]”. See *Statutes of the Eritrean Liberation Movement* (Eritrea, 1982), in Arabic; and John Markakis, “The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea”, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁷⁸ The term *Amharisation* is derived from the Ethiopian feudal language - Amharic. In 1962, after abrogating the federal autonomy Haile Selassie abolished the official languages of Eritrea and imposed Amharic. See EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁷⁹ See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³⁸⁰ See Stefano Poscia, pp. 69-70; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

termed an “amoeba-like” movement throughout Eritrea’s urban centers³⁸¹, and ELM became the sole strong organisation with a national outlook, burying all previous divisions amongst Eritrean nationals. There were two factors that sped up the revolution: (a) radio broadcasts from Cairo intensified the recruitment of Eritreans; and (b) “Amharisation” increased alienation in schools and the Ministry of Education. These factors became a major driving force behind recruitment and the banning of all political parties brought about the politicisation of social organisations such as sports teams³⁸². In a sense, the organisation laid down a strong foundation for a successful Eritrean people’s national struggle. The period between 1952 and 1961 not only created favourable conditions for the formation of a single national struggle but also trained what could be the core of a liberation movement.

Operating from Sudan, the ELM also advocated liberation by *coup d’etat*. Thus, they were mainly influenced by the 1958 bloodless coup in the Sudan that brought the first military regime of Ibrahim Abboud to power in the Sudan when the army took over from the parliamentary government that had governed Sudan since independence in 1956³⁸³. However, ELM’s plot to overthrow the federal government and declare Eritrea’s independence never materialised. A number of factors led to its quick demise: (1) It developed links with people like Ibrahim Sultan and Woldeab Woldemariam who were previously requested and asked to support the proposed coup, but declined and instead accused the ELM’s coup attempt of radical nationalism and communist-inspired organisation; (2) It had no army on the ground since its leaders operated only from exile; (3) Before the coup could be mounted, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), a rival organisation, became established in 1960 under the alternate leadership of Idris M. Adem and the ELF began to alienate the ELM drastically; (4) Woldeab Woldemariam joined the ELF in 1962 after a failed unity meeting arranged by the post-Abboud Sudanese government³⁸⁴. Thus, (5) the ELF’s declaration of armed struggle as the

³⁸¹ According to John Markakis ELM’s organisational skills gained popularity and it spread throughout Eritrean towns and cities. See John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

³⁸² Stefano Poscia writes about Adulis, the Eritrean team that travelled for a national match with a Sudanese team, where members of the team were later recruited by ELM as internal mobilizers. For example, a Tekie Yihdego later played a major role in recruiting the youth in Asmara. See Stefano Poscia, *op. cit.*, p. 70; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³⁸³ For the background to successive regimes in the Sudan since independence, see Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan’s Political Evolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990); and Peter Woodward, *Sudan 1889-1989: The Unstable State* (London: Lester Crook Academic Publishing, 1990).

³⁸⁴ In a conversation with Ato Ibrahim Totil, a pioneer of ELM, Woldemariam’s move was decisive because it changed the direction of the struggle and soon ELF was to assume a formidable role in the struggle for independence. Ibrahim Totil comes from Barentu. He was also a member of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) before joining the ELM in 1960 and he is now based in Eritrea’s second city

sole means of achieving Eritrean independence appealed to a larger audience of the Eritrean populace. This was further strengthened with the fact that a large number of ELM cell members defected and joined the ELF. (6) Skirmishes between the ELM and the ELF had alerted the Ethiopian government to the threat of organised opposition. Thus, government surveillance became more acute, making underground operations become more difficult to carry out³⁸⁵. (7) In September 1961, the first shots were fired that were to mark the beginning of armed resistance and the subsequent demise of the ELM³⁸⁶. (8) In 1963 the ELF began to procure arms for its intended goal-armed struggle. In 1964, the ELF leadership sent an ultimatum to the ELM, pointing out that a liberation front already existed and told Mohammed Nawud (ELM's leader) to reunite with the ELF or face elimination, thus, in May 1965 the two opposing groups clashed and the ELM sustained more casualties³⁸⁷. (9) Finally, because of such clash, the ELM could not deter Ethiopia's forcible integration of Eritrea into the empire, and it was overtaken by a more militant organisation which promised to accomplish, by guerrilla war, what the ELM had been unable to bring about by other means.

(b) Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)

Historically, the ELF was conceived in September 1961, just a year before the formal annexation of Eritrea. With the federation dead and political and press freedoms curtailed it was inevitable that opposition to the Imperial Government should go underground. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) started to form in the last years of the Federation when it became clear that Eritrea would lose its autonomy. Idris M. Adem became its first leader who eventually declared its existence and formed a Provisional Executive Committee. Although

of Massawa (Eritrea's major port) at the Red Sea coast as Governor of Northern Red Sea Region (formerly Semhar region).

³⁸⁵ For Markakis, several ELM members were arrested in 1961, and its cell structure was gradually dismantled and phased out. See John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict, op. cit.*, p. 108.

³⁸⁶ Hamid Idris Awate fired the first bullet, but what has been mooted about the incident is, neither the ELM nor the ELF had anything to do with him. It has been confirmed in various writings that he fired the first bullet at an isolated police post in Barka region. According to Hodges, Awate had an excellent record of guerrilla fighting and he is reported to have driven back Ethiopian soldiers in 1948 and 1950. see Donald C. Hodges and Robert Elias Abu Shanab (eds.), *NLF, National Liberation Fronts, 1960/1970* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1972), p. 210; and for Markakis, Hamid Idris Awate remains of symbolic significance as the herald of the Eritrean revolution, a veteran outlaw who had gained notoriety in nomad tribal clashes in the western lowlands during the 1940s. See John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

³⁸⁷ See Stefano Poscia, *op. cit.*, p. 83; and John Markakis, "The Nationalist Struggle in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 109.

opposition to the Government was particularly exerted by peasants from the rural western lowlands of Barka where the ELF had gained its first recruits and scored its initial success, students and workers from the highlands and from urban centers in the Sudan and Egypt had also begun to join³⁸⁸. The Muslims were markedly hostile to the Ethiopian regime because they believed that they were about to be dominated by a Christian-oriented government, a feeling that was to become responsible for the future fragmentation of the Front. From that time, these Muslims dedicated the Front to the freedom of Eritrea by the force of arms. Much of the action in the mid-sixties took place in western Eritrea because the guerrillas could operate from safe bases inside the Sudan where they could easily withdraw if need arose. Like other guerrilla insurgencies, the ELF tactics were to ambush small security units or attack government installations such as police posts, highway depots, bridges, and roads. For example, they from time to time engaged in spectacular ambushes on the railway which runs from Asmara to link with the two important inland towns of Keren and Agordat.

In a matter of a few years the social composition of the fighting forces began to change. Emancipated serfs from the lowlands constituted the military wing of the ELF. In 1962, students, intellectuals, and workers from other sections of Eritrea also began to join the Front. Because the ELF leadership was mainly in exile, there was a need to remove them from their positions and replace them with fighters on the ground. This caused further struggle within the field and democratic forces began to surface. For example, while one group of opponents believed that the ELF could be reformed from within, others contemplated a creation of a new Front with a revolutionary orientation as a precondition for any future success of the revolution in Eritrea. The latter trend finally prevailed leading to the formation of the EPLF in 1970.

The Tigringya and Arabic names of the ELF-*Tegadla Harnet Ertra* and *Jabhat Atahrir al Ertrya-Qiyada al Ama*, were crucial names in the mobilisation of the masses. The ELF was also welcome news to most Arab countries who perceived it as a potential stepping stone in the expansion of Pan-Arab policy³⁸⁹. It was the military and financial support from the Arab countries that gave the Front immediate effect in its activities. For example, by the middle of

³⁸⁸ See Colin Legum and James Firebrace, *Eritrea and Tigray*, Report No. 5 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1983), p. 8.

³⁸⁹ Mordechai Abir has written that Syria in particular became the champion of the ELF, which it claimed, was an Arab liberation movement fighting a reactionary pro-Israeli regime. He quotes a Syrian Newspaper in 1964 which had published a map with Eritrea included in the Arab World. See Mordechai Abir, "The Contentious Horn of Africa", *Conflict Studies*, no. 24 (June 1972), pp. 5-6; and for John Markakis, the regimes in Syria and Iraq were strongly influenced by the Ba'athists, whose pan-Arab vision seemed to include Eritrea. See his "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 56.

1964, Syria alone had sent its major assistance in the form of only kalashnikov assault rifles. With such received help, ELF forces grew from a few hundred men armed with antiquated weapons to about two thousand men with relatively modern weapons³⁹⁰. Although an Eritrean anti-guerrilla commando was allegedly organised with help from Israeli experts³⁹¹, the new developments in the Front rendered the small imperial garrison in Eritrea unable to cope with the situation on the ground. From that time, the imperial army remained inadequate in trying to comb the vast and physically difficult terrain of western Eritrea. The ELF forces continued to grow and they gradually gained control of most of the rural area of this terrain.

The ELF's emphasis on armed struggle as the only alternative to Ethiopian domination continued to find resonance among the radical students and disillusioned civil servants and workers. Former ELM members were also approached to join the ELF which in turn portrayed itself as the logical extension of the ELM's urban-based resistance and began to justify its brutal elimination of the ELM in 1965. In short, the ELM's achievements were appropriated by the ELF, which posed itself as the sole liberation front dedicated to the realisation of independence through the barrel of the gun. Though the creation of the ELF was welcome news to Eritreans who had felt betrayed by the UN, the organisation lacked a clear ideological line and a political programme that could have safeguarded the interests of the oppressed majority of Eritreans. Worst of all, the ELF was allegedly led by a self-styled leadership, residing abroad, whose main aim was, to the eyes of most Eritreans, to set-up a neo-colonial state through armed struggle by making an independent Eritrea an Arab country. Because of this, the ELF leadership was accused of having encouraged religious antagonism and fanned backward differences and sentiments, of a regional and ethnic nature, so as to assert its leadership. For that reason, the EPLF was to put all blame for any divisions amongst leading Eritrean nationalists on the ELF's approach rather than on the ELM.

As a reaction to that, young recruits from both Christian and Muslim communities began agitating for changes and reforms within the Front. Together with other reformers who had come from training in Syria and China this group protested against the repressive measures the self-styled leaders had taken against some sections of the Eritrean masses. From 1965 to 1969, the internal squabbles within the ELF had intensified and its leadership responded ruthlessly, killing about five hundred of the fighters who had requested changes and reform, and set-out to consolidate its power by continuous intimidation of the rest of the fighters.

³⁹⁰ See Christopher Clapham, "Ethiopia and Somalia", *Conflicts in the Horn of Africa* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1972), p. 10.

³⁹¹ See Mordechai Abir, "The Contentious Horn of Africa", *op. cit.*, p. 6; and EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, p. 22, also lamented the presence of these experts.

This particular incident and the previous killing by the Muslim-dominated ELF of many other Christian highlanders and some dissident Muslims, led to the desertion of a number of disaffected guerrillas to the Ethiopian Government³⁹².

Thus, it became clear to the progressives within the ELF that changes from within were impossible to achieve without risking elimination. The progressive elements demanded a more democratically-run and ideologically-oriented movement. Between 1968 and 1969, conferences were launched in an attempt to overhaul the ELF's command structure that was divided into zones with autonomous leadership. In August 1969, a Conference of Adobha was convened in an effort of trying to restore the unity of the divided rank and file of the Eritrean guerrillas. The convening of the Adobha conference was crucial because the Imperial Government had begun to exploit the differences in the Front by launching a major military offensive against the budding guerrilla movement in 1967. The poor showing of the guerrilla army during the Ethiopian attack of 1967 frustrated many of the young, educated and politically sophisticated cadres, and that led to a process of inquiry known as the *Eslah* (reform) movement. All criticism was, therefore, directed against the zonal fragmentation of the army, but soon came to focus on the ineffectiveness of the unrepresentative and absent leaders³⁹³. The government's onslaught devastated large areas of the country and drove the first of thousands of Eritrean peasants into exile in neighbouring Sudan. Unfortunately, the Adobha meeting failed in its efforts of trying to breach the gap and heal the wounds within the Front. The power struggle within the ELF intensified and generated splinter groups of fighters who decisively disengaged from the ELF in 1969. The groups, namely, the People's Liberation Front (PLF), the Eritrean Liberation Front and the People's Liberation Front (ELF-PLF), and the ELF-Ubel, all represented a mixture of Christians and Muslims from different areas of the country. The fragmentation process was eventually overcome with the rise of the EPLF, to which we will turn below.

According to most scholars of Eritrean Nationalism, the major weaknesses of ELF could be summarised as follows: (1) The rectification movement was at first spontaneous, with no clearly-defined ideological, political and/or economic programme, and lacked a well-developed military organisation. It had made no study of the Eritrean society or of the impact of colonialism on the Eritrean people. For example, the question of defining "enemies and friends" at the national and international levels was not posed, let alone answered. (2) The

³⁹² See Araya Tseggai, "The History of the Eritrean Struggle", in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁹³ See John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea", *op. cit.*, p. 60.

ELF had Arab links that enabled Ethiopia to portray the ELF's struggle as an Arab-inspired conspiracy³⁹⁴. In addition to that, since the Ba'athist parties in the Arab World had strong ties with the Communist USSR, the ELF struggle became branded as a "Communist-Inspired" destabilisation of Ethiopia³⁹⁵. As a result, the Eritrean struggle under the ELF became categorised as both an Arab threat to the African regional order and a Communist threat to the international order, making the Ethiopian regime gain sympathy from both the USA and Israel and its military offensive against Eritrean rebels became legitimised even from abroad³⁹⁶. (3) From the outset, the ELF political campaign took a religious bent. Its leadership divided Eritrea into regions and divided the Liberation Army - command as well as rank and file - along ethnic, regional and religious lines. (4) The Supreme Council, the highest body, was not responsible to any authority and it began to engage in wanton divisiveness. This body was not only based far from the field but also disunited. Each Supreme Council member attempted to build his own power base exacerbating the divisions within the growing Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA)³⁹⁷.

In short, most Eritrean nationalists hold that the ELF was not prepared to guide the rural population into a revolution which would have social implications³⁹⁸. Therefore, the formation of the EPLF became a historical necessity. Though faced with a liquidation threat from the ELF, the EPLF proved later a capable organisation that would deliver Eritreans independence.

(c) The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)

³⁹⁴ See in particular the Ethiopian Ministry of Information Press Department, *Historical Truth About Eritrea* (Addis Ababa, July 1988).

³⁹⁵ See *Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Ninety-Fourth Congress, Second Session*; George Shepherd, *The Trampled Grass: Tributary States and Self-reliance in the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), pp. 68-70, 80-83; Haggai Erlich, *The Struggle over Eritrea: 1962-1978* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1982); in idem, "The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: The Misreading of 'politica Sciona' and 'Politica Tigrigna'", in Dennis L. Bark (ed.), *The Red Sea Orchestra: The Case of Africa, vol. II* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1988), pp. 130-133; and Paul Henze, "The Soviet Impact on African Political Dynamics", in Denis L Bark, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-43.

³⁹⁶ See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 108. (emphasis added)

³⁹⁷ See EPLF *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 32-40.

³⁹⁸ See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea, op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.

The Adobha conference decided that the unity of the liberation army was imperative, if they were to survive against the Ethiopian more superior force. At the conference, a number of issues were undertaken: a thirty-eight-member body known as the *Ki'yada al'Ama* or General Command (GC) was formed to replace the ineffectual Revolutionary Command (RC) based in Cairo and its liaison office in Kassala (Eastern Sudan) and resolved that the first ELF congress be held within a year. In a bid to maintain control of the Front, Osman Saleh Sabbe, a member of the defunct Revolutionary and Supreme Commands abroad, reacted to the conference by forming his own General Secretariat, the ELF-PLF Foreign Mission. What hindered a further effective escalation of factional confrontation is the fact that Osman Sabbe was more of a diplomat than a guerrilla leader and had little contacts with the field because his original supporters had joined other progressives within the Front. Notwithstanding, Osman Sabbe was influential in canvassing support for the Eritrean course among the Arabs and he always derived his power and prestige from contacts abroad. In a tougher reaction, the new GC rejected Sabbe's move of forming a Secretariat and started arresting suspects loyal to him, and his stronghold, the eastern lowlands were attacked ruthlessly and that marked the total disintegration and weakening of the ELF, providing more room for the emergence and consolidation of the EPLF.

However, the failure of the Adobha meeting in trying to breach the gap and heal the wounds of the past left progressive fighters within the movement with no other option but to disengage from the ELF in 1969 and formulate a new programme with a new leadership³⁹⁹. Three new groups were formed: (a) The People's Liberation Front (PLF); (b) The Eritrean Liberation Front-People's Liberation Front (ELF-PLF); and (c) The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF-Ubel) named after River Ubel in the lowlands. Although these groups were organised mainly by zone five members led by Abraha Tewelde and Issaias Afeworki, they were constituted of a mixture of both Christian and Muslim progressives like Ramadan Mohammed Nur and others from diverse backgrounds and areas of the country. Renewed contacts were exerted by the three groups and their leaders agreed to cooperate in a united front against the enemy until confidence was finally established. This was further strengthened by a "Tripartite Unity" which fostered the subsequent creation of the PLF2, the result of merging the PLF and the ELF-PLF.

In another conference that followed on 24th June 1970, Osman Saleh Sabbe was repudiated in a meeting at Suduh'Ela, Dankalia, where a nine-member political and military leadership was elected. However, this continuous efforts to exclude Osman Sabbe from negotiations also

³⁹⁹ See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 114; and Colin Legum and James Firebrace, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

proved counterproductive. It led into a further internal split within the newly forged union with leaders of the ELF-Ubel group supporting Osman Sabbe on the one hand, and on the other some groups in the field supported Issaias Afeworki and Ramadan Mohammed Nur (one of Sabbe's former supporters)⁴⁰⁰. In any case the cooperation between Ramadan Nur and Issaias Afeworki was crucial in the future survival of the EPLF and the duo are highly commended for their farsightedness in forging a unity between the Christians and Muslims in Eritrea. Today, Eritreans of all walks of life widely believe Afeworki and Nur provided a solid foundation for the establishment of the EPLF which liberated the country from colonial forces. It has also been observed that the EPLF suffered no further splits because Issaias and colleagues maintained what Markakis calls an "iron-discipline" within the rank and file of the Front⁴⁰¹.

On the other hand, the full emergence of the EPLF did not mean the end of other splinter groups. Despite the discipline its leadership had maintained to avoid further splits within its ranks, the EPLF was yet to face a greater challenge from the left-over of the ELF-GC in exile and a few still in hiding inside the country. The ELF-GC worked harder to match the efforts of the EPLF to counter internal dissent through increasing organisation. Therefore, the ELF-GC called for a meeting and invited the three united groups (now under the EPLF). In their unanimous response, the three groups demanded that the GC be eradicated as a precondition to their participation. With their continuous intransigence, the ELF-GC went ahead and held their congress at Ar, on the Sudanese border from October 14th to November 13th 1971⁴⁰². In this meeting, the ELF-GC condemned the three groups as reactionary forces and as a result, declared annihilation missions against the newly founded EPLF.

In a counter attempt to diffuse the ELF-GC, a delegation from the EPLF was sent to Beirut in a mission to request assistance from Sabbe's ELF-Foreign Mission (which had greater alliance with the ELF-GC)⁴⁰³. Because Sabbe had hoped to win the confidence of the newly

⁴⁰⁰ According to John Markakis, this split led to serious repercussions. See his *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 126. It's also been quite puzzling that Ramadan Mohammed Nur is out of government after the liberation of Eritrea. People I had conversation with in both Eritrea and Ethiopia gave diverse views. Some think he became sidelined because he openly disagreed with what he (Nur) saw as creeping dictatorship within the EPLF and therefore left in a protest, while others believe he opted out of government at his own choice by resigning as a gesture for leaving room for the young. The truth about this are still concealed, and as one commentator said, will one day come out clearly when opposition politics emerges in post-liberation politics in Eritrea.

⁴⁰¹ See John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁴⁰² See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 116 (emphasis added).

reorganised group in order to secure a place in the hierarchy, he was positive and a joint committee was established to supervise the distribution of military supplies. Thus, a "pseudo-alliance" was forged between Sabbe's Foreign Mission and the new group. This alliance was again perceived as a threat by ELF's Revolutionary Command (the brainchild of the ELF-GC) formed during the congress at Ar. At the same time, a programme of total reunification between the three groups moved a step forward when another meeting was held at Geteb, on the Sudanese border. After the meeting a committee was formed in October 1972 to coordinate military and political activities and commissioned to draft the conditions for a complete merger after six months. Therefore, confidence was built and a year after on September 1973, the groups agreed there were no further fundamental differences and a total merger was proclaimed with the creation of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), also known as *Hizbawi Ginbar Harnet Ertra* in *Tigringa* and *Sha'abia* in Arabic.

However, the EPLF was not really immune from future internal challenges within its ranks. For example, in 1973, a conflict surrounding the ideological correctness of its organisational structure and its alliances with Sabbe's Foreign Mission (considered reactionary) led to the emergence of an organised opposition within the EPLF leadership. The opposition came mainly from former university students who espoused a militant Marxist ideology, named *Menkaa'e*⁴⁰⁴. These were a group of intelligentsia who accused the EPLF of being "petit bourgeois" nationalists and demanded the creation of a "Proletarian Party". In addition to that, another group who accused the EPLF leadership of ethnic discrimination also surfaced led by Solomon Woldemariam⁴⁰⁵. Thus, the EPLF leadership labelled the *Menkaa'e* group as a combination of "ultra-leftists" and "ultra-rightists", while the Solomon group to them reflected parochial grievances. Though the EPLF leadership tried to address the grievances of their critics, the more uncompromising members were placed under arrest and later guillotined⁴⁰⁶. Poscia characterises the EPLF's decision to quell internal dissent by force as a

⁴⁰⁴ *Menkaa'e* is a Tigringian term that carries a dual meaning: (a) refers to a bat, and (b) a slang for "left-handed" person. See EPLF, *Dictionary: English-Tigringa-Arabic* (Rome: RICE, 1985), p. 48. The equation of bats to the clandestine opposition is said to have indicated nocturnal activities such as secret meetings held in secret or darkness. Its second meaning, is a slang term used to refer to "left-handed" persons, which could be interpreted as an indication of leftist orientations. For more information, see Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence, op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

⁴⁰⁵ Their main complain was that they were not equally represented in the hierarchy. See Stefano Poscia, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

⁴⁰⁶ See EPLF, *The Destructive Movement of 1973* (Eritrea: EPLF, 1973), pp. 1-83.

“dark chapter” in the Front’s history and in his words, “... a situation that will remain unrevised until some of its former members decide to speak about their experiences openly”⁴⁰⁷.

Despite all the difficulties the Front experienced, the creation of the EPLF fostered the subsequent transformation of the struggle from the ELF's defiant nationalism to radical, secular nationalism in the third decade of the struggle. Between 1961 and 1981, the endemic fragmentation of Eritrean nationalism underwent continuous transformation, ultimately coalescing under the radical mobilisation of the EPLF, which successfully transcended parochial divisions and narrow agendas⁴⁰⁸. This has been true because the history of the Front has shown the EPLF evolved in the 1970s, from mainly a small band of dissidents, to a radical survivor and innovator in the 1980s. By emphasising secular nationalism and a youthful membership, the EPLF’s goals reflected those of the ELM.

As we mentioned earlier, the struggle for Eritrean nationhood was waged on two levels: First, through military campaign against the successive Ethiopian regimes and their allies; and second, through the construction of Pan-Eritrean political agenda. While the military resistance through armed struggle against the Ethiopian hegemony led to a military stalemate for some time, the political struggle to construct a nation out of the numerous ethnic and religious groups was saluted with success⁴⁰⁹. By the 1980s, the EPLF had successfully mobilised the diverse ethnic and religious groups and classes (women included) into a single nationalist force united around a single goal: liberation. Steps were taken to promote female emancipation within the Front, not a small task given the weight of tradition, especially among Muslims. Thus, women were urged to join the mass organisations in the liberated areas, and recruitment picked up momentum, mainly among Christian females. And eventually, women came to represent about 30% of the EPLF’s strength⁴¹⁰.

⁴⁰⁷ See Stefano Poscia, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁴⁰⁸ See EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 32-76.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Ato Yemane Ghebreab, a leading member of the EPLF and now Political Secretary of the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), Party Headquarters, Asmara, Eritrea, April 8th 1996.

⁴¹⁰ Women became involved in all activities, including combats and lived on equal terms with, and among, the men. See Doris Burges, “Women and War: Eritrea”, Briefings in *Review of African Political Economy*, nos. 45/46 (1989), pp.126-132; and the other person who details female participation during the last fifteen to twenty years of the struggle for Eritrean independence, is Amrit Wilson, *Women and the Eritrean Revolution, op. cit.*

One major factor of the EPLF success in mobilisation was the identification of the Eritrean question as an integral part of the African colonial experience⁴¹¹. The major reason why the ELF had failed in trying to win both domestic and international support was because of its close ties with the Arab and Islamic world, which suggested that a future Eritrean nation under them would be incorporated into the membership of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism⁴¹². The other factor that accrued to the EPLF's success is the idea of secular nationalism and the emphasis on education and culture as prime vehicles for political mobilisation⁴¹³. The EPLF did have a clearer political agenda than its predecessors; an agenda that emphasized anti-colonialism and opposition to American imperialism and Zionism. Leading EPLF members emphasised that "the declared opposition to 'Israeli Zionism' can best be understood not as evidence of Arab affiliation so much as a response to Israel's training of Ethiopian military personnel, especially the notorious commandos 101"⁴¹⁴.

Ideologically, the EPLF was often described as a selective, pragmatic (even eclectic) application of Marxist philosophy adapted to the particular context of Eritrea's nationalist liberation struggle. And according to contemporaries, the EPLF documents, proclamations, and training manuals for fighters of the 1970s reflected adaptation of radical Latin American experiences drawn from the Tupamaros of Uruguay, Fidel Castro's Cuba, Vietnam, the Bolshevik model of the USSR, and Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China⁴¹⁵. The EPLF's adaptation of Marxism developed as a response to the Ethio-American alliance which supported Ethiopia's hegemonic claim against Eritrean nationalism. Though the EPLF's organisational structures and policies continued to reflect a strong Marxist influence, their

⁴¹¹ For most Eritreans, their struggle was anti-colonial just like those fought by all of Africa during the 1950s through to the 1970s. See Bereket Habte Selassie, *op. cit.*; Semere Haile, *op. cit.*; Araya Tsegai, *op. cit.*; and the EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*

⁴¹² See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁴¹³ See in particular the following EPLF documents: *Hafeshawia Politicawi T'mherti NTegadelti* (General Political Education for Fighters) (Eritrea, 1975); and *Hafeshawi Politicawi T'mherti: 1 Kifli, Tikimiti* (General Political Education, Part I, October 1978).

⁴¹⁴ See EPLF, *General Political Education for Fighters, op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁴¹⁵ The Chinese Ambassador to Eritrea and who had also previously served in Ethiopia during the last days of Mengistu confirmed in an interview the long time friendship between China and the Front, that has continued to strengthen diplomatic ties today. Interview with Ambassador Shi Yongjiu, 5th July 1996; see also Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 172, ch.8, endnote 1.

programmes and Congresses did not portray clear official declarations of a future Marxist state⁴¹⁶.

According to most EPLF officials, flexibility, discipline, pragmatism, and innovation were the Front's key characteristics that cherished its success, and distinguished it by a marked comparison from other Eritrean resistance groups that had preceded it. The EPLF's strength is attributed to its capacity and readiness to learn from the lessons of history. For example, the EPLF's first lesson was the politics of the late 1940s, when the Eritrean society was polarised along religious and ethnic lines which in turn facilitated Ethiopian incursions into the political fabric of the ex-colony. A second lesson was the ELM's swift demise in 1965, due to lack of effective organisational structure and a disciplined army. A third lesson was the features and characteristics of patronage politics and personalism exhibited in the organisational character of ELF which led to its total disappearance in 1981. Thus, the EPLF had to organise and discipline their fighting men and women in order to avoid the mistakes of the past committed by their predecessors.

As Ruth Iyob observed, "the EPLF began an active political campaign of coalition-building with Ethiopian groups which opposed the *Dergue's* regime. By the 1980s, coordinated EPLF activities and Ethiopian armed opposition groups began to engage the Ethiopian military on various fronts. This drained Ethiopia's manpower and resources in the face of another cycle of crippling famine and drought in the mid-1980s"⁴¹⁷. The stalemate was finally broken in 1988 when their successful military and political campaigns picked up momentum with the battle of Afabet and the subsequent fall of the Red Sea Port of Massawa in 1990. This marked the political erosion of the *Dergue* regime which also coincided with the forged alliance between

⁴¹⁶ In an interview with Ato Yemane Ghebreab (PFDJ), he denied the Front had ideological leanings since at one time both powers supported Ethiopia against Eritrean nationalism. And this is backed by the fact that none of the following EPLF documents record any evidence about the EPLF's ideological leanings. For example, see *Our Struggle and Its Goals* (Eritrea, November 1971); *Objectives of the National Democratic Programme: First Organisational Congress*, Eritrea, January 31st 1977; *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*; *General Political Education, Part I*, *op. cit.*; and *Proclamation on the Structure, Powers and Tasks of the Government of Eritrea*, Hadas Ertra, no. 76(22nd May 1993). Though John Young claims certain facts about Marxist practices within the EPLF and TPLF in his study of the Tigray People's Liberation Front. See John Young, "Peasants and Revolution in Ethiopia: Tigray, 1974-1989", Ph.D. Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, September 1994; and in idem, "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1(March 1996), pp. 105-120:107.

⁴¹⁷ For lessons of the past, see Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-132; and EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-76.

the EPLF and other opposition movements in Ethiopia. The successful re-unification of the various Ethiopian opposition fronts under one umbrella organisation—the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), coincided with increasing superpower ambivalence toward supporting Mengistu in his various offensives.

In addition to domestic opposition to the policies of the *Dergue*, the EPLF also began initiating successive diplomatic offensives that reduced the *Dergue* credibility both regionally and internationally; and the end of the Cold War also helped reduce, if not halt, Ethiopia’s external support⁴¹⁸. EPLF acquired legitimacy when it emphasised the *Dergue*’s arbitrary violation of human rights, the use of chemical weapons and cluster bombs, using famine as a political weapon, and the violation of Eritrea’s right to Self-Determination⁴¹⁹. Thus, the EPLF began to envision legitimacy over Eritrea and started to transform itself from a guerrilla army to a significant political as well as a military actor in the Horn of Africa.

4.3. Discourses on Liberation: Eritrean Self-Views

To be sure, all Eritreans share the same view that they are a distinct group of people who have deserved independence since the days of European colonialism. Most speakers maintained that Eritrea is a separate country from the Christian realm of the interior of the former Ethiopian Empire. It is such a conviction that bound Eritreans together to stick to their guns until the total liberation of the country in 1991 that was followed by a formal declaration of

⁴¹⁸ See EPLF, *Memorandum to the 42nd Regular Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly* (New York: October 1987). Due to the policy of Perestroika and glasnost, Gorbachev pulled out support for Ethiopia. See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World* (London: Collins, 1987), p. 143; and James M. Makinda, *Security in the Horn of Africa: an analysis of post-cold war developments in regional security and emerging strategic issues in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Djibouti* (London: Brassey’s for International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992).

⁴¹⁹ The famine highlighted the erosion of the post-imperial regime’s legitimacy in the international arena. For details on the impact of famine and drought in the 1980s, see James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, *Eritrea Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation in Eritrea* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1985); Richard Pankhurst, *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: University of Addis Ababa Press, 1985); Mesfin Woldemariam, *Rural Vulnerability to Famine in Ethiopia, 1958-1977* (London: Intermediate Technology Publication, 1986); Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris and Angela Penrose, *The Ethiopian Famine* (London: Zed Press, 1987); Robert D. Kaplan, *Surrender or Starve: The Wars Behind the Famine* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1988); Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1989); and Edmond J. Keller, “Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4(1992), pp. 609-624.

independence in 1993 after a successfully internationally supervised referendum⁴²⁰. Scholars have in the past pointed out that: "... from the time of the first European travellers onwards it is known that the area 'beyond the Mereb river', i.e. between Ethiopia proper and the sea, 'was' separate from the Christian realm of the interior"⁴²¹. Fred Halliday, in particular, concurs that the entity 'Eritrea' as presently constituted did not evolve or subsist consistently in the past but was a creation of Italian colonialism which occupied the area in the 1880s and held it until 1941 when the British took over. Eritreans do confirm in similar comments that the period of Italian colonialism contributed to the strength and firmness of their nationalism. They further argue that the thirty years of war with Ethiopia did more good than harm in cementing the different ethnic groups in Eritrea into one nation.

Our presentation of the self-understanding of Eritreans is divided into three sections. We will first deal with the views of the "elite", then with the experiences of the fighters (both demobilised fighters and soldiers still serving in the Eritrean forces), and finally we will turn to the attitudes of civilians who were at times caught between the firearms of both parties in the war. For each of these groups, our exposition evolves around the four major issues: liberation, democracy, self-determination/secession, and the transition from liberation to government.

(a) Self-views of the Elites

Those I have categorised as elites include key actors in both domestic and foreign policy during the liberation struggle and its aftermath. Specifically, the self-views are those expressed by leading figures in the EPLF which has now changed its name to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), in the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE), in Eritrea's diplomatic missions, in the Military, in the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), in the civil service and other public institutions. Common to all of these narratives are the objectives of the nature of the struggle. Most of these elites were born in the 1940s and the 1950s, and they all became of age at the time when Eritrean nationalism was under a threat of being swallowed by the expansionist Ethiopian Empire. They all went to primary and high schools in Asmara before joining either Addis Ababa University or winning scholarships

⁴²⁰ See the following informative articles on this, Okbazghi Yohannes, "Eritrea: A Country in Transition", *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 57(1993), pp. 7-28; Berhane Woldegabriel, "Eritrean Refugees in Sudan", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 23, no. 67(March 1996), pp. 87-92; Dan Connell, "Eritrea: Starting from Scratch", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 22, no. 66(December 1995), pp. 587-592; Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Eritrean Referendum: Peasant Voices", *Eritrean Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1(Spring 1996), pp. 23-67; and Tekie Fessehazion, "The Eritrean Referendum of 1993", *Eritrean Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1(Spring 1996), pp. 167-175.

⁴²¹ See in particular a piece of work by Fred Halliday, "The Eritrean Fighting", *op. cit.*, pp. 57-67:60.

abroad to Europe and the United States of America. Most of Eritrea's leading elites today began their Political involvement first as "cell-groups" in towns, or student leaders both inside and in the diaspora. According to Ato Yemane Ghebreab (PFDJ), there were a number of issues that also had a strong influence on their generation, for example, the fight against class struggle, the then floating idea of African Unity, and the era of nationalism and ideology. And as Ato Beraky Gebre Selassie had complemented, "Such issues were reinforced more by internal suppression where most of us had to experience imprisonment, mental torture, and witness the indiscriminate burning of Eritrean villages by the notorious Ethiopian army"⁴²².

In separate conversations, these elites all claim their motivation to become involved in the liberation struggle began during their high school days in Asmara. At that time, the revolution had an influencing effect because the Eritrean question became a common issue for discussion in the streets and in everyday life. In addition, there were also manifestations of ethnic nationalism, for example, Amhara *versus* either Tigrayan, Somali, Oromo or Eritrean. Thus, on the Addis Ababa University campus, Eritrean students drew maps of Eritrea and painted anti-government slogans on the walls of classrooms and/or toilets. Most of the interviewees also confirm they were very much attracted by the ideology of the EPLF that had just formed in 1970. Eritreans in the diaspora were active in forming strong associations that in turn supported the EPLF. While abroad Eritreans had learned the politics of survival and, as a result, developed the spirit of resilience that was instrumental in the formation and strengthening of Eritrean associations in exile. These associations proved a crucial means for assisting the EPLF, particularly financially. Towards the end of 1977, all active EPLF members and supporters abroad were requested to come inside the field because the leadership wanted to strengthen the various structures it had created during the first Congress, be it in the fields of education, health, agriculture, information, administration, or Political mobilisation. The positive response by most Eritreans outside to the call by their leaders in the field was significant in the transformation of the organisation's *modus operandi*. This latter group encompassed individuals from every field of expertise particularly those who had just completed their doctoral and master programmes, and others like Ato Haile Menkerios, now Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia, could not wait but left their university studies half-way to join the Front. This group constituted the bedrock of the movement because they contributed meaningfully in the various areas of the struggle. It is the narratives of their own experiences during the liberation struggle to which we now turn.

⁴²² Ato Beraky Gebre Selassie did quit his studies for an LLB at Addis Ababa University in 1972 to join the EPLF whereafter he became a leading member till the end of the struggle in 1991 and he is now Minister of Information. This words are cited from an interview with him on 23rd July 1996, in the Ministry of Information, Asmara, Eritrea.

(i) Elite Discourse on Liberation: practical definitions and conceptions

When one asks an Eritrean, in particular a member of elite, to define or give an account of what liberation is in his/her own experience after the thirty years of the struggle against Ethiopian regimes, one must as well get prepared to listen to a number of long but fascinating stories. Their expressions and explanations constitute new narratives on liberation movements in the post-colonial era. According to a number of Eritrean elites interviewed, liberation is a loaded term, and when defined in the way books have done becomes a mere theoretical concept totally detached from reality. Most of them plausibly argued that definitions and meanings people give to words normally vary depending on particular events, surrounding circumstances and the historical time. Thus, the way Eritreans may express their experiences and feelings today is obviously different from the way in which they would have expressed them at the time of the war. For this reason, liberation may mean different things to different people. For example, Ato Yemane Ghebreab thinks that an Eritrean who understands the logic of a free society would view liberation as the total removal of a whole arsenal of socio-economic, cultural and political restrictions⁴²³. Because such restrictions limit the area of choices and opportunities that are available and open to a citizen in a society. Not much contrarily, the ordinary Eritrean viewed liberation in a more direct and simple way: the removal of the Ethiopian army and the independence of Eritrea. In other words, different groups of Eritreans did experience the effect of the struggle differently depending on their respective circumstances and time. Moreover, there were Eritreans who lived within the oppressor's territory; there were those who found their way out to exile; and there were others who remained in the liberated zones. However, no matter how Eritrean self-views on liberation may vary from one person to the other, their narratives carry significant similarities. The binding ethos was that all Eritreans whether in government territories, in exile, or in the liberated areas, contributed in the fight against Ethiopian hegemony.

Talking to both elites and other Eritreans, one encounters convergence in the view that liberation meant (and still is) freedom from Ethiopian occupation and oppression, the end of Ethiopian dictatorship and the abuse of human rights, and more than anything else, freedom from poverty, ethnic, religious or regional domination and fragmentation, freedom from the social structures that have for years undermined the role of women and young people in society. Although the demand that one must be left to determine his/her own destiny has not

⁴²³ Interview with Ato Yemane Ghebreab, Political Secretary, People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), a Leading Member of the Government's Central Committee since 1987, and formerly a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs until 1994 when the PFDJ was formed.

been unique to Eritrea alone, Eritrean elites have at times idealised their own experiences during the struggle by overemphasising elements of self-independence or self-reliance, even when it is widely known that their post-liberation struggle to survive and become self-sufficient has been mainly hindered by the lack of resources⁴²⁴. Berhane Woldegabriel wrote, “For a long time we’ve been trying to convince the world that Eritrea is rich in resources and economically viable as an independent state. Now we must try to convince the world that we are poor”⁴²⁵. Despite such facts, the EPLF still displayed some arrogance in their first days in office which made them to turn down international aid from donor agencies even when they knew they were in need of external support. A foreign diplomat in Asmara interpreted that as one negative effect of a long struggle because the EPLF still assumed it was possible to survive with meagre resources after the war.

On the other hand, liberation in the experience of most Eritrean elites is not independence as an end in itself. It is the freedom of a people to choose, to act, use their resources to better their livelihood. It is not liberation in the narrowest sense where colonial masters were simply replaced by African elites without any major restructuring of the social apparatus. The wider African experience where decolonisation was marked only by raising of national flags and emblems is what Eritrean liberation leaders have had a strong desire to avoid throughout the struggle. According to Ato Menkerios:

Liberation is to be in control of one’s own destiny, the life of one’s own people, develop one’s own Political system without necessarily neglecting other people’s better examples, direct one’s own programme in terms of both foreign and domestic policies, trade, commerce and industry. To have a broader, flexible and pragmatic approach to issues of nation-building, become self-reliant. This practical understanding of liberation has continued and permeates our thinking and actions after independence⁴²⁶.

This has been strengthened more by the slogan of community participation that has endured because all Eritreans feel they have a part to play in nation-building, reconstruction, and rehabilitation in the same way they participated in the fight for freedom. In other words, an

⁴²⁴ John Markakis actually points out clearly that the EPLF and EPRDF did not have any alternative but to adhere to the regular demand for democratisation, which Hobsbawm observed, “require the adoption of all the institutional paraphernalia designed for the purposes of bourgeois societies”. See the Editorial by John Markakis, “The Horn of Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 23, no. 70(December 1996), pp. 469-474; and Eric Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 202.

⁴²⁵ See his article, “Demobilising Eritrea’s Army”, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 53(November 1993), pp. 134-135.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Ambassador Haile Menkerios (Eritrean Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 17th June 1996).

element of civic virtue through common war experience has emerged. This culture was developed during the liberation years as outlined in the Front's guidelines⁴²⁷.

The good relationship between independent Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was the result of the EPLF's firm conviction that an oppressive regime rather than the Ethiopian people was the arch enemy. Thus, one of the EPLF's pragmatic policies during the war was not only to mobilise the opinion of the Ethiopian masses against the government but to build a normal relationship with the powerful anti-government organisations in other parts of Ethiopia such as the TPLF, MEISON, EPRP, EPDM, SLF, and/or ALF. The EPLF pushed for a common ground in the views of all vanguard organisations fighting for national liberation and for democracy⁴²⁸. The TPLF (and who later brokered the alliance with other opposition to form EPRDF) too, believed there was no democracy in Ethiopia without resolving the case of Eritrea and, as a result, did welcome the programme of cooperation spearheaded by the EPLF⁴²⁹.

Furthermore, there was a belief that socialism was a workable ideology for liberation. This view was mainly held by Eritreans who went to school in the United States of America (USA) and not by those who got their education in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR)⁴³⁰. However, later on in the long process, the EPLF learnt how to do things on their own and through experience no particular "isms" were generally found applicable to the Eritrean situation. The establishment of social justice, following pragmatic policies, and learning the hard way through experience became the sole principle of the struggle. The

⁴²⁷ See the following EPLF documents: *The Eritrean Armed Struggle for Independence* (N.P., 1976); *Objectives of the National Democratic Programme: First Organisational Congress* (Eritrea, January 1977); and *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 76-101, and 166-182.

⁴²⁸ For a detailed analysis of the relationship, see *EPLF Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 145-154, and for this quotation, see pp. 152-153.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse, former TPLF Representative in Washington, London and Khartoum, and now MP and Head of EPRDF Foreign Relations, EPRDF Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (June 17th 1996).

⁴³⁰ In separate interviews with Ato Yemane Ghebream (April 1996, PFDJ Headquarters, Asmara, Eritrea) and Ambassador Haile Menkerios (17th June 1996, Eritrean Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), both confirmed a large number of Eritreans who came from exile to join the EPLF in the 1970s got their education in the USA and the former USSR. But what is interesting is the fact that those who came from the USA turned out to be strong proponents of Marxism or socialism in the struggle and the opposite was true of those who came from the former USSR, who all became better proponents of capitalism. This was mainly because of their own experiences of the contradictions of ideology in those respective societies.

Eritrean experience represents a situation where liberation becomes a continuing process in which, philosophically, human potentialities are forever enlarged. Their struggle was a perpetual search for a way of life where truth, justice, freedom and equality must triumph.

In precise terms, liberation both as a means and as a way of life, is to live in peace and determining one's own fate, and in the words of Tesfayesus, "Living in a house without fear of eviction, becoming the master of oneself, free of external threat, enjoyment of freedom without causing or inflicting pain, fear or trouble on others"⁴³¹. This is what most Eritreans believe they were for a long time deliberately denied by the successive suppressive Ethiopian regimes. They now argue that though their experience was full of pain and despair, the struggle has been very rewarding because Eritreans can now determine their own destiny and the innocent lives sacrificed in defeating the Ethiopian army in 1991 are now resting in peace. And as an Eritrean minister expressed:

The painful experience has helped people develop patience, tolerance, and a very clear outlook and pragmatic approach to issues. Eritreans have seen what war is, we have learned from the destructiveness of it and we shall be very careless to be lured into it by say any external aggressor. On the foundations of a bitter war a strong nation has been constructed. Out of hard moments, tolerance and political maturity have found greater resonance amongst the Eritrean nationals. And after a bitter war, the vision of a nation has materialised⁴³².

Some Eritreans emphasise it is difficult to define liberation the way various academics and researchers would like it to be done. For Ato Ibrahim Totil, translating practice into words especially from a feeling of a local combatant into a foreign language pervades meaning and understanding. In other words, the act of liberation, that is the moment of combat with an enemy say in the front-line, is very difficult to express in simple terms. And as he finally summed up, "Just as liberation was difficult to define during the actual combat, its logical outcome has remained difficult to demystify"⁴³³. To the individual combatant, liberation

⁴³¹ Dr. Tesfayesus Mehary served in various positions with the government and public institutions of Ethiopia till the victory in 1991 that brought Eritrea's independence and he is now Vice President of Asmara University. These are extracts from an interview with him on 2nd April 1996, Asmara, Eritrea.

⁴³² Interview with Ato Beraky Gebre Selassie, *op. cit.*

⁴³³ Ato Ibrahim Totil is one of the few left pioneers of the Eritrean struggle for independence. He joined the ELF in 1960 after becoming a member of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). He is a member of EPLF Central Committee and now resident in Massawa as Governor of Northern Red Sea Province. The interview with him was held in March 12th 1996 after a graduation ceremony at the Eritrean Institute of Management (EIM), Embatkala, Eritrea.

means commitment to kill the enemy while at the same time gambling on one's own survival. In other words, it is also a situation where killing and being killed is an ultimate possibility. In Eritrea, while EPLF war victims were often locally canonised as martyrs, the enemy's dead were often regarded as major villains. In a liberation war, there is no inquiry about companions that have disappeared during combats and life is often continued with less grief for the dead. In fact, some Eritreans explain there was more joy in death than survival especially after losing dear ones in battle. Instead martyrdom often made death rather than life a pride. "But most important of all", Ato Ibrahim Totil posed, "some of us who 'were' not formally highly educated gained a wealth of experience of how to administer even when difficulties are there. The long struggle has graduated many responsible administrators, rural/urban attorneys or judges, local technicians, field commanders, and all kinds of expertise and leadership necessary in the running of society". In this regard, the Eritrean experience has proven liberation is an institution in itself.

(ii) Discourses on Democracy: understanding and visions of the elites

The Eritrean elites would like to see democracy in practical terms more than it is held as a theory. Moreover, it has now been widely acknowledged that the liberation struggle in Eritrea exerted tremendous influence on the liberalisation and the democratisation programme in Ethiopia⁴³⁴. The Eritrean case has shown that a full participation of a people in a struggle is often followed by a full participation in the shaping of societal way of life. Eritreans were, in the first place, instruments of their own conscious participation in social, political, and economic issues during the liberation struggle. In my encounters with them, most Eritrean elites view democracy as a process and attempts of trying to weigh multi-partyism as a panacea is regarded as totally erroneous. According to Ambassador Haile Menkerios, the level of economic development and social integration required for building what one may call a stable democracy is still lacking in the African public and the effects of these often narrows multi-partyism down to ethnicity and fuels further fragmentation. For him, the EPLF was (and still is) a broad-based movement open to all the people, but democratic enough to allow divergent views. He further expressed that though pluralism is generally good and necessary as a check and balance, in practice it is not fully workable, even in the U.S. when both houses of Congress are divided in an agenda it results in delay and, therefore, blocks progress and implementation of projects (good or bad).

⁴³⁴ See in particular Assefaw Bariagaber, "Liberalisation and Democratisation in Ethiopia: Domestic Consequences of the Conflict in Eritrea", *Eritrean Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1(Spring 1996), pp. 69-89.

In this way, multi-partyism is more divisive and in Africa it divides the energy and effort of the people needed for nation-building more than it strengthens. Thus, there is an overwhelming view that any creation of parties in order to meet the demand for pluralistic governance is unacceptable not only to the Eritrean elites but also to the public at large. Given the present situation of nation-building and reconstruction, most Eritreans envision future splits within the EPLF (PFDJ) as a healthy and fast move to multi-partyism because parties emerging from such splits would still share the overall vision of prosperity and success. It is also widely accepted that there has been internal democracy within the country's only party where frequent discussions have occurred. And any differences that do arise within the party's highest organ are often those of approach rather than principle. Thus, the major actors in the party Headquarters believe the people do follow their debates because there has been conscious participation in the liberated areas from the beginning of the mobilisation of the countryside.

The most important legacy of the struggle is sacrifice and Eritrean elites view this as a crucial element in the building of public institutions, especially a democratic constitution for the nation. In a conversation with a minister, the long struggle has left a positive legacy of commitment to nation-building and reconstruction even when the government does not have enough resources to reciprocate such commitment. For example, Eritreans worked for four years without salaries only receiving remuneration in kind, be it in the form of food, medical services and/or clothes. Similarly, the national service is a workable programme and the Eritrean youth welcomes the government's proclamation on national service. Today, thousands of youths have been and others are still engaged in different voluntary activities for the reconstruction of the nation. This has been seen as one measure of democratisation since the Eritrean youth have not been forced but rather find it as a part of their contribution and commitment to nation-building. "*There is a developed kind of devotion over the years which has to be nourished*", the minister concluded⁴³⁵.

Thirty years under harsh circumstances is a long training in life and the system inculcates such experience into the culture which has to be passed to the young and future generation. Above all, liberation has also brought with it simple and less complicated methods of communication with the general public. In order to avoid political marginalisation, for example, the government has ensured the media operates in the diverse languages of its nine nationalities. Radio Eritrea (RE) operates in five languages, two more languages in newspapers and another two on Eritrean Television (ET). That this will have a greater effect in developing the high

⁴³⁵ Interview with Ato Beraky Gebre Selassie, *op. cit.*

level of tolerance and integration Eritrea's different nationalities need cannot be disputed. Of course the long struggle might have already fostered the unity and integration of the Eritrean peoples, but historically inter-cultural migrations also existed in the country. The reason why the EPLF is more highly credited is because it had encouraged the unity of the Eritrean population and at the same time allowed diversity throughout the struggle. For Ato Beraky, the EPLF was (and the PFDJ is still) interested to see diversity becoming an asset and not a liability to the nation. Therefore, the EPLF is committed to minority rights being guaranteed in Eritrea, and that the culture, language and/or religion of every Eritrean must be respected. Foreign observers see this as a security guarantee throughout the future because ambitious political elites who would like to appeal to their roots will not find resonance from their respective cultural, ethnic, regional and/or religious groupings. And a parochial outlook of political parties will be avoided. At the moment, Eritrea sees engagement in economic development as a priority whose advance may lead to the formation of healthy political parties with national rather than segmented outlook. Since its inception, the EPLF (now PFDJ) has stated clearly the formation of political parties is a right in an independent Eritrea⁴³⁶.

According to some Eritrean academics, delay in the emergence of political parties cannot be blamed on the present government because there has never been any experience of discontent apart from that under Ethiopian regimes. It is simply difficult to imagine the rise of any political party that would challenge the popularity of the EPLF (PFDJ) at the moment. It will definitely take a few years as Tesfayesus and Naty concurred: "One would be foolish to attempt a challenge against the EPLF (PFDJ) now because their victory is still being celebrated and Eritreans are simply in a honeymoon of freedom. And anybody trying to challenge the EPLF (PFDJ) now, even on constructive grounds, will be regarded as treacherous and anti-progress"⁴³⁷. So it will take quite a while for any strong opposition to rival EPLF (PFDJ) on an equal footing, and that may be made possible with the return of the young Eritreans who were born or carried with nappies to exile in the 1960s and early 1970s. Ambassador Houdek believes the generation of exiles will pose a clear (and hopefully positive) threat to future EPLF (PFDJ) followers because they will come with progressive views from

⁴³⁶ See EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*; and EPLF, *A National Charter for Eritrea: for a Democratic, Just and Prosperous Future, Approved by the Third Congress* (Nacfa, February 1994).

⁴³⁷ Dr. Tesfayesus Mehary is Vice President of Asmara University and Dr. Alexander Naty is Head of Sociology in the same institution. They in a separate conversation (1996) concurred it is not the right time to make any Political move to challenge EPLF (PFDJ) policies because the smoke of their bullets that brought victory to Eritrea is still lingering close to the air and people could smell it every morning of their wake.

abroad to phase out the rather strict and stream-lined thinking acquired during the struggle⁴³⁸. It is also widely observed that the legacy of fear and obedience to policies because of command which was necessary for executing the war has inhibited the system that it will take a while before challenging voices rise within the system itself.

Today, most Eritrean elites believe the understanding of what democracy is has been very much abused. For them, democracy and its formal attributes⁴³⁹, particularly as outlined in many scholarly works, has dominated the minds of people across the board in every society with much less emphasis given to its practice. In its most recent wave across the world, democracy has meant regular election exercises, that have in turn led to clashes not only between the different Political parties, but between the different ethnic, religious, or regional groupings that follow them. As a PFDJ official posed a question: “Can one say democracy is in operation in Kenya, Zambia, Cameroon, and name them? Elections, Yes! But also ethnic clashes, riots, more fragmentation and loss of vision of one nation one people!” In his words, Ato Yemane further explained:

Democracy to us is and will not be measured only by termly elections or casting the ballot or proliferation of Political parties with parochial agendas in order to meet the demand for multi-partyism. We shall never view it that way ... the fear is many parties may reverse and destroy our already well fused differences. In most of Africa, political parties have often engaged in divisive campaigns rather than in competing visions of national development and progress⁴⁴⁰.

Most Eritrean elites all argue that democracy is not a day or an overnight phenomenon. It emerges over time and must be grounded in the culture of the people concerned. So their position is that they will not react unnecessarily according to the sound of drums beaten far away. Ato Yemane Ghebreab constructively further represented the view of the PFDJ in the following:

What the party is aspiring for is a system where people have control over their lives. Democracy must mean active participation of the population not only in the politics of the country (regular elections only) but in sharing the country’s resources and difficulties. Eritrea is a small country, it had to tap its limited

⁴³⁸ Mr. Robert G. Houdek, U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea echoed this words in a two-hour conversation in his Office (Asmara, 10th July 1996).

⁴³⁹ See chapter two above for more theoretical understandings of democracy.

⁴⁴⁰ This words were expressed in a long conversation with the author at the PFDJ Headquarters in Asmara on April 8th 1996.

resources to succeed. Though small, our country is diverse and all sections of society must be engaged in national issues. All sections of society including election losers (in the future) must have a share in the benefits of national development. The party has a project of equal active participation of all peoples of Eritrea in politics (yes! positive politics) and avoid marginalisation that wrecked the country in the early days of the struggle. Here history has become a useful instructor to the political leaders. The experience of the EPLF is that it was able to tap the resources of its people to succeed. Active engagement of all Eritreans in national issues, politics, and in life was the central mechanism of the organisation. Eritrea will have one person one vote but there will be no marginalisation of people because of election results. That is important! The party is very keen in ensuring that all sections of the population get something. The whole exercise of competition in elections is on the level of efficient leadership that can carry out the programme of liberalisation and democratisation hand in hand with national development in quite an effective manner. So the competition will be based on who shows better leadership ability and not between segments of society because this creates marginalisation and therefore conflict may arise between and amongst different nationalities in the country⁴⁴¹.

The Chairman of the Eritrean Constitutional Commission (CCE), Bereket Habte Selassie, believes that Eritrea needs “a system that will preserve and protect peoples rights (defined in terms of equal opportunity for all)”⁴⁴². According to him, history has taught Eritreans the detriments of alienation and they now know accountability and transparency are efficacious for a progressive political life. Therefore, the Eritrean constitution will provide for a multi-party system but will also clarify the nature and circumstances under which political parties are eligible for registration. In other words, national rather than parochial outlook will be one underlying pre-condition in the formation of political parties in Eritrea.

Most elites think democracy (not particularly its modern conception) is not an alien element to the Eritrean traditional polity. In Eritrea, what may be termed democracy was generally coterminous to the Eritrean villages, the only difference is that the *Baito* debates often came to a conclusion through consensus rather than parliamentary balloting. However, the Eritrean *Baito* also allowed direct deliberations after prolonged debates and the EPLF claimed its democratic programme had its foundations on this village-type democracy.

During the liberation struggle in Eritrea, representatives from all sectors of EPLF comprised the supreme legislative body of the Front at a congress, from which a central committee and an executive body was elected. Today, a 150-member National Assembly is composed of 75

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² Interview with Prof. Bereket Habte Selassie, *op. cit.*

members of the Central Council of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), formerly EPLF, and 75 members from regional assemblies⁴⁴³. According to Eritrean elites, the legislature as a representative of people is very important even in a war situation because it provides a forum where people must participate in electing their leaders. Since its inception in the 1970s, the EPLF had two major congresses that determined the composition of its leadership. In 1977, the first Congress elected Ramadan Mohammed Nur as the EPLF Secretary General and Issaias Afeworki (presently the country's President) was made Assistant Secretary General respectively. A similar exercise was carried out ten years later in 1987 and the reverse took place where the assistant became the first and vice versa. In 1991, the EPLF decided it had won the war but the Eritreans must be left to decide their own fate. Therefore, in 1993 the international community was invited to preside over a referendum where Eritreans decided Yes! for independence and the exercise was declared free and fair. These litany of events are often today cited by Eritrean elites as clear indicators (if not acts) of democracy. Because of this, the Eritrean leadership finds the current debates on democratisation and its genus concept multi-partyism as of less importance compared to other post-war programmes dealing with rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In a conversation, a foreign journalist summed up: "The concept of democracy in post-liberation governments in Africa (particularly in Eritrea and Uganda) is centred around 'participation'"⁴⁴⁴. Both Museveni and Afeworki have argued more than once that Africa must make a cautious turn in its democratisation agenda and instead put much emphasis on "participation" rather than "multi-partyism". For these two post-liberation leaders, there is no imperative in termly elections that do not generate development and progress but would instead derange society. Their conviction is based on the fact that most African countries are multi-ethnic and at times multi-religious, and putting much emphasis on multi-partyism has often proved counterproductive since parties have tend to follow ethnic, religious or even regional lines. They argue that there would be nothing wrong with a polarised debate that would stop, say, in parliament such as those that terminate inside the Commons and/or Congress in Britain and the United States. In mature democracies, defeat in elections and thereafter in debates in the Commons or Congress is often acceptable to both individuals and party members, and it has not often meant defeat in every respect of one's life. In most of

⁴⁴³ See *International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution: A Summary Report* (January 7th-12th, 1995, Asmara, Eritrea), p. 5. This manual is also available in both Tigrigna and Arabic languages.

⁴⁴⁴ Conversation with Andrea Sempleci, a Freelance Italian Journalist who had interviewed both Presidents Yoweri Museveni (1992) and Issaias Afeworki (1996). The conversation took place on April 10th 1996, Asmara, Eritrea.

Africa, defeat in elections, let alone failing to push a bill through in parliament, means the failure, not only of the individual who contests for a position, but of the whole household, village, ethnic group, region and/or religion.

Because the individual is tied to his background, post-elections experiences have often been followed by conflicts in most of Africa such as the constant clashes in Kenya's Rift Valley Province after the 1992 multi-party elections; the political quagmires in post-apartheid South Africa's Kwazulu Natal or the continuation of the civil war in Angola after the 1993 elections. Though it is often common practise that post-election government programmes must reward its voters, in Africa the programme is also often directed towards the punishment of political opponents. As a result, post-election conflicts do not only occur between the government in power and leaders of the opposition, but also between their followers. And such is the experience countries like Eritrea and Uganda do not wish to encounter. In Uganda, Museveni has already introduced what is widely known today as a "no-party" democracy. Museveni's main argument is that democracy may become better exercised when individuals, who are not affiliated with political parties, compete for seats in parliament rather than candidates sponsored by political parties that are in turn based on parochial backgrounds. So that when the individual fails to win, it is not the ethnic group, religion or region that has failed. And likewise, if there are any following punishments for political opponents, these must be limited to the individual who contested the polls.

(iii) Constructed Nationalism and Identity: Elite Discourses on Secession/Self-Determination

The fight for secession and self-determination in Eritrea was triggered by the feeling of a strong separate nationalism from Ethiopia. Thus, the yes 98.5 percent vote for national independence and sovereignty in 1993 was the culmination of an important chapter in the history of the people of Eritrea. For fifty years Eritreans had fought for, what appeared to many as a dream, independence. Nonetheless, the conviction that the war would be won was detectable because there was a common belief during the struggle in Eritrea that the EPLF leadership had known and controlled the rules of the game. A PFDJ chief aptly summarised:

We knew and we read the principles of self-determination that no level of relative strength of the other can subject a people to suppression forever. We fought against enemies who had superior capacity, with meagre outside support, relying on our people and own capacity, with heavy sacrifices, tremendous effort, vigilance, political maturity and ingenuity. Our struggle was not limited to combatting the enemy; we laid down the proper foundation for an independent country.

Though the idea of self-determination has been widely accepted since the appearance of the democratic ideologies in the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, for reasons unknown it was regarded incommensurate with the case of Eritrea. European imperialists conquered much of Africa and Asia, and no contradiction was seen between the liberation of Europe and Americas with the subjection of peoples in the rest of the world, Eritrea included. From Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen points" to numerous UN and Human Rights Conventions and Declarations, self-determination became the catch phrase of world politics. However, the post-World War II African regional order did not allow Eritrea to benefit from such examples. Self-determination in the post-colonial era, with its attendant demands for Political participation, threatened the stability and order of the new fragile states because new African heads of state were unable and at times unwilling to confront complex problems of governance of multi-ethnic and segmented societies. Thus they opted to limit the applicability of the right of self-determination to cases of Africans struggling against European or white rule as happened in Portuguese colonies in Africa and Southern Rhodesia. And in cases where the right of self-determination was invoked against acts of expansion by neighbouring African states, the territorial integrity of sovereign states was upheld. For this reason, it was not a coincidence that the OAU Charter strongly upheld the new *status quo* and, as a result, self-determination was relegated to nothing more than a rhetorical clause, and Rupert Emerson was one of the first to criticise the double-standard when he wrote: "self-determination has become the bright and shining sword of our day, freeing peoples from bondage of empire. Yet the sword must be recognised as double-sided-sharp and cutting on one of its blade but blunt and unserviceable on the other"⁴⁴⁵.

The fundamental historical and legal peculiarity of the Eritrean national liberation movement were best defined in terms of contemporary international law. These are nowhere else properly detailed than in Bereket's seminal work on *Eritrea and the United Nations*. For Bereket, the Eritrean people possess the characteristics of a people according to international law and their claim to self-determination is legally founded. Because of this, the Eritrean people fought single-handedly for justice during the turbulent years overcoming the humiliation from the big powers who deliberately and unjustly denied to acknowledge Eritrean right to self-determination and contrarily continued to help Ethiopia. The evidence of the Eritrean right to self-determination was clearly outlined in the December 2nd 1950 General Assembly Resolution 390(V) that established a federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia. This case was referred to the UN General Assembly after the four big powers namely, the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and France had failed to resolve it. In short, the UN

⁴⁴⁵ See his "The Problem of Identity, Selfhood and Image in New Nations: The Situation in Africa", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 1, no. 3(April 1969), p. 297.

resolution recognised the existence of an “Eritrean people” which was not annihilated by the federal link. Instead the resolution further clarified that Eritrea's economic and political association with Ethiopia must ensure “the respect and the safeguard of their institutions, of their traditions, of their religions and of their languages as well as the maximum realisable autonomy”. The international lawyer Alain Fenet identified the problem as follows:

The resolution, which accepted the colonial boundaries as a historically constituted entity, recognised that the Eritrean people have the right to self-government subject to respect for the international status of the Ethiopian Empire. To that end the UN ensured Eritrea was endowed with a constitution appropriate to a federated state which provides for the creation and operation of autonomous institutions: Assembly, Government, Administration. The international recognition of the Eritrean people meant, therefore, that under the 1950 settlement, the UN made the Eritrean people beneficiaries of certain rights without being a legal entity⁴⁴⁶.

To be sure, Eritrean nationalism has been strongly promoted by the intelligentsia like Bereket and other leading EPLF (PFDJ) cadres. Right from the inception of the struggle prominent figures such as Woldeab Woldemariam, Ibrahim Sultan and Osman Saleh Sabbe had maintained letter activities over four decades before the emergence of the present generation despite the numerous assassination attempts from the Ethiopian Crown's representatives in Asmara. All attempts by Ethiopian elites and their strong “Greater Ethiopia” nationalist discourses could only best be encountered by their equals who were major proponents of Eritrean nationalism. To strengthen their arguments against Eritrean nationalism, Ethiopian elites often evoked the cultural, ethnic, religious, political, and regional differences in Eritrea. They argued that Eritrea's ethnic diversity negates any claims for national identity⁴⁴⁷. To most Eritrean elites, it was quite ridiculous for Ethiopians to argue that Eritrean inhabitants do not constitute a single ethnic group to deserve independence because the line of argument equally applies to Ethiopia itself. Eritrean elites do not deny the existence of differences, to the contrary they do agree that ethnic, political, and religious divisions exist in all states, and they

⁴⁴⁶ Alain Fenet, “The Right of the Eritrean People to Self-Determination”, in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *The Long Struggle of Eritrea*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-45:35.

⁴⁴⁷ See in particular Mesfin Araya, “Reflections on Eritrean Nationalism”, in *Proceedings 1st International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York, 1986), pp. 11-17; in idem, “The Eritrean Question: An Alternative Explanation”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (March 1990), pp. 79-100; Getachew Haile, “The Unity and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia”, *op. cit.*, pp. 465-487; Andreas Eshete, “Beyond National Self-Determination: A Comment”, in *Proceedings 1st Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York, 1986), pp. 23-28; Negussay Ayele, “On the Determinants of Prospects for Peace and Development on the Horn of Africa: The Other Side of the Coin”, in *Proceedings 3rd International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York, 1988), pp. 112-120; Tesfatsion Medhanie, *Eritrea: Dynamics of a National Question* (Amsterdam, 1986); and Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *op. cit.*

will continue to play a role in Eritrea. The differences, Eritreans know, do not negate nationalist consciousness. Thus, assertions that all differences are now resolved would exaggerate what unity has achieved.

The EPLF did recognise nine ethnic groups in Eritrea based on linguistic differences. What they did in order to counter arguments from Ethiopian nationalist elites, and to counsel any divisive tendencies arising from within, was to portray the situation more appropriately as that of territorial nationalism. According to Anthony Smith:

‘Territorial’ nationalisms start from an imposed political entity, and possess no common and distinctive cultural identity to protect ... the projected identity is really a total innovation. It is a politically fashioned and politically oriented identity. It turns its back resolutely on the small-scale cultural identities of the traditional social order for one which promises greater possibilities of group development⁴⁴⁸.

Mesfin Araya too, admitted the Eritrean issue was one of state-building in a multi-ethnic situation, however, went wrong by suggesting its process was to be achieved only within a united Ethiopia, and that no separate Eritrean state was possible⁴⁴⁹. The EPLF ideologues believe arguments of this nature were mainly driven by a certain value-judgement and political allegiance to the system in Addis Ababa. Mesfin Araya, Getachew Haile, Andreas Eshete and Negussay Ayele argued more often that maintaining Ethiopian nationalism was more important than supporting what they termed a “subnational” Eritrean movement. Anthony Smith again pointed out quite correctly on another work when he wrote, “*More than terminology is at stake here, for the adoption of terms like ‘subnational’ (like that of tribe) indicates a political or ideological preference, in this case for the preservation of the political status quo, based on existing state boundaries*”⁴⁵⁰. In short, even though critics of Eritrean independence often referred to Eritrea’s ‘artificiality’, the EPLF often acknowledged Eritrea ‘had’ no unified ‘self’ before colonialism, arguing that this is only typical of other African states. What they emphasised over the years of the liberation struggle was to avoid as much as possible any ideology of ‘deep’ historical unity and essential identity, and instead evoked strongly territorial

⁴⁴⁸ See Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York, 1983), pp. 217 and 219.

⁴⁴⁹ See Mesfin Araya, “The Eritrean Question: An Alternative Explanation”, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-100.

⁴⁵⁰ See Anthony D. Smith, *State and Nation in the Third World* (New York, 1983), p. 66.

origins of identity and acknowledged its relatively recent construction and development through different stages⁴⁵¹.

For years Eritreans have argued they were a colonised people who deserved the right to self-determination, and that their claim was supported with legal and historical evidence. The Ethiopians too did appeal to antiquity and authenticity to prove Eritrea's claims were unfounded, and argued strongly the independent movement was an alien creation. The controversy extended to foreign observers. Yet Donald Levine and John Spencer, who were openly known for their usual strong opposition to the Eritrean fight for independence, did concede in their remark that the majority of Eritreans supported independence⁴⁵². Similarly, Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux recognised Eritreans had the right to self-determination, including establishment of an independent state, and went on to propose that concessions would satisfy Ethiopian demands for access to ports. Though they had found the Eritrean case justified in principle, Halliday and Molyneux were forced to undermine the case in practice because they thought military victory against the *Dergue* was impossible at that time⁴⁵³. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, who had worked in the inner circles of the *Dergue*, claimed many Eritreans were not for separation but demanded for self-determination within a united Ethiopia. Dawit believed once a progressive and democratic government was established in Addis Ababa, secessionist tendencies in Eritrea would have been squarely averted⁴⁵⁴. Others like Negussay Ayele clearly berated "ballpoint mercenaries ... lumpen academics [and] lying 'historians' abroad ... who made a case for Eritrean rights to independence"⁴⁵⁵. Mesfin attacked "foreign commentators" who "cynically ... thoughtlessly preach the break-up of Ethiopia"⁴⁵⁶. Andreas Eshete castigated "foreigners' for promoting Eritrean nationalism"⁴⁵⁷. In short, Eritrean

⁴⁵¹ In an effort to argue their entitlement to self-determination, the EPLF clearly identified four different stages as primary internal Political developments of the struggle for the construction of their identity. See EPLF *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, pp. 27-46.

⁴⁵² See Donald Levine, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa", in *Committee of Foreign Relations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Senate, 1976), p. 49.

⁴⁵³ See Fred Halliday and Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 192. The *Dergue* at one moment received military aid from both side of the bipolarity.

⁴⁵⁴ A statement that could have as well proved right had the emperor maintained the federal constitution respected Eritrea's autonomy. See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears, op. cit.*, p. 112. (emphasis added)

⁴⁵⁵ See Negussay Ayele, "On the Determinants of Prospects for Peace and Development on the Horn of Africa: The Other Side of the Coin", *op. cit.*, pp. 111-120.

⁴⁵⁶ See Mesfin Araya, "The Eritrean Question: An Alternative Explanation", *op. cit.*, pp. 79 and 100.

⁴⁵⁷ See Andreas Eshete, "Beyond National Self-Determination: A Comment", *op. cit.*, p. 25.

nationalism was often characterised as artificial, as contagious, a foreign virus threatening the Ethiopian body politic. For Eritrean elites, arguments that appealed to national or racial authenticity and essence were often used not only to vilify Eritrean nationalism and to reject the colonial argument, but also to dismiss inconvenient interpretations. Eritreans too dismissed Ethiopian nationalist arguments as nothing but mere evocation of authenticity and xenophobia. Be that as it were, the Eritrean case did receive positive resonance not only from a good number of continental governments but also from renown African intellectuals like Nzongola-Ntalaja who demonstrated very well against the labelling of the Eritrean movement as “secessionist”. For him, the use of the term was inappropriate because the Eritrean case was less comparable say to Biafra and Katanga than to Western Sahara or Namibia, former colonial territories where self-determination was denied and which ‘were’ not termed secessionists⁴⁵⁸.

While Ethiopian nationalism often invoked the past to legitimate the Greater Ethiopian discourse by conflating ancient and contemporary empires, Eritrean nationalism does not typically appeal to deeply-rooted historical identity, but begins its origins with Italian colonialism and then emphasises the development, through several stages, of a new identity based on common experience. Thus, colonialism did create the basis of a national identity that recognises the existence of diverse backgrounds - cultural, ethnic, linguistic, regional or religious. This crafted type of nationalism has been further stabilised by various factors. For example, the songs of Eritrean artists describe the beauty and richness of Eritrea, and during the war did condemn military repression by Ethiopia, and praise the EPLF fighters, and longed for or affirmed the inevitability of national emancipation. The EPLF created new metaphors that have successfully superseded earlier forms of ideological mobilisation. These are developmental aspects and they are not simple timeless structures. Therefore, through a liberation struggle a new society can be constructed or crafted and historical symbols and authenticity can be deconstructed and phased out.

(iv) Transition from a Liberation Structure to a Government Structure

After thirty years of life in the jungle and wilderness, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) liberated the entire country and finally established a Provisional Government for Eritrea (known widely for two years as the PGE) in May 1991. At this particular time, it was not a major coincidence that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had also displaced the *Dergue* from power in Addis Ababa and also instituted a Transitional

⁴⁵⁸ See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, “The National Question and the Crisis of Instability in Africa”, in Emmanuel Hansen (ed.), *Africa: Perspectives on Peace and Development* (London, 1987), pp. 56-86.

Government in Ethiopia (TGE). In a national conference held in Addis Ababa in July 1991 to deliberate the future of Ethiopia, the EPRDF government endorsed the EPLF's decision to settle the question of Eritrea in a referendum to be held after two years of the transition. In April 1993, the PGE conducted an internationally supervised referendum whose outcomes were declared "free and fair at every stage" by the head of the UN observer mission and was also confirmed by other observer groups. In that referendum, 99.8 o/o of the population participated, and 98.5 o/o of them voted Yes! for independence. Thus on the 24th May 1993, Eritreans celebrated their independence officially. But that was not the end of the struggle. Eritrea's EPLF had to reorganise and enlarge the government that must raise up the country from the wreckage of war and, within four years, draft a constitution, prepare the development of political pluralism, and the establishment of an elected government. It is widely acceptable that transition from a liberation to a government structure is as tough as the struggle itself. The EPLF leadership was confronted with the need of seeking diplomatic connections and open the Eritrean society to the rest of the world as quick as possible in the early 1990s. Thus, Asmara was opened to the international air traffic for an easier link with the world's other cities and capitals.

According to Bereket, the difficulties were lessened because of the EPLF's organisational character since its inception in the 1970s. The EPLF had running structures similar to that of an established government in most liberated areas. The difficulties have also been lessened because, unlike in the liberation years, other governments have come forward willing to give assistance. In fact, support for the EPLF started to increase after the well publicised battle of Afabet in 1988 where they emerged as victors. Diplomatic doors began to open for Eritrea in the UN, Washington, or Brussels, and that brought numerous years of lobbying behind doors and windows to an end. In order to proof to the rest of the world that Eritrea's case was historically and legally founded, the EPLF leadership decided to hold a referendum because it would make obvious the difference between the EPLF and other revolutionary movements or military coup d'états who merely fight for power in the center. The EPLF elites believed legitimacy would lead to legality and quick international recognition was the reward.

In addition to international recognition, Eritrea was also striving for reconstruction. It was not easy because during the transition period, Eritrea had no money and it was not entitled to international aid either. The situation put the new government of Eritrea to a major test. After the liberation, the first two years were very difficult to the EPLF and it marked the beginning of differences within the organisation's hierarchy. However, some members within the Front maintain the differences were that of a process rather than of principle, because an intense healthy debate within the party was essential if a proper mechanism for national rehabilitation and development was to be achieved. For example, there were people within the

EPLF who had initially supported foreign aid and there were others who for reasons of trying to uphold the spirit of self-reliance were resistant against foreign aid. The differences in opinion and strategies did not mean, however, that the organisation's leadership was going to polarise into factions. After long discussions, the view that foreign aid leads to submissiveness and corruption was adopted. This position was later on acknowledged even by those who felt that the pressure of poverty in the country was acute and refusing foreign aid was irresponsible. However, President Issaias Afewerki was from the very beginning clear and firm on the issue of foreign aid citing the experience of other African countries who had embraced foreign aid in the past when he remarked, "These aid recipients have become hostages of Western influence at times on misleading programmes". According to Yemane Ghebreab, the government's position became clearer and donor countries' and International Financial Institutions (IMF and WB) now discuss matters with Eritrea without attaching any strings. It could be argued that Eritrea is definitely one of the few countries that can now receive foreign aid without conditionalities. Moreover, affluent countries today who would like to see Eritrea succeed have now started backing the government policies on development.

Ambassador Robert Houdek did echo the difficulties the EPLF encountered after the liberation of the country. For instance, when they took over, they had no money, no well-established governmental institutions and, thus, they had to create ministries and other necessary governmental departments. The EPLF liberation struggle was different from other African liberation movements such as the TPLF (EPRDF) next door, or Cabral's Guinea-Bissau, or Zimbabwe's ZANU, or Namibia's SWAPO, because the latter inherited institutions that had been there for long established by colonialists. Though they had brought with them certain structures and institutions, such as for education, health, agriculture, or information, they needed money and qualified personnel to strengthen their effectiveness. However, the EPLF elites were clever because they moved swiftly to separate the government from the party by forming the PFDJ. The disassociation is mainly to protect the party from any errors that may be committed by the government even when it is known all members of the party are also the ones who constitute the leadership of the government. For example, the PFDJ formed "Trans-Horn", a transport agency, took all tracks and started to get involved in money-making business. Through this, the PFDJ wants to appear as a party that is interested in tendering services to the people. For Houdek, their target is to leave no room for would be opposition to manoeuvre and become stronger than the PFDJ which is basically a monopoly and a mainstream party.

On the other hand, the monopolisation of tracks and other properties also shows that the EPLF (PFDJ) took over from a Marxist order that had nationalised everything. After taking power during the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia, the *Dergue* took over and nationalised all

properties including the land, for example, the university of Asmara and other high schools are properties that belonged to the Catholic Missionaries. According to a Catholic cleric, the Church in particular suffered the effects of the revolution more than any other institution in the country. So there are fears now about the PFDJ taking the same line as the *Dergue* but such fears have never been expressed openly. Though the government insists its policy is to benefit every Eritrean, there is reported conflict between some individuals traders and the PFDJ over markets. The PFDJ officials, however, do argue that since Eritrea is a free market economy the party is there to influence markets and stimulate competition to which individual traders must adjust. For most foreign diplomats, it is surprising that Eritrea takes the route of free market economy quickly because, given the Marxist background of the revolution in the country, there were fears they may be slow.

One major continuous issue is that of tension between fighters and exiles. While on the one hand those who fought for years feel they should be rewarded, on the other those who never fought in the field also feel they should enjoy the fruits of liberation because their grievances provided the main reason for the fight. According to a government official, areas of tension emerged mainly when it was discovered that some individuals who never fought had acquired wealth or tried to make money at any cost even by selling information about the EPLF to the enemy during the war. And such an allegation was considered a crime by the EPLF documents long before the end of the struggle. What the leadership did and has continued to do is to emphasise the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness if harmony is to be achieved. This was further clarified by Bereket when he commented, "I am not surprised, however, when some civilian members complain because those who fought think they deserve more attention, and therefore, should be given priority in the rehabilitation programme; but that is not government policy". For the government, all Eritreans whether fighters, exiles, or found within former occupied territories, are the same and will be treated equally.

Furthermore, the EPLF encountered another problem when it assumed the role of a government in Asmara. In order to have a good beginning, the IMF and the WB recommended Eritrea must cut down the number of its civil servants. So who should be left in or discontinued from the civil service became a contentious matter. What the government has done is to consider or take efficiency as a criteria. According to a government official, those civil servants whose efficiency was testified, either in the liberation struggle or found within former occupied territories, remained in office. Thus, Eritrea dismissed ten thousand civil servants at one go, and that in turn increased the problem of unemployment already faced by demobilised soldiers, former guerrilla fighters, disbanded militiamen, and other youthful

veterans of war⁴⁵⁹. Unemployment also affects the educated minority who previously had a ready source of employment in the state sector. There were also others who had committed atrocities while cooperating with the enemy against the struggle of the Eritrean people. Even if found efficient and qualified in their professions, these individuals had to be brought to book, and many are undergoing trial in the court of justice.

The other problem is that the EPLF was a clandestine movement and it has not really abandoned its secretive character. It remains difficult to know whether the post-liberation government welcomes criticism from segments of society that were not in the field. According to Ambassador Wolfgang Ringe, “There is a big problem with the present government because information is hard to get, public relations policy is weak, for example, problems over Hanish Islands and the border issue with Djibouti are really test cases for the EPLF”⁴⁶⁰. In my own observation and analysis of what people think of the present government, the military way of doing things during the war is still very strong, a legacy that may continue to inhibit the current structures. Particularly what I have termed “cell-thinking” which dominated the liberation years is still very fresh in the heads and minds of many Eritrean fighters who hold key positions in the present government. As Houdek aptly pointed out “*The EPLF (PFDJ) have to break the habit and become more open and accessible*”.

For instance, there is still a gap between those who held arms for years and those who did not because former fighters seem to associate more with those whom they have been together in the field and, thus, making others seem isolated. In fact I never witnessed any, but there are rumours that those who came from the diaspora with contributions up to millions of dollars, are some of those who are now most frustrated. A good number of Eritrean exiles have made money in the US, Europe (particularly in Italy and Germany), and the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, and most of them now want to bring that money to invest it in business back home. But because the EPLF inherited a lot of *Dergue*-type procedures, their control mechanism has remained a hindrance to returning exiles. Some observers think the EPLF could be doing that out of unconsciousness because of long-time practise, and that control mechanism may have become a habit that phases out with time. In general, it is often difficult to shift from old to new practices, and in the case of Eritrea, thirty years of war did cultivate a firm soldierly way of doing things that may continue for some while.

⁴⁵⁹ See John Markakis' editorial, “The Horn of Africa”, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

⁴⁶⁰ His Excellency, Mr. Wolfgang Ringe is Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the State of Eritrea. He echoed this words in a conversation with the author in the German Embassy (Asmara, Eritrea, July 4th 1996).

(V) Other Major Social Issues: women, demobilisation, repatriation and land reform

The GOE moved quickly to engage in the creation of a modern, technologically advanced and internationally competitive economy where private enterprise becomes the driving economic force. Thus, it adopted a broad-based growth strategy that encompasses aspects of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development covering all sectors of the economy. The major components of the government's strategy include:

Improve agricultural production and productivity through the development of irrigated agriculture; and assist peasants, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists to enhance their productivity by providing new farming and grazing methods; Develop capital-and knowledge-intensive, export-oriented industries and services; Upgrade and technologically improve the informal sector; Develop the tourism sector; Create an international financial centre; Develop and systematise a public health care system; Provide a broad based education system and improve access to it; Provide an effective social welfare safety net system; Safeguard and upgrade the environment from undue pollution; and, Decentralise and further democratise the political system⁴⁶¹.

The centerpiece of this strategy is the establishment of an efficient, outward looking, private sector-led market economy, with the government playing a pro-active role to stimulate private economic activities⁴⁶².

In keeping with these development objectives and strategies, the GOE has designed a macro-policy framework to stimulate private investment and engender economic revival growth. The main thrusts of the policy are the swift transition to a market economy, a liberal trade policy, a central role for the private sector, and export-led growth. Within the context of the macro-policy, the GOE has developed sectoral strategies and goals that provide the basis for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. The sectoral strategies include participation of women, demobilisation of soldiers, land reform, repatriation of refugees, agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, trade and industry, tourism, marine resources, energy, mining and water resources. In the following we will briefly discuss some of them.

⁴⁶¹ See in particular *Eritrea Rising from the Ashes* (Asmara: Foreign Affairs Ministry, 1996), p. 5.

⁴⁶² Proper details of this are well documented in government proclamations issued in 1994: The Investment, Income Tax, the Customs Tariff Regulations and the Land Use Proclamations, available from the respective departments and ministries.

Women:

Like in other parts of the continent, women were excluded and discriminated against in the socio-economic and political structures of traditional Eritrea. They did not have the right to participate in matters that affect society and, as a result, did not have the right to vote or be elected to the village council of elders (*Baito*), nor have their cases negotiated in the village assembly that existed in traditional Eritrean way of life. It was assumed all along that women issues could be presented by their male relatives to the village council. Traditional Eritrean women had no access to land ownership since land inheritance also passed only to men heirs; women were also prohibited from engaging in any means of production. This exclusive and discriminative practice continued throughout the colonial administrations in Eritrea, and women's active participation in the socio-economic and political realm was only brought to light during the liberation struggle. This was made possible by the EPLF's progressive policies that did not only see liberation in terms of decolonisation but also in terms of transforming society. The Front advocated equality between men and women and worked hard to eradicate religious and ethnic biases from societal structures. When the EPLF's first congress took place in 1977, among other important agendas was the issue of women⁴⁶³. In order to address the inequality that had persisted over the years, the EPLF had to undertake a revision of harmful and discriminatory practices and laws against women, and enforced more what it thought were 'just' laws.

Therefore, the EPLF's position towards women enhanced active participation of women in the liberation struggle on equal grounds. Women contributed greatly to issues that have brought changes to Eritrean society. Eritrean women engaged in harsh battles and underwent tortuous adventures during the struggle on an equal basis with men⁴⁶⁴. Women also worked in administration, as health workers, teachers, platoon leaders, mechanics, drivers, and in other non-traditional occupations. According to the EPLF (PFDJ) officials, women now serve in all sectors of Eritrean society, and in 1995/96, 21% of the National Assembly members are women, 13% executive ministers are women, and almost 50% women are involved as senior officials of the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE). The GOE has allowed three types of laws to operate in the country: Customary laws are practiced in the mainly Christian

⁴⁶³ The rights of women became incorporated into the Front's National Democratic Programme. For details of this and other related agendas of the first congress, see *EPLF, Objectives of the National Democratic Programme: First Organisational Congress* (Nacfa, Eritrea, 31st January 1977).

⁴⁶⁴ If there is any book recommended on women experiences in the Eritrean war of liberation, is that by Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.* Amrit Wilson did talk to women, recorded their stories and travelled through the war zones to gather the material in her most exciting work.

highlands of Eritrea, while the *Sheria* (Islamic law) for Muslim communities, and finally the Civil and Penal Codes of the state. Although the Civil and Penal Codes are the law of the land, customary and the *Sheria* laws are prevalent in the majority of communities at the lowest level in both rural and urban areas. The great fight is how to balance clauses that discriminate against women in both the *Sheria* and Customary laws. At independence, the GOE proclaimed that every person under the law has the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the National Democratic Programme and Constitution of the EPLF, which prohibits any discrimination based on race, colour, religion or gender. This is drawn from the objectives of the EPLF's National Democratic Programmes, where article I(e) stated that a People's Democratic State of Eritrea will: "Assure all Eritrean nationals equality before the law without distinction as to nationality, sex, affiliation, cultural level, occupation, position, wealth faith, etc."⁴⁶⁵.

In a nutshell, the government had to change laws so that women can enter into marriage contracts freely, and are afforded rights equal to those of men; bride price and dowry are prohibited by law; and divorce can be initiated by both parties in the marriage (men and women). After the liberation, the Land Proclamation now allows every citizen the right of access to land for housing and farming upon the attainment of the age of eighteen, regardless of gender. The Labour Law has also directed: "equal pay for equal work; protection of pregnant women from working night shifts, overtime and in unsafe conditions; guarantee of sixty days paid maternity leave in addition to two weeks annual and sick leave; and the prohibition of child labour". Although women involvement in business is a recent phenomenon, today many women have become leading entrepreneurs in the country's capital and other towns.

Demobilisation of Soldiers:

As the Eritrean war of liberation came to its successful conclusion in 1991, the EPLF was forced to re-think the military needs of a small country whose reconstruction priorities supersede those of the military. The GOE decided to cut down the size of its army and most of them were demobilised because the meagre resources of the country call for more focus on rehabilitation and reconstruction, rather than enhancement of military capacities⁴⁶⁶. An Office

⁴⁶⁵ See *EPLF, Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*, p. 167; and also *National Charter for Eritrea: For a Democratic, Just and Prosperous Future, op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁶⁶ According to John Markakis, Eritrea demobilised nearly 50,000 fighters of the EPLF shortly after the end of the struggle. See his editorial, "The Horn of Africa", in *Review of African Political Economy, op. cit.*, pp. 469-474: 474. It must be noted that the demobilised EPLF fighters remain a standing force in case of war or should any military imperatives arise. This was confirmed to me by a

for the Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Fighters, called *Mitias*, was created under the auspices of the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (ERRA). *Mitias* is a Tigrinya's word meaning 'to help community members start a new life', and it originated from the village system of community obligations whereby village members assist each other. In the Eritrean traditional village way of life, a newly married couple is entitled to the help of members of the village in order to build a house or to acquire land for cultivation. This process has given the GOE a task, not only of relieving the EPLF fighters of their duty and arms, but also requires a process of reintegration into the public. For that reason, the government does not only give them severance pay, but has to launch programmes of counselling and guidance, create other employment opportunities for them, skill enhancement and vocational training. These again require large sums of money for effective execution. Already the government has, within *Mitias*, created a revolving fund and credit system for assisting ex-fighters in establishing commercial and industrial business. And feasibility studies have been carried out on that to determine further funding.

According to EPLF (PFDJ) officials, the demobilisation programme was not implemented in one go. Of EPLF's 95,000 strong army 50% have been demobilised and reintegrated into society. The first phase of demobilisation took place in the second half of 1993 where 26,000 soldiers-of which 4,500 were women-were demobilised. Most of these joined the liberation struggle in 1990, that is, one year before the liberation struggle came to its end in 1991. They were not, however, demobilised because they joined late but because they still stand the chance of getting easily integrated into society since their experience has not isolated them much from the rest of the population like others who have been in the struggle for thirty or twenty years. Every demobilised soldier was given a sum of 1,000 to 5,000 birr (US\$100 to 500 only) depending on their length of service; six months' ration of food, counselling; and access to business assistance. Some of these individuals expressed their satisfaction and argued that if there were any remaining problems they should be blamed on previous Ethiopian rulers and not the EPLF. The second phase of demobilisation started in June 1995 where about 22,000 soldiers, because of age, health, disability or other reasons, were not able to remain in the regular army. In this phase, there were approximately 8,000 women fighters, and most of these groups had been in the war for over twenty years, therefore, reintegration became a problem because most of them could not easily readjust to society. They had to return to their respective villages and families where they have to care for themselves and not as it was during the war. Each of them was given 10,000 birr (US\$ 1,000 only) and a ration of food for a year. They also did benefit from a soft loan that enabled most of them to start

demobilised soldier, Mr. Angesom Efrem who now works as a waiter at Keren Hotel, Asmara, Eritrea (21st January 1996).

income generating activities, and to obtain free medical care. Given the economic difficulties the EPLF had in its initial stages, these demobilised soldiers were not paid the prescribed amount but it has been used as a collateral for bank loans taken by the fighter.

According to the EPLF (PFDJ) officials, the demobilisation process has led to the emergence of two special groups that require particular attention. One group is that of fighters who got disabled during the war, and there are about 2,500 of them undergoing treatment. The other special group consists of women fighters who not only struggled along side by side with men during the war of independence but also aimed at reforming the traditional patriarchal practices that have relegated women to the periphery of society for so long. As far as incapacitated fighters are concerned, the Eritrean War Disabled Fighters Association has taken charge of their needs. This association was created particularly as a profit making organisation catering to the needs of the disabled. The organisation now operates a number of businesses, and provides counselling services, recreational facilities and skill enhancement programmes. Similarly, women fighters who numbered one third of the army, now require a special attention. Many women war veterans have children and some are single mothers, either because their husbands were lost in the war or because they have divorced. According to Ambassador Haile Menkerios, it was much easier raising children in the field because of the communal atmosphere of the struggle than today where people have returned to their respective homes in towns and villages. Therefore, most of these women find it difficult to readjust because returning to the village means returning to traditional practices so some of them have opted to find places in Asmara or other towns. One more problem for these women is that their formal education is low, and their professional experience is poor. In order to remedy their difficulties, the government has provided services such as day care centres, and vocational or skill enhancement programmes for demobilised women. What also helps government efforts is the fact that society has a high regard for ex-fighters because of the sacrifices they have made to bring freedom for all Eritreans. And something that must not be underrated is the fact that the GOE also enjoys international sympathy and some donor countries in Europe and the United States have offered substantial assistance.

Repatriation of Refugees:

Eritrea's thirty years of war not only sent a good number of the country's population to neighbouring states, but all over the world. The number of Eritreans in exile has been estimated at roughly one million people. A significant number of Eritreans in the diaspora are next door in Sudan where up to half a million refugees are housed. Because the effects of the war were particularly severe and prolonged in the western lowlands of Eritrea, the area became prone to an influx of refugees. While in Sudan, some of these refugees remained in

settlements, and others found places in cities, towns or villages. The other half a million is believed to be spread throughout the Western world, with a sizeable majority in Europe and America. Many Eritreans who were born between the 1960s and 1980s grew up in exile and, therefore, know nothing about their own country. However, since 1991, about 100,000 Eritreans in the diaspora have returned back home spontaneously. As far as the repatriation of refugees from the Western world is concerned, the GOE has less worries because there are various programmes that have taken charge of facilitating the return and participating in Eritrea's rehabilitation of refugees from Europe and America. The government's biggest challenge, however, is repatriating refugees from neighbouring Sudan.

After the war, the EPLF (PFDJ) government presented a comprehensive project of US\$262 million to donors for Refugee Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Settlement Areas in Eritrea (PROFERI). This conservatively estimated amount is not only for repatriation but also for the integration of refugees into the economy so that they can become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Thus, the PROFERI project is meant to cover initial relief, food aid, water, health, education, agriculture, environment, marine resources and fisheries, shelter, and roads. These sectors are covered here because the areas where refugees return to do not have the basic infrastructure to support them. The government has already made projections of areas where refugees will be returning to. According to official records, 88% will be returning to the lowland zones, 10% to the capital and the remaining others to the highland areas⁴⁶⁷. As pointed out earlier, the lowlands were the most devastated by the war and the GOE wishes to recreate their basic infrastructure in order to reintegrate the refugees. By the end of the programme, the lowland (also Zone Four), will have their population doubled. The government's intention is to make sure that the repatriation programme establishes a continuum from relief to development, and to the sustainability of inputs in its implementation. The coordination of the programme is entrusted to the Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs (CERA).

The government divided the repatriation programme into three major phases. The first phase began from July 1993 to January 1995 with an estimated amount of US\$110,927,990; the second phase between February 1995 to January 1996 with an estimated amount of US\$79,867,958; and the third phase running from January 1996 to January 1997 with an estimated amount of US\$71,406,331. The whole amount totals to US\$262,202,279 only in over a period of four years⁴⁶⁸. According to a government official, a special consideration was

⁴⁶⁷ See *Eritrea: Rising from the Ashes, op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁶⁸ The figures are well detailed in the 1995 report by the Foreign Ministry, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

also given to women in the plan because among the refugees to be repatriated, 37.5% of them are female-headed households. In order for the programme to be executed on schedule, a pledging conference was held in Geneva on 6th July 1993 for phase one. Of the amount budgeted in the phase, only a third of the need was raised and, as a result, the government was forced to look for other means, including the need of starting a pilot project on a much smaller scale. Thus, instead for the first phase to have begun in 1993, the pilot project for PROFERI started in November 1994 with an ambition of repatriating 4,500 families, approximately 25,000 individuals. By April 1995 (after six months), 4,574 families were repatriated back from refuge in Sudan through the pilot programme. The evaluation of the pilot project, however, did lead to the endorsement of a plan to begin phase one of repatriation under PROFERI in November 1995. Phase One did lead to the resettlement of up to 25,000 families, that is about 100,000 people, in fifty sites throughout Eritrea over an eighteenth month period.

(vi) Land Reform

In traditional Eritrean society, land ownership is extremely complex and foreign involvement has for years created a lot of resentment on it. Eritrea's landscape is naturally categorised into three different types. The land mass covers the highland plateau, the Western lowlands, and the Red Sea coastal area. The highland plateau is the most densely populated area of Eritrea, predominantly with Christian Tigrigna speakers⁴⁶⁹. Since the lowlands area of Eritrea is mainly desert, it is sparsely populated with the mainly Muslim nomadic pastoralists who speak Tigre. In this region there are other ethnic groups such as the nomadic Rashaidas (also Muslims) and the settled agriculturalists-the mainly "Animists" (or practising traditional religion) Kunamas and the Naras, some of whom have in recent recent years converted to Islam. The coastal areas of the Red Sea, also known as the Danakalia, are mainly inhabited by the Afar and Saho people. These people are also pastoralists who are culturally more akin to Somali and speak their local language and Arabic. In fact, it has been widely admitted that no accurate population census of the different areas of Eritrea has been conducted since the war began more than thirty years ago. Even the Ethiopian 1984 census, the first in the region, was unable to penetrate the areas of Eritrea because of rebel activities there⁴⁷⁰.

⁴⁶⁹ It has also been pointed out that the Majority of Eritreans live in the highland plateau with 25 per cent of them in the Hamasien alone, one of the three highlands provinces. See John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁴⁷⁰ Eritrean population figures were always estimated until the referendum provided a close accurate population of Eritrea in 1993. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Eritrean population was estimated to be 2.5 million people. See *Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti 1993/94* (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1994), p. 37; for more details on the referendum, see Kjetil Tronvoll,

Historically, the regional divisions of Eritrea have mirrored the differing modes of production of the inhabitants. For example, pastoralism and agropastoralism are widely practised in the Western lowlands region, while agriculture dominates the highland plateau areas, and pastoralism in the Red Sea coastal areas. What has been seen in Eritrea over the recent years is the rampant increase of sedentarised agriculture which has in turn led to changes in the patterns of production. Sedentarised agriculture is moving into those areas that were previously entirely pastoralist, such as the lowland and the coastal areas. Thus, it has been estimated that 60 per cent Eritreans practise sedentarised agriculture, 35 per cent practise a mix of cultivation and pastoralism and 5 per cent are engaged in pastoralist activities alone⁴⁷¹.

Before the total liberation of the country, and before the GOE issued its land proclamations, there were essentially four types of landholding in Eritrea, varying according to region and the activities of the inhabitants. These were private ownership, family ownership, village ownership, and *dominiale* or state land. Amongst the highlanders of Eritrea, individual and family ownerships were both common, widely known in their Tigrigna terms as *tselmi* and *resti* respectively. In the *tselmi* type of ownership, land is divided among male descendants when a man dies, and in *resti* it passes back to the collective hereditary plot. This system discriminated against women and the *Makelai Aliet* (immigrants from Ethiopia to the highlands areas of Eritrea who were mainly Tigrigna speaking Coptic Christians regarded as outsiders)⁴⁷². In Eritrea's highlands, possessing hereditary land is regarded traditionally as having something akin to a sacred right over land, and vests hereditary power, generally known as *restinya*, on a person. This *restinya* element demonstrates the practice of feudal ownership of land in the highlands of traditional Eritrean society. Thus, the *restinya* took charge of all communal labour, the case of the Church and all other administrative and political duties.

In the lowlands areas, there were many different social formations. The largest ethnic group in the region are the Tigre speakers, organised in different clans who together form tribes. These tribes practised a relationship of dominance and servitude. For example, the Beni-Amer confederation of tribes, living mainly in the Barka region of the Western lowlands is divided

"The Eritrean Referendum: Peasant Voices", *op. cit.*, pp. 23-67; and Tekie Fessehazion, "The Eritrean Referendum", *op. cit.*, pp. 167-175.

⁴⁷¹ See *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti 1993/94", *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁷² See Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

into the Nabtab (“aristocrats”) and the Hdreb (“serfs”)⁴⁷³. Similarly, the Habab tribes in the Sahel area consist of the Asgede and Shumgele (“aristocrats”), who dominate the Tigre and the Beja, and who were often looked upon as “serfs”. In a nutshell, the life of a traditional Eritrean inhabitant was already inhibited by grave social problems of inequalities among both highlanders and lowlanders. The coastal inhabitants too, lived their life similar to that of pastoralists in the Sahel and the Western lowlands. This was the relative way of life experienced in traditional Eritrea, just as others of the same pattern (if not similar) have operated in other parts of traditional African society.

However, it was the invasion by colonial Europe that brought about changes in the land tenure system in most of Africa. In Eritrea, land reform is a familiar practice, but in the past it was highly criticised as ineffective. The first large scale land reform was formulated and implemented by the Italian colonial administration in the highland areas of Eritrea. The Italian land reform policy had two goals: one, to expropriate land from the indigenous inhabitants for Italian settlers; and two, the Italians thought they would solve the conflicts already caused by the intense pressure on land exacerbated by the continued use of the *tselmi* and the *resti* system of inheritance. On the contrary, the Italian project of modernisation led to appropriation of land for plantations that would meet the growing consumerism; more land was used for construction of airports, roads and other sectors of the infrastructure necessary in a modernising economy. This, however, backfired and led to a severe shortage of land for subsistence farming in the highlands. In trying to minimise this problem, the Italians devised the *diesa* system as a compromise while at the same time maintaining the *restinya* by putting them in charge of land redistribution⁴⁷⁴. In the Western lowlands, the Italians introduced the *dominiale* system in 1909, and gave much of it as concession to the Habab. The main reason is that the Italians wanted to avoid a clash with the Habab who were already identified as an immensely wealthy group in the lowlands⁴⁷⁵. However, their wealth was not from self-sufficient or integrated economy which the Italians were trying to promote, but they had earned much of their wealth through trading livestock with Sudan and their butter with Arabia *via* Massawa.

⁴⁷³ The interpretation of the term serf as applied here does not match its usual meaning with respect to relations of production. It is rather used loosely here. See also Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 201, footnote 32.

⁴⁷⁴ The *diesa* system is common among the Kunama lowland areas as part of the communal co-operative system of agriculture going back to hundreds of years. See Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴⁷⁵ See W. Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia* (London, 1868).

Be that as it were, the Italian *dominiale* system had given the Habab most of Wadi Labca, the area which spans the valley from the Red Sea to near Afabet. This area constitutes one of Eritrea's relatively fertile land where the Habab aristocrats constructed a successful irrigation system. Because the serfs' plots were not large enough to guarantee sufficient self-support, they had to work on the aristocrats' farms to make their ends meet. Through this, the serfs were remunerated either in form of cash or in the form of grain to subsidise serf families. And as for those serfs who never owned any land, they exchanged their labour for a small piece of land from the aristocrats. What was sad about the Italian land reform is that it encouraged the aristocrats (or if you like the feudal lords) and gave them the right to acquire the larger hectares of land in all parts of Eritrea⁴⁷⁶. However, the power of the feudal lords and the institution of serfdom came under severe criticism from the EPLF that had just established itself as a strong organisation in the 1970s. The EPLF viewed both the *restinya* and the *dominiale* systems as extremely unjust and they aimed at destroying the old land ownership and built a new and equitable system instead. Thus, the EPLF's priority was to deconstruct the foundations of such systems and substitute them with another fairer and just method of land distribution⁴⁷⁷. The crux of the matter is that the *dominiale* and the *restinya* systems were not just because they favoured the stronger tribes at the expense of the less powerful. It gave the largest and best plots to the stronger tribes, and in the distribution of tribal lands the best and largest plots were taken by the feudal chiefs in the order of their hierarchical position on the administrative leadership.

Therefore, the EPLF land reform policy was viewed by many disadvantaged Eritreans as a panacea. The EPLF were (and are still) concerned about the shortage of food in the country, and the GOE believes a rapid development of productive forces in agriculture would be the most realistic remedy. The EPLF were convinced the agricultural sector not only provides inputs for the industrial sector (both food and raw materials) and a market for industrial producer goods (farm machinery etc.), but also a market for industrial consumer goods. Although the EPLF (PFDJ) have all along denied following any ideologies, their concept and understanding of balanced development was based on that of Maoist China especially during the war. According to Mao's Revolution in China, developing the production of mass consumer goods is linked to the goal of improving the overall standard of living of the peasantry. This is what has made some students and scholars of peasant movements in

⁴⁷⁶ For a detailed analysis of the colonial land reform in Eritrea, see a highly recommended publication in Italian by Irma Taddia, *L'Eritrea-Colonia: Paesaggi, Strutture, Uomini del Colonialismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986).

⁴⁷⁷ See EPLF, *Creating a Popular Economic, Political and Military Base* (Unpublished EPLF Document, Eritrea, 1982).

Ethiopia to insist the EPLF was Maoist (if not Marxist) in character⁴⁷⁸. When the EPLF started to introduce its land reform programme in the liberated areas, people were initially wary (and others are still wary today⁴⁷⁹), because of their past experiences with first, the Italian, then the British and finally the Ethiopian administrations. According to an official in the PFDJ, Eritrean peasants have the right to panic with any land reform proclamation till they prove its fairness because they remember many different forms of land alienation and punitive land redistribution imposed upon them in the past, often in the name of land reform. Ato Yemane Ghebreab poignantly argued:

There are still people alive who remember the Italians for having imposed the *diesa* and *dominiale* which left land redistribution in the hands of the rich landowning families. They remember the British during whose rule a severe hunger struck both the highlands and the lowlands which led to the rising of the 'serfs' in Barka and Sahel, only to be crushed by the authorities. The Ethiopians, too are still fresh in people's minds for the handing over of fertile lands to the Americans for military bases and installations, and to foreign multinationals like Baratolo. So these experiences have led the Eritrean peasantry to hate the very thought of land reform⁴⁸⁰.

The EPLF were confronted by old practices that requested ample understanding of the way the Christian and Muslim leaders constantly reinforced the power structures in Eritrea. For example, the Muslim leaders had sanctioned the believe that taking another person's land was prohibited by the Quran and was likely to deprive one from entering into the best life in the "other world".

Therefore, the EPLF quickly reversed their strategy because of the difficulty of dealing with people whom they considered as having for years experienced and lived economically insecure, culturally backward and generally illiterate. The EPLF had to admit that "cruel exploitation, along with the subtle influences of the religious and spiritual world, had such an effect on the mentality of the peasants that the technique to be applied in the process of political education and dialogue with the masses was bound to be problematic, long, repetitive and demanding of

⁴⁷⁸ John Young in particular maintains there is no way the EPLF, TPLF or later the EPRDF will deny their Marxist tendencies during the war. See his Thesis and works, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷⁹ See in particular Sandra Fullerton Joireman, "The Minefield of Land Reform: Comments on the Eritrean Land Proclamation", *African Affairs*, no. 95(1996), pp. 269-285, who believes the EPLF (PFDJ) policy on land reform is inadequate because it neglects the two issues of pastoralists rights and the role of investment. For her, these two lay mines of potential future crisis, both political and environmental, in the Eritrean countryside. p. 285.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview, *op. cit.*

great patience”⁴⁸¹. In order to counter this, the EPLF did carry out a number of measures during the war. By the beginning of 1977, the EPLF had managed to politicise the core of the Eritrean peasantry in the liberated areas and organised them into cells. This provided a base for setting up the people’s militia to counter the frequent armed incursions of the splinter group, the ELF, and to tip the balance of power in favour of the majority of the people. Such a step was felt to be necessary before touching the land issue. But what really moved the issue of land to quick mass discussion was the victories of the EPLF in Afabet and other towns. It became much easier to tip the balance of power in the area. The landlords had no Ethiopian army or the ELF to turn to in case of disagreement. Thus, land began to be discussed at mass meetings in an open manner. By 1978, when a few landlords organised a large demonstration against reforms brought about by the Front, land had ceased to be a central issue in the minds of the oppressed people who were already politicised to think of bigger issues, in particular liberation from Ethiopian domination⁴⁸². Thereafter, the EPLF’s People’s Assembly and the Peasants’ Association drew up plans for land redistribution. Like in any other peasant revolution, the landlords in Eritrea lost their ownership when the EPLF emerged as a fully fledged organisation in the liberated areas. Land was redistributed to tenants and middle and poor peasants. By 1982, the EPLF was well established in the liberated areas and the process of land reform took place in an atmosphere of confidence where the authority of landlords could be challenged openly. Land redistribution was carried out according to the policy of land reform formulated by the EPLF during the war.

By 1991, when the EPLF had taken control of the whole country, remnants of the many tenure systems outlined above existed, as well as new systems developed by the armies of liberation. According to the EPLF, this became a recipe for chaos after independence because when soldiers returned to their respective villages in the countryside to claim land, it became clear that a land reform or new land policy was of immediate importance. Thus, in March 1993, shortly before the formal proclamation of independence, the Eritrean Land Commission (ELC) was convened to draft a land policy for the country. After a considerable period of study, several models of land allocation were devised, though most of them were rejected outright. These were: privatisation, returning all land to the *diessa* system but changing the period of allocation of land from five years to twenty years, maintenance of the *diessa* system and several other variations on this options. According to Alem Seged Tesfaye, Head of the Eritrean Land Commission, these choices were all rejected in favour of usufruct rights held on an individual basis that would give a uniformity of tenure and allow for rental and share

⁴⁸¹ See EPLF, “*Creating a Popular, Economic, Political and Military Base*”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸² See Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

contracts. The new land policy in Eritrea vests ownership rights on the government with usufruct rights granted to individuals, but with the ultimate right of dispossession resting with the state⁴⁸³. Land will be allocated in two ways: primarily, to individual Eritrean citizens on a lifetime usufruct basis and secondarily, all leftover land or expropriated land will go to the government. Government land is both intended to serve as a mine and forest reserve as well as to provide a supply of land for the government to allocate to investors. Investors receiving government land do not have to be Eritrean citizens and acquire the land through the permission of the Eritrean Investment Centre as articulated in the Investment Proclamation⁴⁸⁴.

Today, individual land holdings are allocated to both men and women on a lifetime usufruct basis in Eritrea. These individual land holdings can be inherited, but any child inheriting land from his/her parent must sacrifice any other land which he/she has been allocated by the government. This mechanism is believed to encourage individuals to make long-term investments in their land which will pass to their children eventually. Article 24 of the Land Proclamation also directs that land can only be leased but not sold or granted as a gift. Another special provision allows individuals to change their form of tenure from one of lifetime usufruct to one of long-term lease in order to exploit the land in a different manner. This particular provision is intended to introduce new ways of exploiting the land and attracting the movement of capital into farming communities⁴⁸⁵. The Eritrean Land Proclamation is under implementation now after an educational campaign in the countryside and testing of the policy in four specific areas of the country. In a nutshell, the land reform will have revolutionary consequences to sedentarised Eritrean farmers because farmers will no longer be assured that the plot of land they farm will be changed every five years and there will no longer be confusion as to actual legal rights to land. Instead, a stability of usufruct rights to the same plot of land will be maintained, with the possibility of privatisation at some point in the future.

In summary, the Eritrean Land Proclamation has started with two important facets, for the people and economy of the post-war era. The new land policy is a security guarantee to individual land holding. This should provide the foundation for the restructuring of the rural agricultural sector in Eritrea. The other important facet of the new land policy is revolutionary

⁴⁸³ See *Eritrean Land Proclamation Number 58/94*, Chapter II, Article 3 (Gazette of Eritrean Laws, Published by the GOE).

⁴⁸⁴ See the *Investment Proclamation Number 59/94* (Gazette of Eritrean Laws, Published by the GOE).

⁴⁸⁵ See The Eritrean Land Commission, "*The Land Proclamation of Eritrea: A Summary*", mimeo, 1995. Also the preamble to proclamation number 58/94 reiterates this.

because it vests the legal right to hold land to both men and women. Thus, the land proclamation assures equal rights to land ownership without restriction based on gender, race or faith, and grants usufruct rights to Eritrean citizens above the age of 18⁴⁸⁶. For the first time in the history of Eritrea, women are now allowed to possess their own land under a lifetime lease. According to article 15(1) of the same proclamation, “Married couples, who based on this proclamation are allowed to acquire agricultural land get their separate shares from the land allocated for agricultural activities”.

(b) Self-Views of Fighters: Narratives by Various Ex-Combatants

From its inception in the 1970s, the EPLF developed into a broad-based movement that did not represent only a particular social class, ethnic group, religious sect, or a particular region of Eritrea. Unlike other splinter groups (ELM, ELF-GC, and ELF-PLF, ELF-RC) in the country, the EPLF as an organisation encompassed within its rank and file Eritreans of all walks of life as it continuously strove to attract and recruit all citizens who were willing to participate in the liberation struggle. Today, there are many people in Eritrea who often introduce or describe themselves as fighters, an indication that a person was a participant in the war. The term 'fighter' (also *tegedelti*) is still widely used to refer to those members of EPLF who either participated fully in the actual combat or served in other non-combatant roles during the thirty years of the war. The Eritrean combatants were mainly drawn from the peasantry who constituted the strong army of the EPLF. After the end of the struggle, part of the fighting army was demobilised and a sizeable number is still serving in the Eritrean Defence Force, which president Issaias Afeworki prides as a capable army⁴⁸⁷. Most of the EPLF servicemen and women did not have any formal education before joining the struggle because the colonial system in Eritrea did not encourage it.

The self-views of the ordinary Eritrean fighters are based on their long time experiences of the struggle and, as I mentioned earlier, the language and the words used to express the experiences and feelings is quite different from that used by the elites because of the high level of education and political sophistication of the latter. The fighters were often overtaken by emotions which made most of them lose composure and effectiveness during interviews. For

⁴⁸⁶ See article 7 of the *Land Proclamation 58/94*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸⁷ In an interview with a London-based Arabic daily, *Al Hayat*, President Issaias Afeworki reiterated the importance of capability rather than size of the army when he was asked about the cross-border disputes between Eritrea and Yemen on the one hand and with Sudan on the other. See the English translation of that interview, “*I’m not Boasting but Eritrea has a Capable Army*”, *Eritrea Profile*, vol. 3, no. 45(January 1997), p. 6.

this reason, and unlike in the organisation of the self-views of the elites, the feelings and experiences of the fighters I interviewed are discussed together in a much more condensed fashion. Moreover the ordinary Eritrean fighter saw (and still sees) her/himself as a participant and executioner and not the architect of policies and programmes. The bulk of the Eritrean fighters compared themselves mainly to dancers rather than instrument players. As Tesfamicael had metaphorically put it, “although we constituted an important section in the struggle as fighters, the planners and commanders of the struggle were more crucial because, like instrument players in a ceremony, the dance can only be successfully performed and exceptionally entertaining when the rhythm of dancers co-ordinates well with the sound of drums and tune of the song”⁴⁸⁸. In a way, the fighters fought whole heartedly knowing that post-war restructuring, and in particular the programme of rehabilitation and development would as well be spearheaded by the leadership.

(j) Self-Views on Liberation: practical experiences of fighters

Arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate killing of people, and the continuous intimidation of the younger generation in the country, are some of the most disturbing factors that made the bulk of the Eritrean youth and middle-aged men and women abandon peaceful means of pursuing their rights and take up arms against the Ethiopian regimes since 1952. By the time the armed resistance had matured, with the EPLF coming closer around Asmara in the middle of the 1970s, especially in the nearby highland areas, most young Eritreans joined the Front in big numbers. Some of these new recruits were trained as combatants, while others were sent as internal informers, a kind of membership which the EPLF had encouraged throughout Eritrea during the war. The main activities of the “cell groups” included supplying information and food to the EPLF fighters.

Every Eritrean national, and every student whether in primary or high school, regarded the Front, in the words of Hadas Mussie, as a “great university”, where people learnt many different professions. During the war, most ordinary fighters acquired diverse professions, for example, many became bare-foot doctors, nurses, engineers, poets, dramatists, musicians, and art designers. Alganesh Mekonnen from Orota did not hesitate telling that “The long struggle taught me a lot of professions which I could not have learnt in a peaceful environment. Out of a protracted struggle, a culture of *tetswarnet, tsnat, tesfa, aklie, tewenefinet*’ (perseverance, steadfastness, hope, patience and dedication) has developed”.

⁴⁸⁸ Interview (Embatkala March 1996)

For the ordinary Eritrean fighter, liberation meant freedom from what was widely perceived as Ethiopian colonialism. Angesom Efrem, a young demobilised fighter, explained to me why he had joined the Front:

“I joined the liberation struggle in order to die for my own country, Eritrea, occupied by Ethiopia. There were many kinds of crimes committed by the Ethiopian army on Eritreans. Mengistu's activities made the generation of the time to join the movement. I had no political knowledge but what I saw was enough to make me believe the EPLF had a strong reason to commit the Eritrean lives for freedom. After all, Mengistu had already killed many people”⁴⁸⁹.

The idea of liberation for Angesom Efrem, therefore, meant liberation from oppression by Mengistu, from atrocities of Ethiopian soldiers, from crimes, killing and in one phrase, liberation from colonialism. Berhane Asress cites the confiscation of land and the denial of basic human needs such as food, shelter, clean water, the right to move and speak freely, absence of freedom of culture, and the right to other social services such as the right to education, health facilities, and market as major issues that sparked the rebellion:

Before I joined the struggle, I had seen and experienced practically the activities of the oppressors. I saw the Imperial regime and later the *Dergue* government. So for half of my life I witnessed the miserable life of the Eritrean people before the liberation. We had no political, economic and cultural freedom. *Amharic* was the language in schools and not *Tigrigna* or Arabic. Ethiopians monopolised the trade and the sale of goods. Ethiopians were the rulers and the army that occupied us. When I joined the field, I started to breath the air of liberation. Because the EPLF was a democratic organisation, it was leading the struggle in a democratic way of life. Every fighter as well as the people under the EPLF jurisdiction enjoyed the protection and the liberty. There was equal share of the meagre resources accessed by the Front, equal participation in discussions and elections of office holders and free practise of diverse Eritrean cultures. The EPLF is a unique organisation in the world. Because it is the only organisation in the earth that acquired independence solely through fighting and without help from African countries, America or Russia. But we liberated the country on our own. *Awet Neh'fash!*⁴⁹⁰.

Fighter Teklemariam from Nefashit further added that before the total liberation of Eritrea, every Eritrean was not free to move from one place to another without surveillance:

⁴⁸⁹ Angesom Efrem lives in Ras Alula Street, Asmara. He joined the EPLF after the capture of Afabet in 1988. He expressed this in an interview with the author on January 21st 1996, Asmara, Eritrea.

⁴⁹⁰ *Awet Neh'fash* is a Tigrigna word for 'Victory to the Masses!'. Berhane Asress is a demobilised soldier who narrated his story in a conversation with the author on 13th July 1996, Embatkala, Eritrea.

“The right of association and gathering was lost, the right to speak, complain and/or ask, the right to elect and to be elected, were all robbed off every Eritrean citizen. The right to mourn or weep your dead, yes, was denied the Eritrean by the Ethiopian army. Eritrean towns were all surrounded by the Ethiopian troops. For those Eritreans in villages, to go out at night, say to piss or defecate, would have exposed one to the bullet of the Ethiopian army”.

Similarly Solomon Tesfahun, from Keren explained:

My experience of the revolution started as a teacher in government school. My level of education is very low but because the Ethiopian government did not care sending qualified teachers to Eritrea, I was forced to teach standards one and two in primary. It was break time and I sat under a tree. An Ethiopian soldier came and asked me why I was sitting under the tree. I told him I was free and I had no class because it was also break time. He shouted in return ‘this is the period of socialism get out from here and get to your class or else ...!’ (probably you will be shot, he filled in the blank). I tried to make him understand me but he was not interested. He warned me and the only thing I could do was leave the tree at his will. Finally, I realised my life was not my own but under someone else’s control because he would in the next time decide to do anything-arrest or shoot me without fear of anything. Thus, I could not stay any longer to teach and I left and joined the EPLF leaving my small job and family behind. Liberation for me means removal of the threat of the Ethiopian army, living without fear, giving our children better education by employing well-trained teachers, more schools, health centers, access roads and better communication system, and yes, absence of torture, killing, burning villages. After liberation, a nation has been born free of all these, and there is no more bribery, corruption and mismanagement of government property. This is the meaning of liberation⁴⁹¹.

In Eritrea, circumstances that would force one out of cities and villages to join the EPLF were enormously diverse. For example, Teklie Gheresus was a member of a secret cell group that operated in Eritrean towns occupied by the Ethiopian army before he fled to the field in 1978. “When my friend was caught by the *Dergue* security in Keren, I escaped and joined the EPLF to fight the enemy”, he narrated. In Eritrea, once a member of a secret cell group was caught, he/she was tortured to reveal other members, and that is one way how most people left to join and become active combatants. Similarly, the general feeling that the war would soon come to an end also encouraged many Eritreans to get recruited with the EPLF. However, this never happened as many had hoped and Abraham Debessai confirmed:

⁴⁹¹ Solomon Tesfahun is a demobilised soldier from Keren, and I interviewed him on 12th July 1996.

When in 1978 the liberation struggle was at its resounding momentum, we flocked to the field joining the EPLF with the hope that victory was already at hand. However, shortly the EPLF was forced to evacuate the liberated areas in an effort of what came to be widely known as a 'tactical withdrawal'. The bitter truth was that Ethiopia's Red Star Campaign had overwhelmed the ill-equipped EPLF fighters. During the withdrawal, most fighters had no idea of what was taking place. The struggle dragged on for thirteen years more and nobody had known liberation would still find him/her alive.

The fact that many fighters had no knowledge of the withdrawal also reveals there were moments when decisions could be carried out without considerable wider consultation as most EPLF elites had always claimed. Misghina Debessai, a female fighter from Mandefera also confirmed:

I joined the EPLF in 1976. I was trained for two months in the military center and joined other combatants in the front-line. Soon the EPLF started attacking and took control of the Eritrean countryside. Since that time, from 1977, things had worked in our favour but with the intervention of the Soviets on the Ethiopian side, bringing with them modern military equipment and advisers, everything was reversed and my expectations of a quick liberation were subdued. Thus, the military balance changed in favour of the *Dergue*, and the EPLF was forced to take what many now remember as a tactical withdrawal to the Sahel (*Awraja*). Although the retreat was a real terrible and problematic event that required full sacrifice and commitment, it also gave many of us the motivation to carry on the struggle until freedom was achieved in 1991.

After the famous retreat, the EPLF quickly reorganised and launched the famous "Alghena" attack in North-East Sahel in 1981, as a gesture of trying to regain its lost strength and raise the morale of the army⁴⁹². Three consecutive big offensives were launched-the 6th, 7th, and 8th-which succeeded to paralyse and weaken the *Dergue* army in their daily activities. Thus, constant engagement of the enemy picked up, and by 1988, the biggest army of Ethiopia was destroyed by the reorganised EPLF army from the Sahel (*Awraja*). The hopes of liberation were restored when the frontline of Nacfa was destroyed and the strategic town of Afabet was also captured at the same time and the EPLF secured a huge armoury that included artilleries, BM21 cannon and tanks. From that point the military balance had changed in favour of the EPLF and in 1990 the country's second capital sea port of Massawa fell. A large number of Eritrean youth, who marked the last phase of recruitment, joined the EPLF at this time.

⁴⁹² The counter-attack from *Awraja* shifted the military balance in favour of the EPLF throughout the 1980s till the total liberation in 1991. See Lionel Cliffe, "Dramatic Shifts in the Military Balance in the Horn: The 1984 Eritrean Offensive", *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 30(September 1984), pp. 93-97; and Berhane Woldemichael, "Ethiopian Army in Disarray", *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 44(1989), pp. 60-63.

Given the strategic location of Massawa, and the massive equipment of the *Dergue* soldiers defending it, it was difficult to imagine EPLF would secure victory over the government. The EPLF radio kept every Eritrean informed and the hope that victory was now certain was enhanced. For Hannah Ghebreberhan, a student at Asmara university, hearing the EPLF radio alone was a moving event though for others it had remained a propaganda because everything sounded unreal since the EPLF fighters have often been portrayed by the *Dergue* army as mere *shiftas*. As the liberation hours were being counted, anxiety increased, frustration and distrust also intensified even amongst Eritrean nationals because people began to view things differently. However, it did not take long because the following year the EPLF had captured the whole country. On the 24th May 1991, the fighters marched into Asmara without firing a single bullet, and they were received with excitement and exasperation. As Mama Tewedros, an Asmaran elder, had put it, “I just found it hard to express my joy even now. It is the kind of memory I hope will not fade out but live forever for generations. ‘*Awet Neh’fash*’!, meaning victory to the masses”.

The daily activities of the ordinary Eritrean fighter included combat with the enemy, digging canals and tunnels for defence, teaching other comrades, preparing meals, fetching water, guarding camps, playing games such as volleyball or football, and learning politics and other social activities like dancing and singing war songs. The training of the EPLF fighters ranged from two to six months depending on the role one was to play in the war. Like in any other liberation struggle, roles of the EPLF fighters changed according to the prevailing circumstances. Though most fighters expressed painful memories of the struggle, they also told success stories of it, appreciating in particular the changes the war has brought in shaping their way of lives. According to Tedras Kidane:

My experience of the liberation struggle started when I was eighteen years of age when I joined the EPLF. First, I took military training for six months in Solomona Camp. After finishing the training, I joined the fighting army and participated in the fight for liberation in different battles. That involvement has given me the spirit of caring for my life and that of the neighbour. Patience, honesty, optimism, resistance and resilience, vigilance and hard work are characters that I have acquired over the years during the war, and they will continue to guide my life and relations to the neighbour throughout my life⁴⁹³.

⁴⁹³ Interview with Tedras Kidane, a sergeant major in the Eritrean Defence Force (Dongolo, Eritrea, 18th April 1996). Eritrean Ministry of Defence is located in Dongolo over one hundred miles away from Asmara.

Most ex-combatants concur in their view that there was no difference in the social life of the fighters whether one was a leader or not. The rank and file ate, drank, discussed, shared logistical materials and died like other fallen heroes of the war. For Mengisteab, a life of giving and receiving dominated throughout the struggle. From the lowest to the top in the Secretariat, there was no difference of social status because the EPLF fighters lived together in the sunny desert, rain, and starved when there was no food. Thus, braveness, patience, dedication, perseverance and staunchness, were all mutually felt by the fighting men and women in the EPLF. Everyone fought with great zeal and consciousness for freedom. It is from such practices that the Eritrean has developed the idea of justice, equality, and dedication to work during the post-liberation era.

According to Solomon Fesseha from Dongolo, the practical experiences from a liberation struggle are so vast in scope and producing a precise account of them all at one moment is quite difficult as he expressed:

However, if I am able to say anything with certainty, it is not because I am the cleverest of all in remembering the past. But every comrade and every countrymen and women or every participant in the struggle had more to give than take from another. In every situation, I learned more from the altruistic contributions of my fellow freedom fighters and the commitment of Eritrean people to Eritrea. The subtle love of humanity, the solid unity of citizens, the willingness to offer oneself for the well-being of others, the desire for justice, the resolute and unflinching fight against all sorts of oppression, were lessons we all learnt from one another. I am very much grateful and feel equally obliged to appreciate and thank the company of my comrades because I owe them the whole person I am shaped to be today. Even the frustrations and mistakes that punctuated the course of this experience proved a blessing in disguise for they steeled me even more. It is quite noteworthy here, therefore, that whatever is the peoples' must be returned to the people. And the Eritrean struggle for liberation is a typification of this.

On the other hand, Tzighereda Elfu from Adi Keyi, recalled the misery and despairs of an ordinary combatant saying,

The struggle was too difficult for the fighter because food, water, and even clothes and shoes were never available in the Sahel, EPLF's strong base. For example, a piece of bread was used as a meal and a bottle of water was shared by almost ten fighters. We marched over thorny shrubs and forests, and over desert and sharp rocks barefooted. The situation was equally the same with leaders of the unit, women, old and young alike.

Liberation means the state of peace, freedom from dictatorial rule, arbitrary imprisonment and arrests, hunger, daily air raids and bombardments. Thus, Eritreans had all along yearned for that day when they would have the right and access to everything humans are entitled to in life, for example, food, shelter, education, medical facilities, freedom of movement, speech, press and equal development and opportunity for all. A soldier in the outskirts of Asmara in Hazhaz commented:

One major achievement over the liberation years, which no other country in the world can match, is the fact that today our President has no bodyguards. His office is opened to all who would like to express their grievances and views without fear. Our President visits every Eritrean village in every year and encounters challenges from village elders, something that has never been done before by the colonial leaders to discuss issues. This is liberation which could be seen with eyes and not heard or spoken only.

From early evening till midnight, Eritreans now flood their only high street, Liberation Avenue, taking what they often describe as a leisure walk and an expression of freedom.

(ii) Self-Views on Democracy and Democratisation

There is a widespread feeling amongst the EPLF ordinary fighters which confirms elite stories that democracy and democratisation in Eritrea is not born of a desire to respond to current international trends. For most Eritreans, the history of the struggle for freedom was also the history of the struggle for democracy. On most occasions, both liberation and democracy were defined quite synonymously. As far as the Eritrean case is concerned, the ideas of freedom, equality, justice, and public participation are more often than not associated with the concepts “liberation” and “democracy”. At the beginning of this century, the Eritrean masses were the first to rebel against the feudal lords that had enjoyed an easy life in traditional societies for a long time. Thus, most Eritreans have argued that the armed struggle in the latter half of the century was only a continuation of that resistance against undemocratic forces in society which mainly later on became reinforced by the behaviour of the feudal regime of Haile Selassie and its military successor, the *Dergue*.

Many Eritreans believe that principles of democracy existed in their respective traditional societies. Yet they also acknowledge that their traditional societies are not similar to those based on a modern-liberalised economy. Ato Abraha Tesfahun commented, “The idea to choose what one wants or needs, the idea to refuse or reject what one is not convinced of, has always been Man’s greatest gift from God in the culture of humanity. Of course different societies evolved their own ways of doing things with certain limitations but without

destroying the fundamentals of freedom, which in turn constitute major characteristics of democracy”. Woizero Nebiat complemented, “In rural Eritrean villages far from cities there are different rules and regulations governing society. These rules and regulations are well noted by members of the community. Every traditional Eritrean village had an assembly which elected the leadership of the community from those elders considered wise, honest and brave. The assembly debated, consulted and deliberated on matters that affected the life of society as a whole”.

The traditional system in Eritrea functioned under what is widely known as the *Baito* (some kind of legislature or assembly). Through the *Baito*, the liberties of community members were protected, and village leaders were entrusted the right to decide issues for the good of the society. Thus, the EPLF followed the *Baito* system during the war and made it a forum for discussion and differences were often resolved through it. The *Baito* is remembered in Eritrean traditional societies for the long debates and discussions that had often taken hours and at times many days before the right decisions are taken. One EPLF fighter criticised the controversial nature of a traditional Eritrean whom he perceives as an orator and lover of public debates and discussions at times for the sake of it. In a way, traditional African life was more open than the modern one and an Eritrean elder believes the society has been contaminated by the restrictive nature of colonial administration. Ato Woldemariam contemplated the past in his words, “We did not have dictators in society. No rejected views and ideas were forced upon our communities but we all reached the final decisions through consensus and compromise”.

However, there is a tacit agreement that the rudiments of democratic practices found in traditional Eritrean society were also affected by other limitations particularly when it comes to the issue of women and children. Though Michael Zekarias argued on the point that the issue of women and children was not that of discrimination because traditional society perceived them as a sole responsibility of man. It was not a deliberate subordination nor discrimination but a traditional practise commonly conceived positively in the past. The ordinary EPLF fighter acknowledges such traditional conceptions are a gross limitation that provide a point of departure from traditional to modern government. The democracy that operated in the rural areas was bound to be different from that practiced in the urban areas where colonialism had sowed the seeds of modern economy. The EPLF took the lead in incorporating traditional practices with the modern ones in the building of a new Eritrea. Thus, the transformation of the old system did not mean the total condemnation and replacement of the old traditions by the new modern ones. In other words, the foundations of modern Eritrean democracy are based on those of the *Baito*.

The *Baito* had the sole responsibility of creating laws that guided and regulated society. The members of the *Baito* provided security for the community, knew how to cooperate with neighbouring communities and made sure members of every community exercised their rights without inflicting pain on others. According to Berhane Asress from Embatkala, “The *Baito* was charged with the responsibility of land distribution and cared about deforestation and green pastures for animals. The *Baito* was the sole defender of traditional practices and culture. It appointed *Deyanus* or *Dagna* (Judges or Judge) to interpret laws and tradition. There is a lot of democracy here, although not absolute, it served as a base for running society subject to law and order till the colonialists infiltrated us”. Of course traditional Eritrean elders did not have an orthodox way of defining democracy, but what they practice implies some similarities. According to Zekarias Simeon:

Among the Tigrigna there are rules and regulations governing every village. These rules and regulations are stated in a democratic way. Inhabitants of every village convened meetings to discuss community issues and wise men are often chosen to lead the village. In some villages, the division of labour is as follows: there are *metaro* (land dividers), their main task is to divide land equally among members of the village; there are *gelafo* (a committee that is responsible for those who do not have the right to own land because of age, or in the case of immigrants, etc.); there are *wedati* (advocates) a mobile committee that takes care of contentious cases and issues; there are *deyanus* (judges), who listened and deliberated on issues.

Traditional society had its own ways of enforcing laws and principles, as Solomon Tesfahun from Adi Quala describes:

In traditional life, we did not have the police, courts and prisons, but there were other means of enforcement-refusing to help communally in terms of cultivation, refusing to rescue cattle from the raiders, refusing to quench fire in case of burning accidents.

In most traditional African societies, it was common practise that the community neglected and disregarded those who disobeyed communal regulations. Working for the welfare of the community obliged every members to self-restraint and to avoid being led by personal greed and ambition.

Yet the practiced democracy was not based on multi-party systems but on community, deliberation, and consensus. Belai Habtegabier Bein from Dekemhare explains:

We did not have multi-parties, but our democratic way of life transcended that of political party organisation. We worked together for the interest of the

community. We respected beliefs that were not necessarily part of our culture, e.g., Christianity and Islam. We sustained the unity and security of the community. We shared both good and bad moments-in party celebrations, we defended our communities together against the might of the enemy, and during moments of sorrow we comforted one another. Collective responsibility was the norm. That the absence of records of such activities makes them trivial is not good enough reason to think our societies existed without any structured democratic system.

Among the Kunama of Eritrea's lowlands region, participation was central in every aspect of community life. Both young and old people got involved in activities of society according to the relative capacity of every individual. Ranging from activities to do with tilling or cultivating the land, building houses, to marriage were all performed communally⁴⁹⁴. Generally speaking, *Highi-endaba* (laws of the natives) functioned in traditional Eritrean societies. Poor people who did not have oxen had their farms ploughed by other members of society who saw it as their duty to do so. The able members of society cultivated, cleared off weeds, and collected harvest together. Caring for the poor and disabled was done voluntarily without any use of force or redress. Village elders discussed and deliberated (or passed decisions on issues) that affected the lives of the villagers. Consensus rather than suffrage or voting (balloting) was the common method of arriving at decisions. Since the duration of the *Baito* foras was not fixed, quarrels and contradictions in society were settled through prolonged discussions. Characteristics of traditional democracy included open discussion, guaranteeing the rights of the disadvantaged, sharing responsibility, and sacrifice for the communal good. For example, Eritreans communally owned land *diesa* and used rotational systems which changed hands at a given period of time.

The EPLF adopted the *Baito* system which paved the way for the holding of frequent elections in the liberated areas. The EPLF incorporated the modern system into the traditional way of life in Eritrea by considering principles of religious freedom, women's equality and human rights as important parts of the struggle. The elected committees and councils operating at the village level throughout Eritrea today form the bases for the growth of a modern democracy that transcends the limited traditional democratic practices. During the war, the EPLF leadership emphasised building and expanding democracy from the bottom up. The Front is convinced democracy cannot be imposed from above by the creation of formal national structures without a base in society. A constitution and the framework for pluralism must emerge from the needs and views of Eritreans to whom the Political system must be accountable. Eritrea now has a free press, though one ex-fighter commented on the freedom

⁴⁹⁴ Conversation with Goitom Oqbai from Barentu, February 13th 1996, Asmara, Eritrea.

of the press saying, “Self-censorship is our only problem. No one tells us to say this or that, but we are all ex-fighters, and we do not have the habit of critical reporting”⁴⁹⁵.

Finally, in post-colonial Africa during the 1960s through, economic and social conditions became major barriers to the nurturing of participatory democracy. It is the lack of resources coupled with mass illiteracy that paved the way toward bureaucratisation rather than democratisation. Thus, the definition of the nation was tuned to a simple substitution of the state for the people, bureaucracy for democracy and passive obedience for active citizenship. In Eritrea, the post-liberation government has demonstrated such trend can be avoided by building democracy from below rather than from above. The nationalist leadership has reaffirmed its commitment to cultural diversity because national independence has been achieved through a long drawn mass struggle. The wide feeling is that the nation will remain an organising framework by emphasising the imperatives of obedience and loyalty to state institutions. In other words, democratisation requires not merely the withdrawal of the state to allow developments of spheres of social autonomy, but also a positive and active state intervention of a particular kind, say a constitutionally secured framework of rights and liberties, including the conventional rights of free speech, assembly, freedom of movement, and universal suffrage will be crucial. The government intends to avoid democracy from becoming a synonym for elite factional struggles by locating it in the self-activity of subaltern groups, in both urban and rural areas. Social movements can in this respect act as conduits for the expression and organisation of citizen’s demands *vis-a-vis* the state and the wider society, and protect their members from arbitrary administrative and political measures.

In Eritrea, mechanisms of popular-democratic empowerment are slowly emerging. This can be seen in the efforts of trying to build democracy from the characteristic institutions such as the families, schools, religious institutions, and work places which exhibit a uniform lack of democracy at present. The post-liberation era is witnessing the emergence of differences in the public sphere, and there is fear that the nationalist glue that bounded Eritreans together may be weakened. For example, in April 1993 demonstrations in Asmara centred on the questions of accountability and pay, and the Mai Haber incident where a protest by disabled fighters culminated in the death of three veterans, signalled many of the rank and file members of the Front are no longer willing to follow unquestioningly their leaders in the post-liberation era, as they had once followed their unit commanders out of the trenches. Today, several mass organisations, though still linked to the Front, have emerged. These include the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers

⁴⁹⁵ Conversation with Kiflom Adgoi, Assistant Editor, Eritrea Profile, Ministry of Information (Asmara, 18th July 1996).

(NCEW), and the National Union of Eritrean Youth (NUEY), which have broadened the scope of their activity in the post-liberation period. Other organisations such as those of the union of journalists, teachers, lawyers, doctors and so forth, are still in the making. So far, there is no real opposition coming out clearly in Eritrea.

(iii) Transition: post-liberation expectations and hopes for the future

In Eritrea, there was no “after the revolution”, instead programmes had to be executed simultaneously. Although the war had wrecked the country’s economy and infrastructure, while long periods of drought brought famine to the largely peasant populations, the feeling of most Eritreans I had spoken to remains optimistic. Partly because the tenaciously fought armed struggle also created a determinedly self-reliant nation which has accepted the discipline of austerity and hard work necessitated by the fact that the Front took control of the country with hardly any cash in the banks. And mainly because within the guerrilla army itself, ranks had been kept to a minimum and relations between the fighters and their commanders were for the most part egalitarian and fraternal. Thus, preserving the democratic ideals which had fired the nationalist struggle, and avoiding the authoritarianism of the traditional armies, will be an imperative if the army is to retain its popular designation as a “liberation army”. Moreover, the mutinous demonstration by discontented rank-and-file members after the war in 1993 have accelerated the process of transformation within the army. In 1996, the present Minister of Defence, Sobhat Efrem, was promoted to the rank of General; eight former division commanders became Major Generals; while twenty two were promoted to Brigadier Generals; and another thirty four to the rank of Colonel⁴⁹⁶. It is obvious that discontent is more likely amongst the army than the civilian population because their lifestyle and expectations are changing. As Markakis has pointed out quite correctly, “Gone are the gaunt faces, bushy hairdos, camouflage jackets and scarfs. They have been replaced by neatly barbered men in tieless suits and modestly dressed women”⁴⁹⁷. Thus, recent restructuring in the rank and file of the army is meant to contain any further mutinous demonstrations and to maintain the discipline that was achieved during the thirty years of the struggle.

After the liberation, the GOE has been faced with an immense need to produce the results for a population that has endured privations and sacrifices for over a quarter century. Eritreans had suffered and they needed urgent change to effect a difference in their way of life. The fighters found it difficult when most of them were asked to return to their respective villages

⁴⁹⁶ See *Hadas Ertra*, 10, Meaza 1996.

⁴⁹⁷ See John Markakis, “*Eritrea’s National Charter*”, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

and work without salary. What could the government do with the disabled veterans, families of fallen martyrs or the displaced people who had lost their properties? According to some EPLF fighters, difficulties were expected and reactions to current dissatisfactions do not imply the ordinary Eritrean fighter had high hopes life will change overnight. Nonetheless, an improved way of life should have been the logical consequence of freedom from oppressive successive Ethiopian regimes. For Angesom Efreem, people expected a lot of things, “The expectation was liberation would put an end to the problems of housing, water supplies, health facilities, electricity supply, education and other social issues that Eritreans have been faced with for a long time. Precisely everyone wants to develop and get rich”. On the other hand, there is a wide consensus that gradual fulfilment of some of such expectations is taking place.

To be sure, economic difficulties are there but they are still mainly concealed by the honeymoon celebrations of independence. Above all, the culture of tolerance and self-reliance acquired during the war have had a strong influence on the larger population of the country. According to Tekeste Ghebrezghi from Nacfa:

The slogan ‘self-reliance’ enabled the Front to survive all odds, without any foreign support and economic aid; and without any external moral support, it enhanced the victory of the revolution. Self-reliance has become our pride, a culture that has now been incorporated into our society and socio-economic formation. Today we are not victims of any foreign influence and we now direct our own way of doing things. Our revolution has led to real dramatic changes. The old traditions have not been replaced but filtered and inculcated into new progressive ideas and models of running society.

And for Nasser Osman from Afabet:

After the liberation, everything has changed. Eritreans now have the basic guarantee to life, freedom of movement, and arbitrary arrests and detention without trial are now history. The life of the citizen is now valued. People now have the right to elect and to be elected in public positions. People can now elect their own representatives to the national assembly, and a wide consultation has been carried out for constitutional establishment or promulgation. The members of the national assembly are now able to listen to their electors. The government is truly doing its best to make sure every Eritrean citizen and region gets the services required. We now live a better life that transcends affluent and destitute life, even a rich person who still lives in an environment with constraints suffers more than the poor living in free Eritrea.

Peoples’ expectations vary because some value liberation and describe it not in terms of material realisation but in terms of freedom, justice, equality. In other words some people dematerialised the nature of the struggle by not valuing it in terms of wealth and riches but

equated it with some kind of immaterial results, the idea of giving freedom of the mind a priority. Others emphasise material expectations. People's optimism was made high mainly by the belief that liberation and its genus concept independence would be followed by relative material opportunities after the war. To this point, some Eritreans think their expectations have been partially and quite considerably met since independence. The government is engaged in activities that may provide the necessary services, even though everybody knows the government had to scratch from down given that the country had no money and no international support during the first two years before the referendum. Though the economic outlook of Eritrea may be bleak, it is not entirely without hope since it was the best industrialised area of Ethiopia thanks to the long period of Italian colonialism⁴⁹⁸.

In every liberation struggle, peoples' expectations are often high and even rise when success has been achieved. In Eritrea, no one has made a systematic study to that effect, even the government. However, from what I have gathered in my personal encounters with Eritreans from various backgrounds, there is some sort of overall satisfaction with the government performance since 1991 when the war first came to a halt. When in cities, it is difficult to see enough signals of change because the GOE has put much emphasis in the countryside influenced much by their policy of developing from bottom-up. Though a caution has already been made by Mahmood Mamdani on Yoweri Museveni's tendency of trying to neglect urban areas in favour of the countryside⁴⁹⁹, the Eritrean government seems to follow the social rationality in economics which emphasises that unless you develop the countryside, urban immigration is unavoidable. Congestion of cities by rural immigrants who flock to cities looking for jobs and better social services is the danger the Eritrean authorities are trying very much to avert. Thus, the GOE has embarked on pragmatic efforts of building schools, hospitals, roads, and better housing system in the rural areas, a project which it is highly convinced will enable democracy and democratisation to become real.

(c) Self-Views of Civilians: Narratives of Non-Combatants

It appears that all Eritreans were politicised to understand the main reason why their human and material resources were to be used in a war which, after all, it was difficult to imagine would come to an end. Apart from the education and politicisation they got from their

⁴⁹⁸ See in particular Colin Legum, *The Horn of Africa Prospects for Political Transformation* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1992), p. 7.

⁴⁹⁹ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

political elites, other practical incidents also served as concrete evidence to convince the ordinary Eritrean that the Ethiopian soldier was an occupier and not indigenous as the Ethiopian government in Addis Ababa wanted to portray him. Every time the Eritrean fighters had a confrontation with the Ethiopian army, the regime in Addis Ababa often responded with punitive measures on the civilian population. Thus, villages were being bombed or burnt to ashes, and in some areas people were assembled at gunpoint and massacred or requested to evacuate their villages immediately against their own will. Elsewhere in the country, helpless peasant families were pursued for miles by Ethiopian soldiers in tanks and rocket-launchers. So much so that all over the country the fleeing, the never-ending travelling and adventures, the displacement, and the dislocation of peasants became the order of the day. Although Eritreans in the cities suffered, those in the countryside were much worse off and they began to pour into towns in the hope that it was safer there. In a short time, a vast conglomeration of people with diverse histories, class and regional backgrounds converged in Eritrea's big cities like Asmara, Keren, Massawa, Dekemare or Mandefera, thus building what one would call a "lumpen proletariat".

Despite the fact that most of these lumpen groups were unemployable, there was a continuous mob of fresh arrivals from the rural areas seeking jobs, and this resulted in massive unemployment in the cities. The major outcome of such a situation was the rampant increase of crime that affected Eritrea's city dwellers. These internal immigrants are refugees of internal war who, unlike refugees from a drought or famine, come with pain and anger which brews more bitterness and the determination to resist. Even though some of these people had wished to return to their respective villages after the unpleasant experiences in cities, their houses and localities had become mere memories except for a particular part of the land with its surrounding hills and river and sky, but everything else was gone. So what else could the suffering people do under such circumstances? Most of them reacted by joining the EPLF freedom fighters, some fled as refugees into neighbouring countries and abroad, and others opted to remain inside the occupied areas as informers.

One common story found amongst the Eritrean population, particularly those who endured the war without fleeing outside the country, is that of massacres carried out by the notorious Ethiopian army. The Ethiopian troops destroyed Eritrean villages in an effort to try to coerce them into following the regime in Addis Ababa and stop listening to what was widely known as the *shifta* (bandits) propaganda. For this reason, the Ethiopian troops used cluster bombs, napalm and anti-personnel mines against the civilian population of Eritrea throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Though the event was traumatic in its disruption and displacement of Eritreans, it also forced them to adjust to wartime conditions that has now made them bear

and, perhaps, overcome post-liberation difficulties. One major effect of such traumatic experience is that it has fundamentally changed the consciousness, and the view of the world and the future of the Eritrean civil population. The economy and all its infrastructure were destroyed immeasurably, the war has left hundreds of children without parents, and others have remained traumatised and disabled, exposed to poverty as well as physical and mental stress. Mahante and Gaddam expressed their experiences in a recorded conversation with Amrit Wilson:

We are Billens. Our village is two hours walk from Keren. Under Haile Selassie's regime the Ethiopians were massacring us; they made us gather in Churches and Mosques and shot us. We had no peace to till our land, and many of us had to flee to Sudan. Under the Mengistu regime many more of our villagers have been killed. Because the village is so near Keren everyone even suspected of supporting the Front is arrested. After killing us, they say they are doing us a favour. They ask us to sing and dance and ululate in celebration. Since the Ethiopians have come we have no peace. They forced us to leave our land, leave our village. Our harvest, cattle and goats have all been taken by the Amharas. Since our peace was disturbed we are always thinking about change. Since we came on the side of the revolution seven years ago, we learnt to be alert, to go out of our houses, to run away". In tears, Gaddam uttered with sobs: "Now there are no Billens in the village. The Amharas are there, the village is destroyed, and even the forest is gone ... when we get our independence we'll be able to tackle all our problems. We are lucky we are here in Fil Fil (a refugee camp). The EPLF looks after us but many are sheltering under trees and stones with no food to eat and no plans for the future⁵⁰⁰.

These and many other accounts tell of dislocation, loss and longing, and also a formidable strength. Only personal histories and specific experiences differ, and with them the way women and children, old men and young talk about their lives-their openness or reticence, their imagery or incisive analysis, bringing home the richness of the Eritrean experience. For example, Semhatu Bakheet comes from a very different background and according to Amrit Wilson, "She is 54, a Tigre Protestant and EPLF cadre, a quiet woman of immense dignity who lived in Ghabub, another village near Keren". Sembatu narrated to Wilson the story of the notorious Ona massacre and the simultaneous destruction of her village, and what these atrocities did to her:

⁵⁰⁰ Amrit Wilson's research is one of the few efforts by a foreign researcher undertaken during the war to record experiences of women both civilians and fighters. See her *Women and the Eritrean Revolution: The Challenge Road*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

I was brought up and married in Ghabub village. My father had a shop selling essential commodities like sugar, coffee and oil. My mother was a housewife. There were about ten other shops; the rest of the villagers were farmers and so was my husband ... In 1970, the Ethiopians started shooting in the south. My family and I fled towards Keren. When we reached Forto, the gate to Keren, the people of the village of Masadare told us to gather in an Orthodox Church. The Ethiopians then entered the Church and killed hundreds with guns and bayonets; we ourselves narrowly escaped death. Then we saw that from Forto the Ethiopians had started bombing Ona with heavy artillery and tanks. They had forced people to gather in an Orthodox Church there and then they bombed the Church. Seven hundred were massacred; Ona was destroyed ... school students went there in defiance of the soldiers and buried the dead⁵⁰¹.

The foregoing stories were responsible for the development and entrenchment of Eritrean identity and nationalism amongst the ordinary civilians and peasants in cities and villages. Every time the Ethiopian troops had killed and massacred innocent Eritreans, the reaction would intensify with more agitation, increased organisation ensued and firm commitment to continue the war for total liberation was also fuelled. Thus, one lady from the outskirts of Asmara expressed in Tigrigna and translated by Edna Yohannes: "Eritrea is part of me, part of my joy and tears, part of my pain and happiness, it is my future and the future of my children". Throughout Eritrea, almost everyone I spoke to had experienced torture, imprisonment, loss of someone in a family, has a disabled person in a family, or lost valuable property. According to Abeba Ghebreher, now Secretary to the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Asmara, the Ethiopian troops were notorious because they would kill somebody's son and throw his body outside the house and parents of victims were not allowed to mourn or weep for their dead. The situation, however, worsened when the EPLF operated near the city because that would license the Ethiopian army to attack the civil population in revenge for the EPLF attacks. The Ethiopian army would declare a severe curfew where Eritreans were often rounded up and massacred. Those Eritreans who risked going out during the curfew, were killed and displayed in the street. According to Mebrat, a bar tender, any slight event could spark off a massacre or indiscriminate killings. For example, a fight with an Ethiopian soldier, or when an Eritrean woman rejected an Ethiopian soldier, intellectual arguments in university or public institutions also led to killing.

On democracy and democratisation, there is a general feeling that cuts across the elites, fighters and civilian population that Eritrea's priority now is to engage in reconstruction and rehabilitation. Members of the civilian population I had spoken to believe the EPLF-led government has their backing, especially when the Front which brought them total freedom in

⁵⁰¹ For the whole story, see Amrit Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

1991 is still fresh in their minds. Others like Jordan Gebre-Medhin have often argued that the values of democracy are not strange to traditional Eritrean way of life. For example, he records that Eritrean peasants often launched constant opposition to colonial rule particularly that of the Ethiopian administration and feudalism in the past⁵⁰². There is also a widespread believe that the government is doing what it can to fulfill the expectations of the people. For example, Ato Tewelde, an elder and business man in Asmara expressed that business men like him are happy because of the free market economy the government has adopted allowing free competition on markets. "There are no restrictions on foreign exchange, I can give you American dollars, Italian Lira, Deutsche Mark, and other monies", he argued. There is a proliferation of housing projects throughout the country, more schools and hospitals have been built, clean water reaches most inhabitable parts of Eritrea now, remote areas of the country are now accessible more than before.

During these years of transition, there is, however, some grumbling and rumbling among Eritrean urban-dwellers and returning exiles over the slow pace of economic liberalisation. One Eritrean returnee from the United States expressed dismay over government bureaucracy:

I have been struggling to open a hotel business, and nobody listens to me. I want to acquire land in the city to build a big hotel in the city of Asmara because I have the money, nobody welcomes it. I know the reason one ex-fighter now working in a government department told me the priority has been given to former fighters. This is ridiculous because I believe freedom and independence is for all Eritreans whether inside or outside the country and we should be treated the same way.

The other largest number of Eritreans whose aspirations and prospects are linked to the economy is that of the youth. They form a sizeable population given the fact that an estimated half of the population is under seventeen years of age. As Markakis had correctly put it, "Uninvolved in the nationalist struggle, young Eritreans are also uninfluenced by its Spartan mores"⁵⁰³. That is why the EPLF-led government worked out a strategy of how to involve them in rebuilding the country's economy right after liberation. They are now drawn into various reconstruction tasks and they participated actively in the referendum campaign. In May 1994, the Ministry of Defence launched a National Service Programme, involving six months military training and one year work in reconstruction tasks, for males between the ages of 18 and 40, including those grown ups who never participated in the struggle. This national

⁵⁰² See Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Nationalism, Peasant Politics and the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea", *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 30(September 1984), pp. 48-57:49.

⁵⁰³ See John Markakis, "Eritrea's National Charter", *op. cit.*, pp. 126-129.

scription was, however, met with severe criticism and rejection from those who think they are too old to be trained. However, women, students, government and private employees were exempted for the time being. Every year, hundreds of young students will be sent for the training programme which takes place in Sawa, in the Barka region.

4.4. The Role of the Elites and the Rise of Peasant Consciousness

For years, various arguments concerning popular movements have been advanced regarding the role of the elites on the one hand and that of the peasants on the other. As to whether peasants are often inspired from above by the elites or that the elites have often snatched peasant movements, has drawn scholarly attention for years. Under what circumstances do peasants decide to act politically? How do they get mobilised to act collectively? What is the source of their resources? How do peasants overcome their disorganised character as a group? These are a number of questions scholars in the area have long asked⁵⁰⁴. However, the underlying assumption that peasant movements in Africa have more often been inspired from above is rooted in the literature on nationalism. For example, from the 1950s and afterwards most scholars have viewed rural protest primarily through the prism of nationalist discourse. Hodgkin, Ranger, Crawford Young, Mazrui and Tidy, have in the past defined all significant rural movements as nationalist, protonationalist, or linked to nationalism⁵⁰⁵.

According to this trend of thought, the educated nationalist leaders were able to construct a suitable political language which both penetrated and resonated throughout nonliterate rural communities, winning the hearts and minds of rural folk. Though they were right, these authors all paid scant attention to the type of rural protests which took place in rural Africa such as those in Eritrea and Ethiopia designed to safeguard critical household resources against the greed of feudal lords. To be sure, the primary aim of the rebellions by rural peasants against their local landlords and colonial infiltration was not to capture the state but to protect themselves from exploitation. In Eritrea and Ethiopia, the enlightened elites took

⁵⁰⁴ See in particular Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of the Mau Mau* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987); Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Sidney Tarrow, "National Politics and Collective Action: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the United States", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 14(1988), pp. 421-440.

⁵⁰⁵ See Thomas L. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 1957); Terrence O. Ranger, "Connections Between 'Primary Resistance' Movements and the Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa", *Journal of African History*, vol. 9, no. 3(1968), pp. 437-454; Crawford M. Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonisation and Independence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965); and Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *op. cit.*

hold of the crises over land and turned it against the feudal system and later on against what was widely perceived to be the most unfair regimes in Ethiopia.

According to the EPLF, military victory over Ethiopia was only certain if the majority of the Eritrean people, that is, the peasantry, were highly politicised to develop a single purpose of mind and direction which it was conscious of. Thus, the peasant question was made a priority by the EPLF, how to mobilise them, how to politicise and organise a new national democratic solidarity of the Eritrean masses. In short, the success of the Eritrean liberation came about in a long run due primarily to the special attention paid on the question of peasants. Thus, it was not surprising that the EPLF mouthpiece was to read more often “The Eritrean peasantry is the backbone and force of our national democratic revolution”,⁵⁰⁶. In order to succeed in their mobilisation programme, the EPLF carried out a class analysis of the rural areas and distinguished the needs and interests of the rural population. Given that the Front had no outside or external support, the burden of shouldering the war for Eritrean independence was totally based on the Eritrean people. In a short while, the Eritrean peasantry became convinced of the EPLF policies and took the burden of the struggle as their sole responsibility. Thus, the fighting army of the Front became entirely constituted by the middle and poor peasants. Besides that, the Front organised militias in the countryside and built its cell groups from the same class of the population. Apart from its contributory factor as a fighting force, the unarmed Eritrean peasantry supported the front-line fighters with supplies such as food, water, and other necessities. According to Ato Paul Highfield, during the years of the split a correct handling of the peasantry by any splinter group was crucial for the survival of that particular group⁵⁰⁷.

The EPLF success in their mobilisation programme was also due primarily to their strategy of the national democratic programme. It must be noted that the EPLF has had three major Congresses where it outlined clearly its National Democratic Programme (NDP) and only changed it into a National Charter for Eritrea when the Front adopted the new name *People’s Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ) in its Third Congress in 1994⁵⁰⁸. In 1975, the Front’s first NDP was founded on the belief that “the Eritrean revolution has to be based on

⁵⁰⁶ See EPLF, *Vanguard*, 1987, p.23.

⁵⁰⁷ Ato Paul Highfield is English and works for the Ministry of Education in the curriculum department. He joined the EPLF in the 1970s. (Conversation Asmara 1996).

⁵⁰⁸ For details of the three major documents, refer to the following EPLF documents: *Objectives of the National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*; *Political Report and National Democratic Programme, op. cit.*; and *A National Charter for Eritrea, op. cit.*

the worker-peasant alliance". The alliance of the peasantry was crucial if the proletariat was to be victorious over its enemies and, similarly, it was believed the peasantry could not win a war without the leadership of the proletariat. And as Professor Bereket acknowledged in a conversation:

You can only operate a revolution quite efficiently if there is some kind of hierarchical order which establishes and allocates roles; and for such roles to function efficiently they must be led. In this case, the elite factor cannot be minimised. The only problem is that the elites must not mismanage their power. Instead the elite power must be useful for influencing the masses. Thus the elites are often there to facilitate the struggle by providing vital logistical support, efficient leadership and a functioning structure.

In a way, the EPLF strategy was to organise the struggle in some kind of Marxist order where the national democratic revolution becomes coterminous with the socialist one. The first stage was transitional, where the alliance of all democratic forces, in particular the worker-peasant alliance against feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism must be forged. This was then a precondition for the success of the second stage, namely, the socialist revolution. Behind the first stage are the peasantry, who lead a wretched life and constitute the majority, they are the main force. However, this transitional stage of the democratic revolution demanded the guidance and leadership of the workers. The first stage was dialectically related to and the foundation for the success of the second stage where the socialist mode of production and socio-economic relations take place. Hence, the adoption of a national democratic programme based on the demise of two-stage revolution⁵⁰⁹.

At this point, part two of the EPLF programme dealing with agriculture directly concerned the peasantry, where their effort was to:

Abolish feudal land relations and carry out an equitable distribution of land. Strive to introduce co-operative farms by creating conditions of co-operation and mutual assistance so as to develop a modern and advanced system of agriculture and animal husbandry capable of increasing the income and improving the lot of the peasantry. Promote an association that will organise, politicise and arm the peasants with a clear revolutionary outlook so they can fully participate in the anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggle, defend the gains of

⁵⁰⁹ See in particular a major literature that articulated EPLF's strategy of mobilisation by the Eritrean scholar, Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Eritrea: Background to Revolution", *Monthly Review*, vol. 28, no. 4(1976), pp. 52-61; "Nationalism, Peasant Politics & the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea", *Review of African Political Economy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-5; and *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies*, *op. cit.*

the revolution, free themselves from the oppression and economic exploitation, and manage their own affairs⁵¹⁰.

In other words, the examination of peasant social structure in light of the history that preceded it proved of importance. Thus, the outcome of historical studies demonstrated that the Front considered land, labour, means of production, production relations, and superstructural relations of greater salience in the process of building a popular movement. The EPLF took an independently systematic study of each region, each section, and each village in relation to the overall Eritrean situation. According to those involved in the project, no *a priori* assumptions were made as to the revolutionary nature of a certain fraction of rural peasant population. The then Chairman of the Department of Mass Administration summed the method of peasant mobilisation in the following way:

Our organisation makes thorough preparations before it initiates the struggle. We make detailed investigation of the political, economic and social life of the village where the land reform is to be carried out. We study the relations and contradictions between various tribes and nationalities, the strength of the feudalists and other reactionaries, the influence of religious fanaticism and other backward sentiments. We then analyse the level of organisation and consciousness of the masses. Our experience shows that it is not correct to assume *a priori* that in every particular case the poor and middle peasants will take a resolute stand in favour of land reform, even though the people and middle peasants may realise that the land reform is in effect their stand. If the land reform does not succeed or is reversed, the poor and middle peasants fear that the feudalists will expropriate their land or deprive them of the means of gaining supplementary income. For this reason, the poor and middle peasants might oppose the land reform to take a wavering stand. To ensure the success of the land reform, we organise the poor, middle and rich peasants separately and carry out sustained propaganda and agitation so as to raise the consciousness and develop the self-confidence of the oppressed peasants. In addition we organise a core of the most conscious peasants to terrorise the feudalists and suppress them if necessary. If in addition a people's Assembly dominated the poor and middle peasants is established, an extremely favourable situation is created for successful land reform⁵¹¹.

In most parts of Eritrea, the interest of the peasantry often clashed with the interests of the Ethiopian state bureaucracy. So when the EPLF liberated an area, it was not uncommon to see peasants who had lived in the village for years without a portion of land. Because

⁵¹⁰ See EPLF, *National Democratic Programme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

⁵¹¹ Sobhat Efreem has been promoted to the rank of General and he is currently the Minister of Defence. This quotation is an extract from an interview he carried out with the Front's mouthpiece. See EPLF, *Vanguard*, 3, 1-21-32 (1978).

whenever peasants demanded that land be redistributed, the Ethiopian government cared less about their complaints. Thus, the holding of the landlords and rich peasants had increased while the number of poor and middle peasants had also increased. Rural class differentiation favouring those who had land, the labour and the implements to exploit it, became acute throughout the period of Haile Selassie's imperial reign⁵¹².

Fully aware of the common discontent amongst Eritrean peasant population, the EPLF quickly adopted an effective strategy of mobilisation by infiltrating villages and agitate them first, against the local hierarchy and enrol them in the membership of the Front. For example, in 1974 the EPLF dispatched its armed propaganda unit to villages near and around big towns. In Azen village, their role was to promote democratic political agitation, mobilise the peasant masses, and initiate the necessary rural class struggle after a careful assessment of the economic situation. Thus, conscious peasants were recruited from among the poor and middle peasants and organised in underground cells, in preparation for building democratic mass organisations. The peasant association of the EPLF in Azen was built in this manner. As soon as the necessary mass homework was successfully done, an open democratic fight ensued. The people of the village assembled and the question of village political power was openly discussed for the first time. Now all the able-bodied villages participated in this open struggle for the first time. The village assembly was freed of being under the control of the ruling classes or being attended only by men. Thus, the assembly transformed into an arena of mass class struggle with each individual in the village, regardless of religion or sex, having full rights to participate. This is how the mass organ of the EPLF summed up the village situation in Azen:

The question of political power was raised at mass political meetings ... In the course of the discussions two diametrically opposed views were presented. The overwhelming majority of the peasants spearheaded by the cell members voted for the popularly elected village assembly. The feudal lords and a section of the rich peasants were for preserving the *status quo*, but their view was totally unacceptable to the peasant masses and was repudiated and condemned outright. Women who never participated in political meetings and had no political rights before played a vigorous role in the historic event. It was a turning point for Azen⁵¹³.

⁵¹² Jordan Gebre-Medhin illustrates this case in the story of Azen, a village in Hamasien Province of Asmara. See his "*Nationalism, Peasant Politics & the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea*", *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵¹³ See AESNA (Association of Eritrean Students in North America), "EPLF Leading Peasants Masses' and Eritrean Peasant Intensify Class Struggle", *Eritrea in Struggle*, vol. 2, nos. 2&3(1977), p. 5.

After intense political and agitational work in Azen, under the EPLF guidance, a chain of similar reactions proliferated elsewhere in the country. From thence, a united front action of the peasantry in rural Eritrea was finally awakened and land came under the control of the peasantry. However, the EPLF strategy did not go unchallenged, the Front had to experience some opposition from the *status quo* circles. For example, the Church in particular reacted by preaching about the unholy and anti-religious nature of the EPLF, but with less effects since changes were evidently in favour of the majority of the population. The major effect of the EPLF mobilisation offensive was the final collapse of the magic of high culture in Eritrea's liberated areas and the subsequent triumph of the peasantry.

Therefore, the correct handling of the land issue resulted in the active participation of the peasants with clear political direction. Though the EPLF provided the necessary guidance to the peasantry by introducing their NDP, the actual work of liberating the peasants from the yoke of feudal idiocy, oppression and exploitation was done by the peasants themselves. This proves that what peasants often need is prior intense politicisation and clear indication that the programme of mobilisation would deliver them concrete goods in order for them to rise and act against injustice and political suppression and oppression. On this point, Ambassador Haile Menkerios was bold enough to say, "Elites of course start the conscientisation of the ordinary people. But once mobilised, the peasants' involvement generates new power, this takes years, in the case of Eritrea, thirty years. However, the long process pays because is in itself a process of empowerment". By the end of 1977, more than 90% of the Eritrean territory was under the control of anti-government establishments. Thus the EPLF's control of areas like Azen was a display of peasant emancipation. Therefore, Eritrean nationalist discourses have often emphasised that it was in the cauldron of war and revolution-which involved massive social mobilisation across class, gender, religious and ethnic differences-that the culturally and socially diverse population of Eritrea was forged into a single identity forming a cohesive political nation.

In general, the EPLF had two major successful strategies of mobilisation: land reform and self-reliance. We have already seen how the strategy of land reform played a crucial role not only during the years of the liberation struggle itself, but has continued to do so in post-war restructuring. In the same vein, the strategy of self-reliance was effective given that the Front had no outside or external support. Self-reliance has as well permeated the Eritrean society so much that the people know the country's survival and success remains on their shoulders. This strategy was the consequence of the harsh environment, the narrow ravines and rugged terrain,

though in military terms, the EPLF were proud to exclaim, “The mountains are our friends”⁵¹⁴. Throughout the struggle, EPLF maintained its transport system for delivering the necessary equipment and even food for fighters and inhabitants of drought-stricken liberated areas. The captured fleet of trucks were kept in good running condition by a network of garage staffed by mechanics trained by the movement, capable not only of servicing and repairing but converting military booties and destroyed trucks for transport and even for engineering of spare parts. However, military effectiveness does not depend only on sound tactics and self-reliance or land reform alone, but demanded efficient political mobilisation for the support of the broader mass population. Thus, the provision of services such as health, education, famine relief (whose creative activities has been documented by several other observers⁵¹⁵), was the crucial proof that the EPLF was a viable organisation that can not only defeat the enemy but is capable of also effectively running a government of a future independent Eritrea.

⁵¹⁴ “The mountains are our friends” became EPLF’s slogan. See Lionel Cliffe, “Dramatic Shifts in the Military Balance in the Horn: The 1984 Eritrean Offensive”, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 30(September 1984), pp. 93-97.

⁵¹⁵ See Roy Pateman, “Drought, Famine and Development”, in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *Eritrea: The Long Struggle for Independence and Constructive Peace*, op. cit., pp. 163-186; and Mark Duffield and John Predendergast, *Without Troops and Tanks: Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1994).

CHAPTER FIVE: DEMOCRATISATION THROUGH LIBERATION: ETHIOPIAN SELF-VIEWS

Introduction

Post-colonial liberation movements in the African continent at large do not in particular aim, as some commentators have pointed out, “to take over the state structure established by their predecessors and to use it, suitably adapted, as an agency for economic development, national integration, and the consolidation of their own power”⁵¹⁶. The EPRDF, EPLF (PFDJ), NRM/A, SPLM/A and/or Laurent Kabila’s Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, are all aiming at the total deconstruction of the state structure and its apparatus and the replacement of these by new and often more democratic ones. It is now all clear that liberation movements in Sub-Saharan Africa are led by revolutionary intellectuals whose challenge against the dictatorship of the first generation of African leaders has received popular response from the African masses. In fact, decolonisation left, if not encouraged, corrupt state structures that have in turn provided the ground for dissent and political fragmentation, and post-colonial liberation movements have struggled to restore and foster national integration by introducing structures of accountability and transparency.

The liberation movement to democratise Ethiopia was started by the popular masses and revolutionary intellectuals in the early 1970s, and was unfortunately hijacked by the military junta, later infamously known as the *Dergue*. The assumption of power by the *Dergue* in Ethiopia led to the replacement of the monarchy with a military autocracy which shelved the democratic agenda until its total overthrow in 1991. However, it is important to note that the 1974 Revolution in Ethiopia was preceded by decades of opposition, both covert and overt. The attempted coup d’état of 1960, for example, marked a watershed in the political opposition in post-World War II Ethiopia. For years, opposition tended to be conspiratorial and elitist, but after the 1960 coup, it became more open and mass-based. In fact, opposition politics against the Emperor accelerated thereafter and assumed many facets. For example, peasants rebelled against increasing demands on their produce. Nationalities rose in arms for self-determination. Intellectuals struggled for their vision of a just and equitable order. Even some members of the ruling class are reported to have favoured the removal of Haile Selassie I believing that this might avert the total collapse of the socio-economic order⁵¹⁷. In short, three main groups became involved in the contest for the control of the state during and after the

⁵¹⁶ See for example, Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity, op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵¹⁷ See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

collapse of the monarchy: the military, the civilian opposition led mainly by the intelligentsia, and finally, the nationalist liberation movements that were either striving to detach their regions from the Ethiopian state or fought for greater autonomy (Tigray, Gondar, Hararghe and particularly Eritrean and Somali nationals)⁵¹⁸.

As will be shown later on in the chapter, the fight for the establishment of popular democratic foundations for the political future of Ethiopia and aspiration to acknowledge the rights of national minorities for self-expression and autonomy have for the first time been brought to public discourse by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). To be sure, not much has been written about the EPRDF except for those works that have simply mentioned it in the course of writing about either ethnic liberation movements such as the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Somali-irredentists fronts, or mentioned it simply as a party that is presently in charge in Ethiopia⁵¹⁹. On the other hand, the Monarchy, the Ethiopian Empire, and the 1974 Revolution has been widely written about⁵²⁰. The EPRDF is discussed here as a liberation movement that has truly brought total

⁵¹⁸ See John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1986), Introduction to American Edition; Shehim Kassim, "Ethiopia, Revolution and the Question of Nationalism: The Case of the Afar", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.23, no. 2(1985), pp. 331-348; and Paul Baxter, "The Problem of the Oromo or the Problem for the Oromo", in I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-149.

⁵¹⁹ John Young mentions EPRDF when writing about the TPLF, see his works: "*Peasants and Revolution In Ethiopia: The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, 1975-1991*", *op. cit.*; "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts", *op. cit.*; "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia", *op. cit.*; Peter Woodward mentions EPRDF only ten times or so, see his *The Horn of Africa: State Politics and International Relations* (London: Tauris, 1996); Christopher Clapham does not allocate a significant portion to EPRDF in his *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sarah Vaughan only examines the EPRDF's entry into Addis Ababa and the July negotiations for the formation of the TGE, see her *The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991*, *op. cit.*; and Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 1992). One only source, though fragmented, but critical of the EPRDF is *Ethiopian Review*, a journal controlled mainly by Ethiopian dissidents in Los Angeles, especially the 1991-1993 series.

⁵²⁰ Notable among these works of scholarship include: Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *op. cit.*; Christopher Clapham, *Continuity and Change in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*; Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*; Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, *op. cit.*; David and Marina Ottoway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: African Publishing Company, 1978); Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987: A Transformation From an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Mulati Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder, Col.: Wsetview Press, 1988); on the Monarchy and the Empire see Darrell Bates, *The Abyssinian Difficulty: The Emperor Theodorus and the Magdala Campaign 1867-68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestants and Catholic Missionaries in Orthodox Ethiopia 1830-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); R.H. Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa*,

change in the political history of Ethiopia. For the first time, an Ethiopian constitution has allowed the right of self-determination to its different nationalities and indeed the right to secession⁵²¹. Today, Ethiopia is neither ruled by descendants of the Agau Dynasty nor by a military autocracy. Even though the EPRDF took over power through the barrel of the gun, many including even representatives of Western democracies, believe Meles Zenawi (add Museveni, Issaias, or Kagame) became soldiers by default⁵²². Ethiopia's past of *negus*, *ras*, *tsahafe t'ezaz*, *dajjach*, *bajerond* or other royal titles have been totally destroyed by the successful liberation alliance movement in 1991. Politics has now been upgraded and people can elect their leaders through the ballot box⁵²³.

In order to fully comprehend the liberation struggle for democracy in Ethiopia, this chapter will briefly trace the genesis of modern political life in Ethiopia back to its mythologies and royal chronicles. While feudalism provided a fertile ground for the 1974 Revolution after some three thousand years, the military autocracy which succeeded it, left forces of change with no option other than the mobilisation of protracted mass-based movements. Though the era of the *Dergue* delayed the transition from monarchical rule to democratic governance, the rise of revolutionary intellectuals in the 1970s intensified armed resistance which later on became fully fledged mass-based liberation movements in the late 1980s until the final victory of a broader alliance in 1991. Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic society and, somewhat in contrast to

Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire 1813-1889 (London, 1975); Girma-Selassie Asfaw and Richard Pankhurst, *Tax Records and Inventories of Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia* (London: SOAS, 1979); Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II. Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings: Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press, 1966); in idem, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976); and Alesandro Triulzi, *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of a No-Man's-Land, Bela Shangul. Wallagga, Ethiopia, c.1800-1898* (Naples, 1981).

⁵²¹ See “*The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*” (unofficial English translation from the Amharic original), Addis Ababa, 8th December 1995, pp. 18-19, where nation, nationality or people are defined in the constitution as “a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture, or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief (sic.) in a common or related identities, and who predominantly inhabit an identifiable, contiguous territory”, and article 39 of the 1995 Constitution proclaims, “every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession”. See also Constitutional Commission, Transitional Government of Ethiopia, *Basic Constitutional Concepts* (Addis Ababa: TGE, 1993); and EPRDF, *On the Question of Peace in Ethiopia* (London: EPRDF, 1990).

⁵²² Separate conversations with Mr. Robert Houdek, United States Ambassador, Mr. Claudio Bay-Rossi, Italian Ambassador, and Mr. Wolfgang Ringe, German Ambassador, *op. cit.*

⁵²³ See in particular Kife Abraham, *Ethiopia: From Bullets to the Ballot Box*, *op. cit.*, (emphasis added).

Eritrea, liberation movements there have more often been ethnically-based. Even though the resentment against Amhara domination perpetrated by the rise of the Agau Dynasty is shared across the majority of Ethiopian society, party politics during and after the 1974 Revolution tended to follow ethnic or regional lines.

This chapter will also show that the social revolution in Ethiopia was started not by the military but by university students, the intelligentsia and was supported by the masses in the cities. When the people's revolution was hijacked by the army, remnants of it fled northward fearing military intimidation and incrimination. It is these remnants who later on constituted the membership of the various guerrilla insurgencies in Ethiopia. Most of them were from Tigray who found their way to Eritrea and got trained by the EPLF to form the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). Theodros Dagne explained:

Reportedly, there were 37 students most of whom were active in the Ethiopian student movement, but committed Tigrean nationalists as well. They were also Marxists, with few exceptions. Most were in their early twenties and had gone to the same elementary or high school, or University of Addis Ababa. Out of the 37 founders of the movement, 11 were reportedly sent to the field to start the armed struggle with five guns, some to Eritrea for military training, while others remained in the cities to agitate. The current Defence Minister, Seye Abraha, was one of the originals sent to Eritrea for military training⁵²⁴.

It was the TPLF who, in turn, became instrumental in the formation of an-all rebel alliance from other parts of Ethiopia against the *Dergue*, leading to the birth of the ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989.

Just as the previous chapter on Eritrea, this chapter will first, in 5.1. and 5.2., present the genesis of the liberation struggle in Ethiopia and then, in a second part, analyse how Ethiopians look at their struggle for liberation and democracy, before we look again at the role of elites in the struggle.

⁵²⁴ See Theodros Dagne, "EPRDF's Rise to Political Dominance", *Ethiopian Review* (December 1992), pp. 17-20:17.

5.1. The Genesis of the Liberation Struggle for Democracy in Ethiopia

(a) Historical Antecedents of the Struggle: Feudalism and Military Autocracy

Present-day Ethiopia's political problems are often traceable to centuries of monarchical rule and more than a decade of military autocracy. Virtually all scholars of Ethiopia's history and politics do concur that current political events in Ethiopia cannot be dealt with in isolation from the past. The multiplicity of the Ethiopian people, their links to ancient history and culture are reflected in Ethiopian traditions very much alive today. For years, Ethiopia's political scene was dominated by the Amharas on the basis of dynastic credentials, traditional claims, demographic advantage, or the advantage of being endowed with resources. Although such domination survived for millennia, at the second half of this century changes in the global order began taking place. For example, the struggle between the communist and the capitalist blocks had been on the upswing, particularly after 1948. Secondly, the era of decolonisation in Africa could be said to have been ushered in with the independence of Ghana in 1957. And in addition, Arab nationalism was on the rise, and the world's growing polarisation found Ethiopia in the camp of the USA and Israel⁵²⁵.

Even though the membership of the nonalignment movement and later on the location of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa restored a certain veneer of neutrality to the autocratic regime, it did not cleanse it enough for the regime to be viewed as sufficiently neutral within the framework of world politics. Moreover the imperial regime continued its heavy handed treatment of the new generation of Ethiopians with exposure to modern education and some knowledge of world affairs. This use of brute force together with its hollow propaganda was bound to boomerang on the imperial regime. In 1960, the emperor experienced the first challenge to his very throne in the form of an abortive coup d'état that included "trusted elements of the Imperial Body Guard, the police, and the Security Branch, as well as individuals"⁵²⁶. The press proclamation of the coup leaders read: "While the newly formed independent African nations are making progress, Ethiopia is lagging behind, and this fact is now realised. Ethiopia has always been lulled by vain promises. This realisation

⁵²⁵ See Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941-1974: The Politics of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁵²⁶ See Robert Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall, 1965); and Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1885-1974, op. cit.*, pp. ...

resulted during the past two years in an active movement among farmers, merchants, government officials, the armed forces, and the educated class ...”⁵²⁷.

Although Haile Selassie managed to suppress the coup d'état, the event had planted the seeds of dissent and revolution. For example, in 1961, a group that called itself “*The National Front Movement in Ethiopia*” published a programme of revolutionary opposition to the monarchical regime which read in its opening paragraph: “After centuries of independence and twenty years [1941-1961] of a so-called modern government the overwhelming majority of Ethiopians still live under medieval [?] conditions of poverty, disease, ignorance and recurring famine”. The document further discussed issues such as “political tyranny”, “the cult of personality”, “civil rights”, “justice”, “education”, “foreign policy”, and “feudalism and economic progress” with regard to which it decided that the regime was a total failure. In the conclusion it stated:

The matter is that even with best intentions economic and social development is of necessity impossible under the prevailing feudal agrarian structure, [sic.] Institutional changes, including a radical change in the present system of landholding and the self-appointed feudal autocracy, are fundamental prerequisites of economics [sic.] and social development in Ethiopia. Nothing less than this will release the energies of our people from the present dormant and passive attitude, to a more dynamic and constructive attitude which should form the only sound basis for economic and social development of our country⁵²⁸.

This memorandum argued that no social transformation would take place without social and political revolution. The consequence of this was the emergence of two major facets to revolution: first the Eritrean nationalists (examined in the previous chapter) had already been bracing themselves for a forceful seizure of independence; and the Ethiopian Student Movement had emerged during the period between 1960-1974⁵²⁹. By 1974, students and the intelligentsia had succeeded in instigating public unrest which led to the overthrow of the autocratic monarchy. The 1974 Revolution was meant to deconstruct the Amhara basis of

⁵²⁷ See R. Ronning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977* (East Lansing: African Studies Centre, Michigan State University, 1985), p. 94.

⁵²⁸ The full text of this statement came out in Ethiopia's *Monthly Review* that year and reprinted later on in *Challenge*, No. 1(1968), pp. 26-32.

⁵²⁹ See Adhana Haile Adhana, “The Roots of Organised Internal Armed Conflicts in Ethiopia”, in Terje Tvedt (ed.), *Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: Human and Ecological Consequences of Warfare* (Uppsala: Reprocentralen HSC, 1993); one person who details information on the student movement is R. Ronning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students*, *op. cit.*; and on the Eritrean liberation struggle, see chapter four above.

power by proving that those less endowed with resources or the small nations also have legitimate rights to participate in the country's political process, economic life and in the burdensome task of rebuilding it. Even though this aim was not achieved, the 1974 Revolution marked the beginning of Ethiopia's seventeen years (besides the thirteen years previously engaged with Eritrea from 1961) of organised armed resistance that culminated in the overthrow of the *Dergue* in May 1991. Therefore, an autocratic monarchy succeeded by an autocratic military regime laid the foundation upon which liberation movements for democracy in Ethiopia were built. These two successive periods of autocratic rule deserve separate examination.

(i) The Rise of Imperial Autocracy and Its Demise

As we have pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the aim of looking at the far past of Ethiopia's political systems is not merely an exercise of historical revisionism, but rather that of showing the foundation upon which the current system is built. The liberation struggle for democracy in Ethiopia has its historical antecedents dating back to some three thousand years ago. Conventionally, Ethiopian history begun with the visit to Solomon, King of Israel, by Queen of Sheba, who allegedly came from Ethiopia in the tenth century B.C.⁵³⁰. Thus, Bahru Zewde, himself an Ethiopian historian, writes:

The *Kebra Nagast* ('Glory of Kings'), written in the early fourteenth century, which gave the 'received' account of the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, not only linked the Ethiopian Kings to the House of Israel, but also sealed the identification of the term Ethiopia with the country: since the thirteenth century, when a dynasty that claimed to represent the restoration of the Solomonic line came to rule the country, its rulers have styled themselves 'King of Kings of Ethiopia'⁵³¹.

This reference affirms the truth of Ethiopia's three thousand years of history. For centuries, Ethiopia was referred to by the name of 'Abyssinia' and acquired its present geographical shape and multi-ethnicity only by expansionist conquest in the nineteenth century⁵³². In fact, it has for years been difficult to decide upon which date to begin from when writing about

⁵³⁰ The history of Ethiopia can be traced as far back as three thousand years ago; it is even mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. See in particular the Books of Prophet Jeremiah, Ch. 13:23; and the Acts of the Apostles, Ch. 8:27.

⁵³¹ See his *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1885-1974*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁵³² See Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Ethiopia's body politique. For the purpose of this thesis, 1855 is the date chosen from which to trace the roots of revolutionary thought in Ethiopia.

The medieval Christian Ethiopian Empire had disintegrated into small feudal kingdoms. Before 1855, central authority was not effectively constituted in Ethiopia and the present geographic boundaries were not established until 1908. The period of state growth and power consolidation began in 1855 under four successive emperors, ending with the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie I by a "creeping revolution" in 1974⁵³³. Thus, the man who is credited as the main architect of Ethiopia's first effective unification and independence was Kasa Haylu, crowned in 1855 as Emperor Tewodros II. He became the principle inaugurator of Ethiopia's present history. According to Bahru Zewde, Kasa was a self-made man, who became Tewodros by means of his own personal qualities: "his sense of mission, his military skill and valour and his extraordinary intelligence"⁵³⁴. During and after the 1974 Revolution, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the military autocrat, often invoked the qualities of Tewodros II for modelling himself to appeal to Ethiopians of his time for support, despite the fact that he also claimed resentment of monarchical rule as a primary motive for the revolution.

Tewodros II has been described as the first monarch who introduced modernisation in present-day Ethiopia⁵³⁵. Even though Tewodros's concept of modernisation was vague because the reforms he attempted to introduce lacked consistency and method, his reign laid a foundation for what later on came to be known as modern Ethiopia under Menelik II. Tewodros had a clear vision of constructing a powerful Ethiopian state and used Western technology which in turn earned him recognition by Western powers. Tewodros successfully re-established a single Ethiopian state with a vision which his successors sustained, and which ultimately made Ethiopia survive as the sole independent indigenous African state in the middle of the European scramble for Africa⁵³⁶. However, Tewodros was an over ambitious emperor because

⁵³³ This period is remembered as that of construction and consolidation of the modern Ethiopian state. See in particular Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*, *op. cit.*; Mordechai Abir, *The Era of the Princes* (London: Longmans, 1968); and John Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation* (Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1988).

⁵³⁴ See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-80.

⁵³⁵ See Donald Crummey, "Tewodros as Reformer and Moderniser", *Journal of African History*, vol. 10, no. 3(1969).

⁵³⁶ See Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1966); Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (London: ROAPE, 1975), p. 2; and Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alula 1875-1897* (East Lansing, 1982).

his programme of conquest even included the liberation of Jerusalem. Later on, the failure of his vision backfired forcing him to commit suicide in the face of a British expeditionary force sent to rescue imprisoned Europeans.

Tewodros II was succeeded by Yohannes IV of Tigray, who first had to defeat other rival leaders in Ethiopia before ascending to the throne. It was Yohannes who successfully defended Ethiopia (including Eritrea) against external invaders in 1875 and 1876, particularly against the first Italian incursions from the coast and the Mahdist from the Sudan where he finally met his death in 1889⁵³⁷. Yohannes' reign is famous for having followed a substantially different policy of unification. As opposed to his predecessor's confrontation with regional powers, Yohannes IV was ready to devolve power to clients and subordinates who recognised his claims as 'King of Kings' of all the regional chiefs. While Tewodros had restored the image of "*Greater Ethiopia*", Menelik II, who succeeded the throne after Yohannes IV's death, had the best claim of all the three great 19th century emperors to be considered as the founder of the modern Ethiopian state⁵³⁸.

Menelik's claim to historical distinction was that he presided over the realisation of an idea that had first been kindled in the fiery mind of Tewodros II. His reign witnessed a ferocious process of conquest, annexation, incorporation and subjugation of peoples and territories - the creation of a typical pre-capitalist empire-state. In the process, the entire socio-political and economic foundations of modern Ethiopia were laid down. The socio-historical product of this era of empire building is what Addis Hiwet has characterised as "military-feudal-colonialism"⁵³⁹. The borders of this expansionist empire were accepted by the colonial powers after the 1896 battle of Adowa, where for the first time since Hannibal a native African army had defeated a colonial army. For this reason, virtually the whole complex socio-political structure of modern Ethiopia, say from 1900-1970s, was evolved directly out of and is based upon it.

⁵³⁷ See G.N.K. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, 1941-1952*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; and Araya Tseggai, "The History of the Eritrean Struggle", in Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 68-71.

⁵³⁸ See Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II 1844-1913*, *op. cit.*; John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, *op. cit.*; Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, dates his book from that time; and Kjetil Tronvoll and Oyvind Aadland, *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia - An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?*, Human Rights Report No. 5 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 1995), pp. 22-23.

⁵³⁹. See Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Thus, without a clear grasp of this concept it is virtually impossible to understand any of the fundamental elements of pre-and post-war Ethiopian socio-political realities. As mentioned above, Menelik II had defeated the Italians at Adowa in 1896, the birth place of a future president and prime minister of Ethiopia after the EPRDF successful liberation of the country in 1991⁵⁴⁰. The only thorny issue left by the Menelik era was that of Eritrea because the emperor had failed to repossess it from the Italians⁵⁴¹. Since that failure, Eritreans often referred to Italy's presence in their land as the *de facto* point in history that legitimised their independence claim, an argument the EPRDF leaders later on conceded to and allowed Eritrea to partition from Ethiopia. Despite that, there are many things Menelik II is also to date praised for. For example, he moved the capital from Ankobar to the slopes of Entotto and then to present day Addis Ababa, and linked it to the outside world by building Africa's historical railway to Djibouti, in which the first Western educational and administrative structures were created⁵⁴². After Menelik II, controlling Addis Ababa became a control of national political power and that, for the first time in history, shifted the fight for power amongst regional rulers to the city⁵⁴³. In other words, the construction of Addis Ababa made rival regional rulers less important who were then obliged to look to Addis Ababa for recognition. In precise terms, it is widely acknowledged that the life style and system of present-day Ethiopia begun during the reign of Menelik II⁵⁴⁴.

However, Menelik's last years created difficult moments in Ethiopia's early political history. Following his protracted illness and up to his death in December 1913, the Emperor had designated his grandson, Lej Iyyasu, a boy of twelve years of age, as his successor in the

⁵⁴⁰ For a proper recording of the battle of Adowa, see G.F.H. Berkeley, *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik* (London, 1902). There is no written biography yet, but reliable sources confirm that Meles Zenawi, Chairman of EPRDF, formerly President of the TGE and currently Prime Minister, was born in Adowa, a town of the Province of Tigray. In fact the TPLF has been led by people from Adowa since its formation. Its first Chairman, Sebhat Nega (1979-1989) is also from Adowa. See Theodros Dagne, "EPRDF's Rise to Political Dominance", *Ethiopian Review*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵⁴¹ See B. Thompson, *Ethiopia: The Country That Cut Off its Head* (London: Robson Books, 1975).

⁵⁴² See Bahru Zewde, op. cit., p. 69; and Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, op. cit., p. 27.

⁵⁴³ See Charles W. McClellan, "Articulating Economic Modernisation and National Integration at the Periphery: Addis Ababa and Sidamo's Provincial Centers", *African Studies Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (April 1990), pp. 29-54.

⁵⁴⁴ See in particular the UNESCO General History of Africa, Volume VII, *Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, ed. Adu A. Boahen (London: James Currey, 1985); and Harold G. Marcus, *The Lives and Times of Menelik II*, op. cit.

middle of 1908. But later in the same year, Menelik became paralysed and lost the power of speech and was, therefore, forced to appoint Ras Tasamma (a former general) as an immediate successor to the throne. Unfortunately, Ras Tasamma's Regency did not last for long because he died shortly in 1911, and the Ethiopian Council of State was also forced to declare the young designate, Lej Iyyasu, as old enough to act for himself with their guidance.

Unfortunately, Iyyasu's background suggested his father, Ras Mikael, ruler of Wollo, was impetuous by nature. Iyyasu's family rule was concentrated only in Wollo earning him no wider power base outside the province. Worse of all, his policies had alienated the nobles, the Church dignitaries and the Allied delegations in Addis Ababa. For example, he had encouraged close ties with the Muslim World and his foreign policies supported Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey on the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. As a result, he was deposed in September 1916 and kept in prison until his death in 1935. Menelik's daughter, Zawditu, was thereupon crowned Empress, and Tafari, son of the deceased Emperor's cousin Ras Makonnen, was made Regent and heir to the throne. That means Empress Zawditu's coronation, on February 11th 1917, was followed by a regime of dual authority in which power was shared between the Empress and the Regent, each with a palace, a distinct group of followers and often conflicting policies. To be sure, the advent of Tafari as Regent was an event of importance, in that he was a resolute leader desirous of resuming Menelik's policies of promodernisation and of maintaining Ethiopia's independence. His personal style enabled him to gradually extend his power during the regency over several crucial areas of the public sector and, in 1928, he was crowned *Negus* (King), and assumed complete control of the government. Thus, a brief description of Haile Selassie's rise to power is important here because his reign marked the end of monarchical rule in Ethiopia.

(ii) Haile Selassie I's Reign: Farewell to Monarchical Rule in Ethiopia

First and foremost, Emperor Haile Selassie I was the last of the four major emperors of Ethiopia who reigned between 1855-1974. His reign waved a farewell to monarchical rule in Ethiopia. He was born in 1892 in Harar to Yeshi-emabet Ali and Ras Makonnen, he was named Tafari Makonnen. In his biography, it is mentioned that Tafari Makonnen learned to write and read both *Ge'ez* (the liturgical language of the Church) and *Amharic* (the national language of Ethiopia) from clerical tutors and became fluent in French through foreign tutors. When his father died in 1906 Tafari joined the nobles at Menelik's court in 1907 where he also attended the new Menelik II school in Addis Ababa. By 1916, Tafari had served consecutively as Governor of Garamullata, Salale, Basso, Sidamo and Harar, even though such early appointments were only titular and symbolic. However, his ascendancy to the throne was not an easy task. He had a number of challenges, but due to his shrewd character he managed to

overcome them. On the death of Empress Zawditu in March 1930, Tafari Makonnen mounted the imperial throne and was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I on 2nd November 1930 until his unprecedented debacle in 1974⁵⁴⁵.

However, it should be pointed out that between Menelik II and Haile Selassie I, an interlude of power struggle took place in particular when Ras Abata Bwayalaw made a triumphant entry into Addis Ababa in a bid to replace Ras Tasamma. In the city, he entered the palace in an attempt to take over the armoury, this initiated another period of tension, as the chief of the palace guards, Fitiwrari Gabra-Maryam, barred the way. According to Bahru Zewde, a bloody clash was averted by the intervention of the *abun* and the *echage*; and Abate was persuaded to retire to his Kambata fief⁵⁴⁶. Bahru further summarised:

The political stalemate reached during this interlude was in the nature of a compromise. In 1916, the monarch and the heir to the throne were, respectively, the candidates of the Showan nobility and of the foreign legations, the two forces which had united to overthrow Lej Iyyasu. Zwaditu's sole qualification for the throne was her birth, as the daughter of Menelik. Her supreme attraction to the nobility was her political innocuousness. While Tafari Makonnen's lineage as grandson of *Negus* Sahla-Selassie of Showa (r. 1813-1947) was almost as impressive, his pro-allies stand, emanating partly from his French educational background, contributed as much, if not more, to his claim to and assumption of such an exalted post⁵⁴⁷.

So the fight for power amongst the diverse groups of social backgrounds is a constant phenomenon in Ethiopia's political history, and it has continued to date. Although Emperors Tewodros II and Menelik II are renowned as architects of modern Ethiopia, nevertheless it was Haile Selassie I, later on in his time crowned as the "*Girmawi, Kidamawi, Haile Selassie, Neguse Negest ze Ethiopia*" (Greatest of the Great, the First amongst the First, Haile Selassie,

⁵⁴⁵ See UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. VII, *op. cit.*, p. 305; Haile Selassie I, *Haywatayna Yeitiopia Armaja, Vol. I* (Addis Ababa: Berhannena Selam Printers, 1973), trans. by Edward Ullendorff, *Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I: "My Life and Ethiopia's Progress", 1892-1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, op. cit.*, p. 140; and *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia and Eritrea, second ed., op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁵⁴⁶ For details about the Iyasu Interlude, see Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-128. He also confirmed this to the author in an interview in Addis Ababa (1996).

⁵⁴⁷ Though Bahru does not mention categorically as to whether Haile Selassie belongs to the ruling imperial family or not. See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, p. 128-129; Christopher Clapham argues that succession to the throne prior to 1855 was governed by descent or at least was restricted to a small group of princes. But after 1855, it was governed almost solely by the control of force. See his *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia, op. cit.*, p. 28.

the King of Kings of Ethiopia)⁵⁴⁸. During his reign (1930-1974, *de facto* from 1916-1974), Emperor Haile Selassie I bridged Ethiopia's ancient past with the modern era, even though significant events of his reign were expunged from the official record by the successive military regime that shortly turned into an autocracy.

In his reign as emperor, Haile Selassie I did make some political changes, though commentators have judged them as of less fundamental and structural significance. Some of the changes he made included the centralisation of the administration, financial regulation, army training, some public appointments according to individual ability rather than birth, the elimination of the most conservative of the Ethiopian nobility and the formal promulgation of a constitution in 1931. However, his education programme was comprehensively interrupted by the Italian invasion of 1936-1941. In spite of increased political centralisation, social separatism and cultural differences remained the dominant characteristics of Ethiopia and serious hindrances to national integration⁵⁴⁹. The constitution that was promulgated in 1931 which provided for a bicameral parliament with a nominated Senate and a Chamber of Deputies, was far from being radical and had little immediate impact on Ethiopia's political culture. Instead, the constitution left the Emperor's absolutist powers intact and largely retained the privileged position of the nobility. The parliament was given hardly any initiative in legislation or policy-making, and convened and dissolved at will by the Emperor. Thus it remained docile and complacent.

Furthermore, because of the historically dominant position of the emperor, political parties were not allowed in Ethiopia. Even those that existed in Eritrea were abolished by the emperor and little progress was made in resolving relations with the Eritrean independence movement or the conflict with Somalia over the Ogaden. Although he is credited for having achieved what his predecessors tried to achieve, his 1931 constitution set up the juridical framework of emergent absolutism. As a result, the debate preceding its promulgation was illustrative of the continuing struggle between centralism and regionalism. To date, Ethiopian centralists still hold the emperor responsible for the total dismemberment of one of Ethiopia's sea coast provinces, Eritrea. In a way, even though Haile Selassie finally succeeded in realising the unitary state of which Tewodros had dreamt, soon he created new problems that were to cause perpetual instability and even threatened national integration. For example, the

⁵⁴⁸ See Kjetil Tronvoll and Ayvind Aadland, *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia - An Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?*, *op. cit.*, endnote 42, p. 63.

⁵⁴⁹ See Harold G. Marcus, *Haile Selassie I: The Formative Years*, *op. cit.*

subsistence way of life of most of the inhabitants of the country scarcely changed. Not only did efforts at land reform fail repeatedly, but he also consolidated the feudal system⁵⁵⁰.

After the challenge to his authority in the abortive coup of 1960 minor improvements were offered, and the emperor promised to delegate more power to parliament, which discussed but did little about the need to redistribute the big landholdings that supported the power of the elite and the Church. In 1973, a combination of drought resulting in famine in Wollo province and the evident corruption and inefficiency in the distribution of aid led to a crescendo of criticism and unrest. The army in Eritrea mutinied in February and forced the mass resignation of the cabinet. The emperor appointed the progressive Endalkachew Makonnen as prime minister, and a committee was formed to draft a new constitution. This was not enough for militant students, who periodically disrupted Addis Ababa. This kindled the “creeping revolution” organised by junior army officers, which I discuss shortly below.

Though Haile Selassie’s reign began in the early 1930s, it was aborted by the Italian invasion and occupation between 1936-1941⁵⁵¹. After 1941, the Emperor consolidated his rule again with aid first from the United Kingdom, and then from the United States of America. We are told that, by 1960, Ethiopia had the largest armed forces in SSA; with a four division army and imperial bodyguard, a brigade of tanks, an air force flying jet fighters, and a small coastal defence navy, amounting in all to some 45,000 men⁵⁵². Thus, Haile Selassie’s power increased and the political influence and military strength of regional governors became overshadowed.

Despite such strength of being in charge, the emperors’ reign was to fail due to the feudal system. Feudalism in Ethiopia is traceable to the early days when the Empire first emerged. The history of the Ethiopian Empire began in the first half of the first millennium when Semitic settlers from Arabia came and settled in the northern region of present-day Tigray. As life went on the settlers mingled and intermarried with the indigenous Cushites and founded

⁵⁵⁰ See in particular Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernisation in Ethiopia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975); Peter Schwab, *Haile Selassie I: Ethiopia’s Lion of Judah* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc., 1979); and Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969).

⁵⁵¹ For more on Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia between 1936-1941, see Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War 1935-1941* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969); Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini* (London, 1985); George W. Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge, MA.: Cambridge University Press, 1967); and Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, op. cit.*, pp. 150-177.

⁵⁵² See Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity, op. cit.*, p. 28.

the historic Kingdom of Axum which later on dominated the Red Sea through trade and conquest. Thereafter, Christianity was introduced into the kingdom in the fourth century, marking the birth of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It was then the Orthodox Church that had also encouraged feudalism until this century, and even clashed with the leaders of the 1974 Revolution and has remained a critic of government policy on land reform⁵⁵³. Through the feudal system, the influence of the monarchy and the Church increased tremendously to dominate the political and economic life of the society⁵⁵⁴.

However, in 1137, the Axumite Kingdom was interrupted by the formation of the Agau Dynasty by a group of Amahara from the Shoa region. This group referenced one particular legend which associated the Agau Dynasty with a descent from Israel. As mentioned above, the legend has it that during her visit to Israel, the Queen of Sheba (from Ethiopia) conceived a son with King Solomon, named Menelik I. Thus, from the formation of the Agau Dynasty until the deposition of the emperor in 1974, successive Ethiopian Emperors often used the Solomonic line as a source of legitimacy for ascendancy to the imperial throne⁵⁵⁵. One salient factor of the Agau Dynasty is the proclamation of the Amhara region as the political centre of the Empire by Menelik II, an event which gave rise to Amhara dominance and power in the political, economic, social and religious affairs of Ethiopia. Amhara dominance became an integral aspect of the flame of resentment upon which the boiling pot of ethnic, regional and religious dissatisfaction in modern Ethiopia is heated. And the direct cause of contemporary resentment in Ethiopia is the fact that Amhara culture has also been maintained as the standard by which every ethnic and religious group would be expected to live, and this policy also became reflected in the doctrines of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church⁵⁵⁶.

From 1813 to 1847, the Solomonic Dynasty engaged in a war of conquest with the nearby southern, southeastern and southwestern territories and, in the process, it conquered the Oromos and brought them under its rule. Successive Ethiopian Emperors enlarged the territory, but as mentioned above, it was under Menelik II of Shoa (Agau Dynasty) that the geographical boundaries of modern Ethiopia were constructed and maintained by the

⁵⁵³ See S. Pauselwang, *Peasants, Land and Society: A Social History of Land Reform in Ethiopia* (Munich: Weltforum Verlag, Africa-Studien 110, 1983).

⁵⁵⁴ See Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1985), p. 4.

⁵⁵⁵ See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁶ Richard Caulk, "Religion and State in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol 10, no. 1(1972).

monarchy until its final debacle in 1974. The Agau Dynasty was able to survive for years until 1874 because of the feudal system.

First and foremost, the feudal system was instrumental in the success and maintenance of the monarchy in Ethiopia. The feudal system is originally medieval in which ordinary citizens acquired land from a lord, and in return worked and fought for him. In the same line, the Agau Dynasty maintained its supremacy through a feudal system, without which it would not have been able to dominate politically and economically for centuries. Writing about the feudal system in Ethiopia, Bahru Zewde pointed out that “*status, class and power were shaped by it and the political order was based upon it*”⁵⁵⁷. Under the feudal system, to own land was literally to acquire political and economic power. Thus, from the reign of Emperor Menelik II through to that of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Warlords and the Nobility alike were granted land by the emperor, mainly as a reward of good behaviour and loyalty. For example, Menelik II rewarded his Warlords with land from successful conquests, with such grants, the services of the indigenous population were attached to the grant and they were required to till the land for the soldier/settler, many were absentee landlords⁵⁵⁸. Similarly, the ruling class of Haile Selassie’s days were made up of individuals loyal to him. They were promoted to positions of central and local administration and land was rewarded as a form of patronage⁵⁵⁹. Until the 1974 Revolution, the bulk of the country’s land was owned by the following groups: the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, government officials, and other large land owners. These three privileged groups together exploited and suppressed the peasants, controlling their everyday life. For example, tenant farmers (a system of farming which was much more prevalent in the south than the north), had no legal, political nor economic rights. Through the years, the feudal system became a legitimate part of the political structure of Ethiopia through taxation and land tenure legislations⁵⁶⁰.

Throughout the imperial reign, the peasant was faced with numerous tax obligations which included agricultural income tax (20 Birr before 1974) as well as indirect taxation in the form of his labour time, for example, corvee labour and campaign labour whereby he was required to assist in road building, reforestation and other special schemes. In the case of the tenant-farmer, he was required to transfer about 50 percent of his produce to the landlord as tax. But

⁵⁵⁷ See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵⁵⁸ Harold G. Marcus, *The History of Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-47.

⁵⁵⁹ See Bahru Zewde, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-203.

⁵⁶⁰ See S. Pauselwang, *Peasants, Land and Society: A History of Land Reform in Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*

on the other hand, the ruling classes were mostly exempted from taxation. For example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was not required to pay taxes but the law allowed it to collect tax from its tenants. The individual landowners, most of whom were government officials under Haile Selassie, had similar privileges and on occasions when they were required to pay land tax, the burden was often transferred to the tenant farmer. This kept the peasant on a subsistence standard of living⁵⁶¹.

(iii) The Rise of Military Autocracy in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Revolution of February 1974, also *Yekatit* 1966 in the Ethiopian calendar, was a turning point in the political history of Ethiopia⁵⁶². The revolution did not only bring centuries of monarchical rule to a halt, but also gave way to the rise of a no less autocratic military regime that reigned with an iron fist until 1991. Resentment against the monarchy began to accumulate after the failed 1960 coup d'état and burst in the early 1970s when the famine situation in Wollo and Tigray claimed nearly a quarter of a million souls. Moreover squatters from northern Ethiopia evidently engulfed Addis Ababa and *Hamminas* (singing beggars) from Wollo attracted a large public attention in the capital city. The people in Addis Ababa and elsewhere became aware of the hidden famine, in particular, when three university professors who had visited Wollo brought back with them pictures and a report of the grim conditions they had witnessed⁵⁶³. University students were the first to react by donating a part of their dining budget to the starving population and demanded that the government make the famine public and seek international assistance.

Many Ethiopians came to regard the famine as a moral outrage and 'wrath of God' which many felt came from God because of the emperor's wanton disregard of thousands of innocent people who perished of hunger in Wollo and Tigray regions⁵⁶⁴. The rise of the *Dergue* was

⁵⁶¹ For details of this analysis, see Mesfin Wolde Mariam, *Rural Vulnerability to Famine in Ethiopia: 1958-1977* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1986), pp. 92-93.

⁵⁶² There is a huge literature on the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and any further attempt to detail the events that led to its upshot is not needed here. However, recommended references for further reading on the Revolution include: Ethiopian Government, *Basic Documents of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Addis Ababa, 1977); Fred Halliday and Maxine Mollyneux, *op. cit.*; Rene Lefort, *op. cit.*; Christopher Clapham, *op. cit.*; Addis Hiwet, *op. cit.*; Edmond J. Keller, *op. cit.*; L. Collins, *The Fall of Haile Selassie's Empire* (New York: Africana, 1976); and John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶³ See Addis Hiwet, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁶⁴ Joint interviews with Netsanet Asafaw and Mebrat Bayene, Addis Ababa, July 1996; see also Kinfe Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

premised on this because the military committee also exploited the famine as a propaganda ploy. For example, they used the famine crisis to undermine the imperial myth by giving a negative impression of the monarchy that “*the father of the nation had failed to perform his most important duty, to save his children from death*”⁵⁶⁵. Instead of protecting and defending the emperor, the army took side with the opposition, largely consisted of a conglomeration of the urban elite including students, academics, teachers, taxi-drivers, workers and, later, men in uniform⁵⁶⁶. The abrupt collapse of the Ethiopian monarchy has been described by some revolutionary Ethiopians as “the inevitable impression that the Empire was like a house built of sand”⁵⁶⁷. Therefore, the famine was a cumulative effect of an archaic agrarian crisis which had reached national proportions.

The famine triggered other major identifiable incidents in the continuum that culminated in Haile Selassie’s overthrow. Such incidents included: a mutiny by soldiers and NCOs in a small garrison at Neghelle Borona of the Fourth Division in Southern Sidamo in January 1974 because of their discrimination for an access to pure water which the high ranking officers had been enjoying. Even though the mutiny itself was simply over living conditions, the arrest by the mutineers of the senior officers sent to investigate it gave the incident political overtures, and indicated the powerlessness of the imperial regime in the face of military dissent. Other dangerous mutinies ensued elsewhere in the country. Notable among these were: The Air Force base at Debre Zeit near Addis Ababa who went on strike demanding higher wages; the Second Division Infantry in Asmara also mutinied on 25 February 1974, with a list of several demands. That was followed by the first break out of public demonstrations in the capital. Similarly, teachers and students became alarmed by the implications of an education sector review which proposed, among other things, an expansion of basic education in the countryside, and a relative restriction of Secondary and University education in the towns, and the commencement of tuition payment in public schools and the general de-emphasis of higher education. This was vehemently opposed by teachers and students. On top of this, taxi drivers went on strike against the government’s refusal to let them raise fares in response to the OPEC oil price rise - one of the few points at which upheavals in the international economy impinged on a generally domestic political process.

⁵⁶⁵ See Rene Lefort, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁵⁶⁶ In short, Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-81, tabulated five main opposition groups at the time: the provincial nobility; the non-Amhara nationalities; students; middle ranks of the armed forces; urban population (employee) such as the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the trade unions (e.g. Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, CELU).

⁵⁶⁷ See Kinfe Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

The Emperor sensed the growing dissent and rebelliousness that was emerging in the country and was compelled to face the nation on television. His promises were branded as mere outmoded lame excuses, and on the contrary, demonstrations continued unabated and the Emperor was forced to demand the resignation of a cabinet that he himself created⁵⁶⁸. The then Prime Minister, seen as an imperial protege, was replaced by another, who was widely viewed as a liberal aristocrat⁵⁶⁹. Ever since the unsuccessful 1960 coup d'état to 1974, three important political groups consolidated themselves. During this period, Ethiopia began to develop a militant student movement whose strikes and demonstrations dominated the scene of Ethiopian politics. Above all, they were the first group to come out clearly in support of the 1960 coup. In fact, Ethiopian overseas students all became enthusiastic Marxists and their love of the ideology made them become instrumental in the rise of the 1974 Revolution. According to Clapham:

Students were drawn on the whole from the privileged sectors of urban society, and could expect to be appointed to reasonably well-paid government posts on graduation. Though they demonstrated in favour of 'Land to the Tiller', they generally had little conception of conditions in the countryside. Yet for these very reasons, their detestation of imperial government was all the more significant, indicating its failure to attract the loyalty of those who would gain from it and on whom it would directly rely⁵⁷⁰.

Secondly the armed forces became politicised and many of the junior officers began to share students' disgust with the imperial government, apparently dedicated to little more than the gross adulation of an aging puppet. The contempt among the junior officers extended to the small groups of senior officers, some with aristocratic connections, who were admitted to the charmed circles of the court and rewarded with land grants and other favours. As a result, contacts between students and junior officers were closer than might be expected. In contrast to most armies, where the officers are normally volunteers even though the other ranks may be conscripted, Ethiopia had a partly conscripted officer corps. According to a senior army

⁵⁶⁸ This is one situation that led the Emperor to betray his own cabinet to save his skin. See Ghewdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁵⁶⁹ See Rene Lefort, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-55; and Christopher Clapham, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁵⁷⁰ See Christopher Clapham, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *op. cit.*, p. 76, footnote students' popular song of the period: "*Fanna Metamara, Ende Ho Chi Minh, Ende Che Guevara*", meaning "Patriot [i.e. one who fought the Italians did not flee like Haile Selassie] Go to the Country like Ho Chi Minh, like Che Guevara"; and for more on students movement, see Ronning Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students*, *op. cit.*; and Legesse Lemma, "The Ethiopian Student Movement 1960-1974", *North East African Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2(1979).

officer, during the period of the army's rapid expansion in the 1960s and early 1970s, the best secondary school students were often compelled to join the army, and nourished a lasting resentment against a government which sent them to serve in distant and dangerous zones of Tigray, Gojjam, Wollo or Ogaden, where anti-government forces were active⁵⁷¹. Most conscripted officers were unhappy because they did not want to serve in battleground areas, while their contemporaries (particularly from the privileged families) enjoyed professional or civil-service jobs in the city.

In addition, most of the conscripted army officers who first served in the capital before they are sent to the frontline had frequently attended evening classes at the university, and were therefore, affected by the prevailing climate of ideas; quite a number of these officers, indeed, later held high office in the revolutionary regime⁵⁷². In short, even though the Ethiopian armed forces are historically renowned for serving a centralising tradition of government, they found it tiring to continue serving with an anachronistic imperial regime. Thirdly, an embryonic labour union began to form in the 1960s. This encompassed urban workers, petty traders, the innumerable hangers-on in one kind of semi-employment or another, down to what one may term the lumpenproletariat with which Addis Ababa was as well provided as any other major African city. In Ethiopia, trade unions were recognised following the issuing of a Labour Relations Decree in 1962, and by the early 1970s the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions (CELU) had a membership of about 55,000, heavily concentrated in Addis Ababa and satellite towns along the line of rail to the coast⁵⁷³.

Although the right to strike was formally recognised, it was severely limited in practice, in fact, in the case of Eritrea the formal right to strike was arbitrarily abrogated (see chapter on Eritrea above). Thus, in 1974, the trade unions got involved in the upheavals, and the conflict for control of them was often violent. However, the labour unions were less significant than the local neighbourhood associations, known as *idir*, which were beyond the scope of

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Col. Asaminew Bedane, Ministry of Defence, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Bedane was a commander on the side of the *Dergue* and was captured by the TPLF as a prisoner of war. He was also instrumental in the formation of the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM), both as its Chairman and Vice Chairman. As we shall see, EDORM became one important ally of the TPLF in the formation of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

⁵⁷² A retired senior army officer confirmed that most of the 120 men *Dergue* members were high school graduates who were conscripted by the imperial regime after the 1960 coup d'état. Interview with Col. Tesfaye, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, June 1996.

⁵⁷³ See in particular John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, *op. cit.*, p. 176; and David and Marina Ottoway, *op. cit.*, chs. 2 & 3.

government. The *idir* became instrumental in the mass involvement of urban dwellers in the revolution. Therefore, the political spectrum in Ethiopia had, at one end, students and young army officers, and the poorest of the poor at the other. These three groups together formed a strong force behind the 1974 Revolution that deposed Africa's last absolute emperor. In this case we see violence becoming inevitably a means for effecting change⁵⁷⁴.

Of all sections of the urban groups, students were the most critical on the imperial government and they considered its policies and programmes responsible for the country's underdevelopment. For them, the prevailing values espoused by the imperial regime of Haile Selassie were a severe obstacle to modernisation and change. Unlike the working bureaucracy that was obedient to the regime, students particularly deplored the underdevelopment of the rural population and felt duty bound to seek change on their behalf. Donald Levine pointed out quite clearly: "The bureaucracy was the other element in the modern Ethiopian government, which was less alienated than either students or armed forces in the urban structure. The bureaucracy was constituted by foreign-educated Ethiopians, who often accepted the comforts of a government job, and the limitations on political action which this implied"⁵⁷⁵. As students, they had not yet been fully assimilated into the social system and therefore had not yet acquired vested interest in the system.

Since the forces behind the revolution espoused Marxist doctrines, they demanded a reform of the land holding system, with a major redistribution of land and an end to the feudal system mentioned above. Thus when the famine of 1973 became exposed, mainly by university professors in Addis Ababa, and the government's attempt to conceal it was realised, the students staged major demonstrations in 1974⁵⁷⁶. Similarly, in addition to their demand for pay increase and better living standards, the army officers also began to sympathise with the regional conflicts which also occupied most of their time. Even though the Haile Selassie government had discouraged the formation of labour unions, in 1962 they sprang up again with the rise of plant unions. And as a result, the 1970s saw many workers on strike with the support and encouragement of the student movement as economic conditions in the country deteriorated.

⁵⁷⁴ As in Johan Galtung, *A Structural Theory of Revolution* (Rotterdam: Rotterdam University Press, 1974), p. 22.

⁵⁷⁵ See Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold*, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

⁵⁷⁶ See Addis Hiwet, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-15; and Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 152.

On the other hand, taxi drivers campaigning for an increase in fares also went on strike, while the military demanded further pay increases. At the same time, the main labour union, CELU, had organised a four day strike that brought the country to a standstill. Finally, soldiers mutinied and arrested senior officers and closed down the international airport, they were then joined by personnel from Air Forces and other military units. In March 1974, junior officers demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister. The crises moved from economic to political dimensions. What was, however, unfortunate is the fact that the revolution erupted without a clearly led opposition party. As a result, the officers organised a party in June the same year, under the umbrella of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the *Dergue*. From thence onwards, the army hijacked the peoples revolution and began to chair it until its leadership was consolidated in the person of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam.

(iv) The Consolidation of the Dergue and Its Demise: Farewell to Military Dictatorship in Ethiopia

There is no precise date, but the *Dergue* ('Committee'), as it became known, was formed between June and July 1974. According to Harold Marcus:

On 27-28 June, the military representatives constituted themselves as the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces (in Amharic, *derg*, or "committee"). During its meetings, a number of officers rose to speak, but none was more eloquent than Maj. Mengistu Haile Mariam, of Harer's Third Division, who became the Coordinating Committee's chairperson. He brought order to boisterous proceedings and gave shape to the *derg*'s demands. He told his colleagues that nothing was more important than the unity of the military and the nation, and he may have introduced the still potent slogan *Etiopia Tikdem*, or "Ethiopia above all"⁵⁷⁷.

The *Dergue* was an instant product of the several phases of the revolution. One particular piece of work catalogues the "creeping revolution" into three major phases: where phase I represented the people's uprising; phase II the consolidation of the *Dergue* and the politics of attrition; and phase III the consolidation of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, or what has been termed "*a coup de grace* within a *coup d'état* and within a revolution"⁵⁷⁸. Another account points out that: "Not until July did the self-styled Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee start broadcasting that they were the agents of revolution. It was still unclear who headed the

⁵⁷⁷ See Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁷⁸ For details of such dichotomies, see Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-99.

group of 120 men, though General Aman Mikael Andom was its spokesman⁵⁷⁹. Initially, the 120 men membership was partly elected and partly co-opted to represent the various branches and units of the military establishment and, later, the police and territorial army⁵⁸⁰. The ranks that constituted the membership of the *Dergue* ranged from plain soldier to major. The early hours of the *Dergue* signalled a dictatorial trend when the committee rejected demands to renew its membership through election, and instead filled the vacancies created by purging of over one-half of its original members.

The Armed Forces Committee not only undertook an increasingly hard line favouring the punishment of all those involved with imperial power either by birth, privilege or appointment, it also took a hardline against what it termed Eritrean secessionists. Within a short time after its formation, the *Dergue* had successfully decapitated the military hierarchy by decimating the higher officer corps through execution, arrest and dismissal. This was followed by nationalisation and expropriation of royal assets, eradication of Haile Selassie's name, detection of those branded as "enemies of progress" (including wives and children), banning of strikes and demonstrations, abolishment of Parliament, suspension of the Constitution, and stringent censorship. On the 18th November 1974, it was announced that Major Mengistu Haile Mariam was the Head of Executive Committee of the Provisional Military Administration Council (PMAC), which later on became synonymous with the *Dergue*. Thus, on the night of 23-24 November the same year, a series of arrests netted most of the high officialdom of the *ancien regime* who got executed without trial; and similarly Aman Mikael Andom and several of his aides died fighting indoor arrest. In order to garner international support, in particular from the former Soviet Union and its allies, Mengistu declared Ethiopia a socialist state on 13 December 1974. The following year, a formal revocation of the monarchy was announced on 21 March 1975⁵⁸¹.

However, that was not the end of it all. Besides the embroilment in class and ideological conflicts within the party itself, the *Dergue* also began to encounter opposition from without

⁵⁷⁹ See the *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, *op. cit.*, p. 268; and also Harold G. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

⁵⁸⁰ See John Markakis, "The Military State and Ethiopia's Path to 'Socialism'", *Review of African Political Economy*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁵⁸¹ See Colin Legum, *Ethiopia: The Fall of Haile Selassie's Empire* (London: Collins, 1975); John Spencer, "Haile Selassie: Triumph and Tragedy", *Orbis*, vol. 18 no. 4 (Winter 1975); Patrick Gilkes, *op. cit.*; and John Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post-Imperial State* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1988).

the party⁵⁸². The first section of the Ethiopian society to express dissatisfaction was a group of radical intellectuals who had espoused Marxism in the 1960s. These were constituted by a core of two generations of university and secondary school students who had mounted a consistent militant opposition to the imperial regime during the last decades of its collapse. As a Maoist leftist group who claimed to represent the interests of the proletarians, they protested against a Marxist revolution channelled through a military government and, as a result, refused the leadership of the *Dergue*. These group of intellectuals managed to raise the consciousness of the masses and guided the popular movement towards a social revolution. They defined the nature of the struggle as anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist⁵⁸³. These group regarded the overthrow of the *ancien regime* as a prerequisite to fundamental change. Thus, the military was bound to face problems because the civilian population followed suit and protested that the revolution had not been mobilised for a military government to be installed. The *Dergue* was accused of usurping a popular movement and a civilian government was demanded.

Although the *Dergue* could hardly afford to ignore the hand that helped it to seize power, the military officers reacted to the demands of the intelligentsia by closing down the university and colleges and sent many students into the rural areas to educate the peasants on the objectives of the revolution⁵⁸⁴. This was a decision whose effects were bound to boomerang against the regime itself. Instead the students seized that opportunity to indoctrinate and politicise the peasants even more against the *Dergue*. While on the one hand the regime's reply to popular demands seemed unaccommodative, they sought to make up for their ideological *naivete* and lack of programme by adopting the radical orientation of the Marxist intellectuals and by appropriating most of their programmatic suggestions as well. The temporary alignment seemed natural enough, given what Markakis terms "*the congruence of class between the popular and the military movements*"⁵⁸⁵. It was also an expedient one, for it was calculated to win popular support and provide a legitimising ideology for the new regime⁵⁸⁶. The *Dergue*

⁵⁸² See Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Bourgeois Dictatorship* (N.P., 1976); John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *op. cit.*; Marina Ottoway, "Democracy and New Democracy: The Ideological Debate in the Ethiopian Revolution", *African Studies Review*, vol. 21(1978); and Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵⁸³ One particular work which details intellectual involvement is Randi Ronning Balsvik, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸⁴ See in particular John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *op. cit.*; and John Markakis, *National Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸⁵ See John Markakis, "The Military State and Ethiopia's Path to 'Socialism'", *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵⁸⁶ See Marina Ottoway, *op. cit.*

was admittedly under great pressure to establish its revolutionary credentials by dismantling the socio-economic foundations of the old regime, and advancing its own radical motto: “The Broad Masses of Ethiopia First” or *Etiopia Tikdem* became the revolutionary slogan⁵⁸⁷.

The *Dergue* also adopted a shrewd strategy that divided the intelligentsia and put them at war one with another. Specific policy proposals of a few radicals were incorporated into the new regime's political programmes and some of these radicals were silenced by rapid promotions in the civil service and others even became active advisers to leading members of the regime. As the community of the intelligentsia was successfully divided, the *Dergue* proceeded to nationalise the means of production at the beginning of 1975 as a gesture of keeping in line with its socialist outlook. Thus, it nationalised banks, financial and insurance institutions⁵⁸⁸. The military regime further unveiled a radical proclamation concerning landownership. John Markakis writes:

In March of the same year, a sweeping land reform decree was proclaimed, which went further than most Ethiopians had anticipated. All agricultural land was nationalised, possession was limited to a maximum of ten hectares, and the sale or rent of land was prohibited. Thus both landlordism and tenancy were eliminated at one stroke. Peasant associations were formed to implement the provisions of the reform, which included the redistribution of available land into equal shares within each association. All matters concerning land came under the jurisdiction of the associations, thus, putting the notoriously venal Ethiopian judiciary out of business in the rural areas. The associations were also entrusted with the administration of local affairs and maintenance of law and order, thereby greatly reducing the scope of action of the equally corrupt police and provincial administration⁵⁸⁹.

In addition to that, urban land and extra housing were also nationalised, where ownership became limited to only one housing unit per family. And as far as agricultural land is concerned, no compensation was offered. Rents were substantially reduced for the cheaper housing, thus, the lowest income group was the major beneficiary while the landlords became the sole losers in the changes brought about by the revolution.

⁵⁸⁷ See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 117; and Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁸⁸ See in particular Peter Schwab, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁵⁸⁹ See John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

These reforms were enthusiastically welcomed and especially the majority of Southern peasants felt emancipated and eagerly participated in the peasant associations⁵⁹⁰, which were perceived as instruments of genuine local self-government. However, they also received significant, and at times, violent opposition from former landlords in the South of the country and Amharic farmers of the North who had owned land under the communal ownership system whereby land was passed down from one generation to another; they considered the reforms to have stripped them of land that was already theirs⁵⁹¹. At the same time, conflict between students and the *Dergue* continued over the mobilisation of the peasants. Since political organisation was lacking before and during the revolution, the ‘men in uniform’ became the vanguard of the revolution by historical necessity⁵⁹². Therefore, the insistent call of the radical left for a peoples’ government was rejected as untimely, and its proponents were dealt with increasing severity.

In order to secure the monopoly of power, the *Dergue* embarked in systematic dismantling of the few existing organisations which it perceived as a possible threat that may develop into staunch political opposition⁵⁹³. Therefore, the *Dergue* and the PMAC were eventually combined under the complete control (*de facto*) of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Though the existing organisations such as the EPRP continued a violent campaign against the *Dergue*, they were answered with ruthless use of force. As we shall see below, the military officers were able to wipe out the members of the radical left, the conscience of the revolution, out of the post-imperial political scene in Ethiopia. This method of silencing its critics would become a regular occurrence as the *Dergue* executed “enemies” of the revolution, including students and members of the labour unions. Peter Schawb wrote: “Confronted by opposition in the cities, within the *Dergue*, in Eritrea, in the Ogaden, in Tigray and from Somalia, Mengistu

⁵⁹⁰ These associations were widely known as *Kebelles* or Urban Dwellers Association. The *Kebelles* were in each neighbourhood, making political and administrative decisions for its areas. See Harold G. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁵⁹¹ See Dessalegn Rahmato, *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1984); and John Harbeson, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹² According to John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁹³ This worry was baseless because even though organisations such as CELU, AETU, EPRP, and MEISON would have become early platforms for political reform in Ethiopia, the foundations upon which they were built were totally incoherent and disorganised. See in particular Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity, op. cit.*, Amare Tekle, “Continuity and Change in Ethiopian Politics”, in Marina Ottoway (ed.), *The Political Economy of Ethiopia* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

decided that if he did not eliminate those he considered counter-revolutionary, they would eliminate him and prevent socialism from being instituted in Ethiopia"⁵⁹⁴.

This coercive method did not only exacerbate the numerous ethnically-based liberation fronts, but it also led to severe famine. To be sure, the ethnic conflicts *per se* did not cause the famine, it was the *Dergue* strategy of containment that created conditions for the drought to become a famine. For example, the government restricted free movement and prevented food from reaching alleged-rebel-held areas. These deliberate strategies were the *Dergue's* open counter-insurgency methods. Such methods were bound to hit the innocent civilians because the targeted rebels had no permanent military base. For instance in Tigray, it was very difficult to target the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) because they operated using guerrilla tactics of hit-and-run⁵⁹⁵. In fact, the government's indiscriminate response to ethnic rebellions proved counter-productive. Instead of searching for a political solution to the grievances, the *Dergue* declared most regions of northern Ethiopia war zone areas and began carrying out its military strategy of a "counter-population warfare"⁵⁹⁶. The major consequence of this was the emergence of ethnic-based liberation fronts and the seeds of widespread armed resistance were sown.

(b) The Intensity of Armed Resistance in Ethiopia: The Rise of Ethnic-Based Liberation Fronts

The rise of widespread effective guerrilla opposition against the *Dergue* became eminent because of the military repressive measures of power consolidation. At one time the military's prohibition against dissent and the capacity of the state to carry out its proscription in the urban areas forced opposition leaders to move to the countryside and launch peasant based insurrections. More than anything else, the military policies continued to alienate what became the periphery - Eritreans, Tigrayans, Somalis, some regions occupied by the Oromos and a

⁵⁹⁴ See Peter Schwab, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁵⁹⁵ See John Young, *Peasants and Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁹⁶ One particular incident is when most regions of Tigray were unofficially considered a war zone. See *Human Rights Violation in Ethiopia* (London: Amnesty International, 1978); and Africa Watch, *Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York & Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 1991), p. 139.

sizeable population of the Amhara in the north and northeast of the country⁵⁹⁷. As a result, the ranks of ethnic-based opposition guerrillas swelled, and the political and military contexts of the rebellions were defined.

The major ethnic-based liberation fronts in Ethiopia included the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). These were then joined later on by other splinter groups such as the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (OPDO), the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) and Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) were irredentist organisations, the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM) formed mainly by captured *Dergue* officers, and those fronts representing the Beni-shangul and the Gambella peoples. These fronts were all described by the *status quo* regime as *shiftas*, meaning bandits or rebels⁵⁹⁸. The activities of these ethnic-based liberation fronts in Ethiopia together with those of the secessionists in Eritrea began to drain the regime's resources and weaken it drastically.

Historically, a permanent grievance against Amhara connivance became the hallmark of Tigray provincialism ever since Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) was dispossessed by Emperor Menelik II of Shoa in 1889⁵⁹⁹. Because of the excesses of centralism which lent itself to the slow southward thrust of the center of the empire (begun by emperor Menelik II and consolidated by emperor Haile Selassie I), the people of Tigray began to resent the loss of what they regarded as their hegemonic legitimacy to their arch rivals, the Amharas. According to Kifle Abraham:

The North-South conflict was kept under control because of Haile Selassie's shrewd multi-pronged strategy of divide and control, intermarriage between his family and the Tigrayan nobility, and the extension of traditional titles, land and other privileges to prominent Tigrayans. However, this had not fully appeased

⁵⁹⁷ See Adhana Haile Adhana, "The Roots of Organised Internal Armed Conflicts in Ethiopia, 1960-1990", in Terje Tvedt (ed.), *op. cit.*, and John Young, "*Peasants and Revolutions: A Theoretical Review Based on Ethiopian Experience*", Unpublished Paper, Addis Ababa University, 1996.

⁵⁹⁸ In ancient times the word had a political connotation applying to someone who rebelled against his feudal lord, but more recently it has applied to any person doing robbery, usually in a rural area, sometimes with a political purpose but mostly for personal profit. Haile Selassie I, for example, used the term *shifita* to refer to Eritrean guerrillas; and the *Dergue* used it to refer to all those opposition groups fighting the regime. See Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 277; and Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹⁹ Yohannes IV became the only Tigrayan emperor of Abyssinia in modern times. See in particular John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

the rebellious and disgruntled Tigrayan peoples. With the deposition of the emperor those weak dynastic links which had helped maintain a semblance of orderly allegiance were swept away in one stroke. The post-1974 regime knowing that it did not have the dynastic credentials of the old one to which it was ideologically opposed, did not do much to heal the wounds by replacing the old structure with a democratic one⁶⁰⁰.

The major consequence of this North-South tension was to come to the open with the formation of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1975. Although the story of the Tigrayan resistance stems from the developments of the last quarter of the 19th century, it also feeds on a mixture of legend and history which few contest regardless of their nationality. It has its roots in the story of the Queen of Sheba outlined above, whose historic trip from the northern kingdom to Jerusalem became the start of the Solomonic line of Kings. In fact, the rise of Tigrayan nationalism never surprised experts in Ethiopian politics for the very simple reason that the history of Ethiopia is characterised by the dominance of highland Christians. So that the southward drift of the Ethiopian Empire (from Axum to Shoa), the loss of the remaining vestiges of autonomy which was extended to the Tigray region by Haile Selassie I and the failure of the Mengistu regime to understand the psychology of the Tigray people including their hardiness and tenacity for waging war was bound to provoke resentment⁶⁰¹.

Similarly, the economic underdevelopment of Tigray province was blamed on the Amhara domination. For example, under the *ancien regime* there was little investment in the Abyssinian provinces and none at all in Tigray⁶⁰². Thus, the Tigray resistance is naturally the outcome of the gradual decline of the region whose human and material potential was spent in the preservation of the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. On the cultural front, Tigray's distinct language reinforced its self-consciousness. The imposition of *Amharigna* and the proscription of *Tigrigna* in the 1940s created serious difficulty and even greater resentment⁶⁰³. The *Woyene* rebellion was the first peasant uprising in Tigray long before the TPLF emerged in the 1970s⁶⁰⁴. The other major problem Tigrayans resented is the fact that their region was excluded from the mainstream of Ethiopia's modernisation. Erlich Haggai wrote:

⁶⁰⁰ See Kife Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶⁰² See John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 251; and Colin Legum and James Firebrace, *Eritrea and Tigray, op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶⁰³ See John Markakis, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-251; Colin Legum and James Firebrace, *op. cit.*, p. 17; and many Tigrayans date the roots of their contemporary struggle back to the *Woyene* rebellion of 1949.

⁶⁰⁴ See Dawit Woldegiorgis, *Red Tears, op. cit.*, p. 115; and John Young, *Peasants and Revolution in Ethiopia, op. cit.*

During modern times (starting with Emperor Tewodros), socio-political changes were much slower in Tigre than in other regions in Ethiopia. Showa underwent a centralisation of power under Menelik and extended this over vast regions of Ethiopia. Wollo, the center of Oromo power till the days of Tewodros, was later reduced politically to a mere buffer zone between north and south. Eritrea was occupied by Europeans and experienced profound changes in various fields. Both Gojjam and Begemdir had lost their local leadership by the early 1930s. Ethiopia's southern regions had been annexed to the empire by the turn of the previous century with inevitable repercussions for their political, social and cultural institutions. Tigray, in contrast, was barely affected. In the 1930s and early 1940s the power of the leading families established centuries earlier still existed in this province. The political system of the province, practically autonomous from Ethiopia's government, was characterised by a complex set of rivalries and splits among the leading local figures. In essence it differed only marginally from what had been the general order in Ethiopia⁶⁰⁵.

Because of this ethnic discrimination, the urge to organise on the basis of nationality was strong. For example, in 1972 the Tigray University Student's Union (TUSU) was formed and the Tigray National Organisation (TNO) soon began active recruitment and mobilisation in Tigray region. Thus, the students (most of whom were from western Tigray-Adowa and Axum) who left Addis Ababa for Tigray after the dramatic events of the 1974 Revolution, emerged in early 1975 as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

However, it should be pointed out that the Tigrayan resentment did not suddenly come to a boiling point. The province's youth, as it was elsewhere in Ethiopia had hoped the 1974 Revolution was going to change the direction of the political activities in favour of the long over trodden nationalities. That is why the 1974 event was greeted with optimism and the euphoria of sudden change had awakened hopes of a new democratic order. Unfortunately, that positive dream was shattered and a Provisional Military Government was formed instead. Such a move reversed the direction of events and revolutionary intellectuals and university students began to become more sceptical about the activities of the military. This loss of hope was aggravated more by the *Dergue's* indiscriminate arrest of Tigrayan aristocracy and elite together and its campaign of mass liquidation and arrest during and after the "Red Terror" in Tigray, Addis Ababa and else where in Ethiopia⁶⁰⁶. Generally speaking, the TPLF was born

⁶⁰⁵ See his *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: The Pall Mall, 1965), p. 133; and Kinfe Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁶⁰⁶ According to Kinfe Abraham, the total number of Tigrayan prisoners was larger than that of other nationalities (about 70 percent), where it is argued that many non-Tigrigna speaking inmates were able to learn Tigrigna in jail. See his *Ethiopia: From Bullets to the Ballot Box*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

and nurtured in a climate of high hopes which were dashed to the ground by the unresponsive activities of the *Dergue*.

Therefore, the Tigrayan main objective was to struggle for self-determination as the Front explained it to the 37th Session of the United Nations General Assembly:

Even though the right to self-determination incorporates the right to secede, the struggle of the Tigrayan people led by the TPLF does not take secession as the only solution for the national domination under which it is forced to live. Being part of a democratic multi-national Ethiopia based on equality, where there are no oppressor and oppressed nations; where the right of every nation without destination is constitutionally and in practice safeguarded; where democracy and social justice prevail; and where fundamental human rights of the peoples are not violated, is also acceptable to the people of Tigray⁶⁰⁷.

John Markakis too, pointed out that “Self-determination could result in anything from autonomy, federation, confederation, up to and including independence”⁶⁰⁸. In another statement, the TPLF outlined:

The TPLF is a peoples democratic front fighting for the national self-determination of the Tigrayan people and waging a people’s democratic revolution. The TPLF is not fighting for secession. It is not against the *voluntary* unity of the five million Tigrayans with other nations and nationalities in the empire state.⁶⁰⁹

The fact that the TPLF supported the voluntary unity of the people of Ethiopia, so long as the legitimate rights of those people are fully realised, made it difficult to describe the Front as secessionist.

Moreover the environment for the consolidation of a strong front was favourable at the time because the *Dergue* became intensively pre-occupied with the more serious problems posed by the Somalis in the Ogaden and the Eritrean insurrection had acquired a successful momentum. These two particular events disorganised the *Dergue* and therefore provided the fledging TPLF with an important opportunity to establish itself. Thus, between 1975 and 1978, the

⁶⁰⁷ See TPLF, *Submission to the 37th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Regarding the Tigray People’s Struggle for Self-Determination* (London: TPLF Foreign Relations Bureau, 1982).

⁶⁰⁸ See his *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa, op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁶⁰⁹ See Colin Legum and James Firebrace, *op. cit.*, p. 18; also quoted from TPLF, Foreign Relations Bureau, *People’s Voice*, published sporadically from July 1981 (also widely referred to as “Tigray in Struggle”).

TPLF was able to develop its political programme, make its first contacts with the peasants, establish relations with the Eritrean revolutionary fronts, carry out its first model reforms, and distinguish itself from other anti-*Dergue* movements in Ethiopia⁶¹⁰. Although this period also witnessed the growing disenchantment of Tigray's peasants with the military regime, informants have maintained that by 1978 the majority of the TPLF fighters were still drawn from the province's petty-bourgeois, particularly teachers and students. As a group, the Tigrayan petty-bourgeois shared with other ethnic and regional counterparts in Ethiopia an opposition to the feudal regime. They also shared pan-Ethiopian ideology developed during the Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s which fought successfully the old regime and military dictatorship on a pan-Ethiopian basis. Ato Meles Zenawi, former President of the TGE, currently Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Chairman of the EPRDF, and his other Tigrayan contemporaries were leaders of that movement and their establishment of the TPLF did not mark a retreat into ethnic parochialism, but instead proved to be an accurate assessment of the revolutionary possibilities in the country at that time⁶¹¹.

By 1989, the TPLF took the government by extraordinary surprise when its troops sustained the most humiliating defeat at the hands of the TPLF. The victories of 1989 not only resulted in total control of Tigray but also delivered a stunning psychological blow to the morale of the regime. Even the famine, which hit the region of Tigray in 1989 and 1990, did nothing to halt its forward march. Instead the TPLF enabled the famine to widen its legitimacy as well as the territory under its sway. In the aftermath of the total liberation of Tigray, the government had gradually and painfully come to the realisation that the movement was a very serious force to contend with. But it was too late, after getting hold of its home-base (Tigray), the TPLF began the implementation of its overall strategy of emphasising a united opposition of democratic fronts against the *Dergue*. In 1990 the TPLF merged with the EPDM with whom it had cooperated since the early 1980s against the EPRP; the OPDO and EDORM to form the EPRDF shortly before waging the famous Tewodros campaigns in Gondar, Walelign campaign in Wollo and subsequent campaigns in Shoa in 1990 and 1991.

The other major ethnic-based liberation front was that waged by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), whose roots are also grounded in the politics of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) of the 1960s and early 1970s⁶¹². According to John Markakis, the

⁶¹⁰ See TPLF, *Revolt, First Year (1975?)*, no.7, p. 29, and no.8, p. 26; Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), *Woyene*, 21 February 1979; and John Young, "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism", *op. cit.*, pp. ...

⁶¹¹ Interview with John Young, Addis Ababa, June 1996.

⁶¹² See Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

EPRP infiltrated the Labour Unions, the Teacher's Association, and university bodies, and "proclaimed itself a proletarian vanguard party on the basis of its class position"⁶¹³. This was a point of concern especially among the TPLF who perceived the primary contradiction crippling Ethiopia as more of nationality than of class. The nature of the contradiction widened the gap between the TPLF and the EPRP because of the latter's concern with class rule and the former's pre-occupation with the question of nationalities. John Markakis further commented:

Though it recognised the fact of national subjection, the EPRP saw it as a derivative of class rule, and maintained that both class and national oppression could be eliminated through the joint struggle of all nationalities against the ruling classes. What mattered was not the nationality but the class nature of the movement that waged the struggle. Citing Mao's dictum that in certain historical situations the national contradiction can become the principal one, the TPLF argued that although national subjection derives from class domination, it is not necessarily resolved by class struggle. The Tigray nationalists maintained that fear and suspicion between the Amhara and other nationals in Ethiopia had reached a point where national sentiment submerged class consciousness and made a joint struggle impossible. 'The correct solution to the problem is national struggle which will have a class character against Amhara chauvinism and American imperialism' (Woyeen, 1/2/76). The EPRP asserted that national struggle is bourgeois concept and cannot be directed against social oppression. Yes it can, retorted the TPLF, if it has a mass popular base⁶¹⁴.

The EPRP formed its military wing, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Army (EPRA). The EPRA was to organise itself as a logistical unit to fight under the vanguard political leadership of the EPRP. However, because of differences in ideology, the TPLF demanded to be recognised as the only vanguard organisation operating in its home-ground, Tigray, and as a result, requested the EPRP and its military wing to go elsewhere to struggle against the *Dergue*. Under such circumstances, conflict erupted when the EPRP defended its right of operating everywhere in Ethiopia⁶¹⁵.

⁶¹³ See his *National and Class Conflict*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁶¹⁵ The bloody result of that conflict are well documented by John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 255; and for details on the EPRA and its activities, see Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-127.

The EPRP was conceived in 1972 and declared its public existence in 1975 after the 1974 Revolution⁶¹⁶. The EPRP had operated underground as the 'Ethiopian People's Liberation Organisation' (EPLO). Between 1972 and 1974, the EPRP leadership reorganised its structure as a party drawing a good number of its leadership from Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) and the exiles. It was the exiles who made the necessary preparations to enter into Ethiopia and initiated armed resistance in Tigray. Although the EPRP was an outgrowth of the student movement, the bulk of its leadership were no longer students since most of them had already joined the public service as civil servants in government ministries, companies, trade unions, agricultural projects, and some were recruited as teachers in both university and high schools throughout the country.

The EPRP ideological line followed the far left whose intention was to dismantle Ethiopia's ruling class. For this reason, the EPRP underground leaders supported the 1974 Revolution which it thought would serve the interest of the larger masses. Thus, it began circulating its two important organs: *Democracia* and *Abyot*. These were instrumental in its open emergence in 1975. Even though the *Dergue* was still a staggering leadership, MEISON, another contending party during the 1974 Revolution began getting worried of the EPRP and, as a result, starting playing conspirational games against the EPRP by cooperating with the *Dergue*⁶¹⁷. Because of such rivalry, the EPRP suddenly found itself sandwiched between the *Dergue* on the one hand and MEISON on the other. The EPRP itself was also to blame for its own downfall because it entangled itself in a series of actual suicidal battles that it unnecessarily conducted.

Be that as it may, the EPRP exiles and other members in the country converged in the north, Tigray Region, and assembled at Asimba (red mountain in the Saho language) in *Awraja* Agame of Tigray to form an armed band which in effect became the nucleus of the EPRA⁶¹⁸. This nucleus of the EPRA, or the embryo of the revolutionary army composed only of 18 men and was led by Berhane-Meskel Redda. They were trained in Algeria and the EPLF base area in Eritrea. These men had to mingle with the people of Tigray, organise the latter and also usher a hit and run guerrilla warfare in Asimba and its vicinity.

⁶¹⁶ See Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, p. 115; and Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

⁶¹⁷ MEISON melted though some of its elements surfaced again at the end of the liberation struggle in 1991 as members of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF). For more details on MEISON, which I have deliberately left out in my analysis of the ethnic-based liberation fronts because of similarities with the *Dergue*, see Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*

⁶¹⁸ For details about the EPRA and its activities, see also Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. . cit.*, pp. 125-127.

Despite the difficulties it encountered because of its unamicable relations with the TPLF, the EPRP had various programmes of mobilisation against the *Dergue*. In a statement it released against the *Dergue*, the EPRP wrote:

... The revolution for which you bled, and made a life and death struggle is out of your hold by the self-appointed caretakers. In this respect the revolution is being misdirected to serve the interest of the ruling class ... not yours. On the contrary, the very revolution you have set in motion is twisted to destroy you. Therefore, before it becomes too late, you should reclaim your rights and throughout this historical struggle you wage, the EPRP will stand at your side until final victory⁶¹⁹.

To be sure, the EPRP's party programme appealed to "the resolute workers and peasants, the broad masses of the military forces, city dwellers, townsmen and villagers and patriotic country people"⁶²⁰. The content of the programme clearly showed that the EPRP was a Marxist-Leninist party dedicated to the ideals of socialism. The party's programme clarified that it aimed to "destroy the rule of feudalism and Imperialism, especially Imperialism led by the U.S. and its representatives-bureaucratic bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie-and to establish peoples democratic republic of the broad masses"⁶²¹. As one of its primary objectives, the EPRP mentioned the formation of a Provisional Peoples Government (PPG). This became a rallying slogan during the first phase of the revolution, and as Ghelawdewos wrote, "since the broad masses lacked an organised political leadership, it was appropriate, correct and timely"⁶²². Unfortunately, the *Dergue* manoeuvred to the leadership *via* the brutal suppression of the masses.

The other important point, which was central to the EPRP's programme, was about political democracy and the rights of the people and the nationalities. Thus, the EPRP aimed at "establishing a broad democratic and progressive political system", and declared further that its objective was: (1) to establish a national peoples congress, and (2) ensure the exercise of democratic rights like freedom of speech and press, to safeguard freedom of political activities, to separate church and state, to establish a genuine justice system. These will be achieved when a national peoples congress is established which shall in turn, draft the constitution of the

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶²⁰ See *The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party Programme* (August 1975).

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶²² See Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

republic, promulgate laws, conduct elections for the peoples government, adopt economic plans on national scale and ratifies international treaties and agreements⁶²³. These programmes were wholly plagiarised by the military leaders who hijacked the peoples revolution and built their National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and the Constitution of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) based on EPRP's plans⁶²⁴.

The EPRP's programme was "to safeguard the freedom of activity for all political parties, organisations and individuals, 'irrespective of their ideological or political inclinations' as long as their objective stands are anti-feudal, anti-bureaucratic bourgeoisie and anti-imperialist"⁶²⁵. The EPRP also aimed at "establishing planned democratic national economy free from foreign domination, and improve the material and spiritual well being of the broad masses". This part includes ownership of land and development of rural agricultural land, urban land and housing, industry and finance as well as commerce. According to this section, all rural land and extra houses, formerly imperial owned industries and financial institutions such as banks and insurance were to become public properties. Commerce was also to be regulated by the state. By and large, this constitutes what the *Dergue* plagiarised and adopted in the construction of their own programme.

Another important point in the EPRP programme was the issue of land ownership. The party delineated three types of land ownership, namely, private individual, cooperative and state ownerships. Thus, the party stated, "before embarking on settlement or resettlement schemes the state shall consult and seek permission of the local people concerned"⁶²⁶. Most important too, was the point that lay at the heart of Ethiopian politics, the issue of nationalities. The EPRP wished to "declare and safeguard the unrestricted rights of nations to self-determination". Because the party's goal was:

To give full rights to the peoples of the various Ethiopian nationalities to determine their own destiny, and at the same time carry out a peaceful political struggle for a voluntary union of the type they choose on the basis of equality and feeling of brotherhood; to condemn and struggle against the militaristic onslaught of the Eritrean people to solve the question; to ensure that the Eritrean question is resolved peacefully and democratically; similarly to bring

⁶²³ See The EPRP Programme, *op. cit.*, p. 2

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8. .

about a peaceful and democratic solution to the question of the Somali nationality residing in Ethiopia⁶²⁷.

This is what made both the EPLF and the TPLF to cooperate with the EPRP. The EPRP had formally recognised the national independence of Eritrea and officially endorsed the self-determination of nationalities in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the same policy was responsible for the head collision between the EPRP and MEISON because the latter was clearly reluctant to address the Eritrean question. Even though the EPRP had recognised the question of nationalities in theory, MEISON was clearly reluctant to address it, and instead waged the war against nationalities by cooperating with the *Dergue*.

The EPRP focussed on the improvement of the working conditions and standard of living of all working people, for example, the right to strike by the working class. The EPRP programme aimed at the “establishment of a national democratic culture and educational system and to run public health services catering to the masses”. The EPRP wanted to abolish all forms of reactionary, rigid, and ‘imperialist-ridden’ culture and education and install in instead a progressive educational system that is attuned to the interests of the broad masses. In other words, they aimed to merge theory and practice in schools to reflect the productive engagement of the working class. The building of a peoples army and the equality of women was also included in the party’s programme. In short, the EPRP aspired to create a peoples democratic republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), an aspiration the *Dergue* were quick to hijack after liquidating the EPRP from its held territories. On the other hand, even though the EPRP’s policies were sound, the front did not succeed in its attempts to implement the programmes. Instead it fell in collision with the TPLF, MEISON, and the OLF. The EPRP and the TPLF had different strategic interests, outlooks, analysis of the Ethiopian revolution, and hence different programmes⁶²⁸. The other important additional factor that contributed to the clash was the fact that most of the EPRP’s core leadership that had also played a vital role in the EPRP were Tigrayans⁶²⁹.

Similarly, although both MEISON and the EPRP were, in essence, multi-national, MEISON was largely an Amhara-Oromo organisation, with virtually no Tigrayans, an insignificant

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶²⁸ See Ghelawdewos Araia, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-133; and an informant confirmed that the relationship between the two fronts was confrontational mainly because the EPRP was dominantly Amhara while the TPLF was similarly Tigrayan. Interview with Tafesa Olika, Department Head, Political Science and International Relations (PSIR), Addis Ababa University, June 1996.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

number of Gurages and other minority nationalities. In contrast, the EPRP was predominantly Amhara and a minority of Tigrayans, Gurages, Oromos, Somalis, and even Eritreans. The EPRP had also managed to recruit other minority nationalities - Kaffino, Wolaita, Sidamo, Dorze-Haizo, Saho, Afar, Falasha, and Shinasha. Thus, the EPRP was by far a more broad-based revolutionary organisation than was MEISON. In fact one sidelined major problem in the analysis of the differences between MEISON and the EPRP emerged out of attempts to implement socialism in Ethiopia. They exhibited basic differences in their analysis of strategies which were in part differences on the nature of the Revolution. The EPRP demanded the formation of the PPG as an effort to try to fill the leadership vacuum during the revolution, while MEISON supported the military. This was a major conflict because the *Dergue's* 'Red Terror' campaign that liquidated the EPRP and other opposition was backed by MEISON. However, they all had similar programmes about the issue of nationalities 'self-determination of nations'. MEISON, however, feared any attempts that may lead to the dismemberment of Ethiopia *via* secession of nationalities. Thus, MEISON campaigned against Eritrea.

Despite all the conspirational games it played in favour of the military officers, MEISON actually fell out with the *Dergue* and the latter began its onslaught against the former. After successfully liquidating the EPRP and other opposition groups with the help of MEISON, and after winning the war in Ogaden and Eritrea, the *Dergue* actually turned its sword against MEISON. By the end of 1978 and 1979, MEISON and the EPRP were eliminated from the political arena of post-imperial Ethiopia. They were pushed to the peripheries where they continued to fight the *Dergue* but in a much weaker fashion. As for the relationship between the EPRP and the OLF, I will turn to them later. Meantime, we examine the OLF as one major ethnic-based liberation front along side the TPLF and the EPRP.

Of all the major contemporary resistance movements in Ethiopia, the Oromo is the oldest. It started long before the 1974 Revolution and was also a reaction against the "Amhara domination". For the OLF, the case of the Oromo was a colonial one dating back to the days of the construction of the modern state of Ethiopia during Menelik in the latter half of the eighteenth century⁶³⁰. The foundations of the OLF are traceable to the early 1960s when the *Metcha-Tulema* Self Help Association was formed in 1962. The objectives of the *Metcha-Tulema* included the construction of schools and clinics, Churches and Mosques, and the provision of legal assistance to members. Within three years after its inception, the organisation had registered three million members and operated within eight regional

⁶³⁰ See Peter Baxter, "Always on the Outside Looking in": A View of the 1969 Ethiopian Elections from a Rural Constituency", *Ethnos*, vol. 1, no. 2(1980), pp. 41-59; Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*; and Kife Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

offices⁶³¹. By 1966, the pre-occupation of the *Metcha-Tulema* with the issue of land distribution had become a cause of some disquiet to the imperial regime⁶³².

As the organisation became increasingly stronger, it began to go against government orders. For example, it defied a government ban on a meeting in Arssi Region, and an exploded grenade in an Addis Ababa Cinema was associated with the organisation. The major consequence of such defiance was then paid heavily by the arrest of Tadesse Biru, and execution of other Oromo leaders.

When in 1967 the imperial regime discovered the *Metcha-Tulema*, the organisation continued to survive in other forms. For example, in 1969 an Oromo student paper, namely, '*Kana Bekta?*', meaning, 'did you know?', was established, and in October the same year, a militant faction which had been trained under Sheikh Hussein Sura was imprisoned in Mogadishu, attempting to return to Ethiopia to launch an armed struggle. From 1971 the militants were able to maintain contact with two other clandestine study circles, '*Oromia*' and '*Bakalcha Oromo*' which were established in Addis Ababa, and when in 1973 Hussein found his way to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Peoples Liberation Front was formed. In July 1974, a few months before the final fall of Haile Selassie, the movement's first organisational meeting adopted a formal programme, and renamed itself the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

The OLF was established to fight for the independence of Oromia, which they claimed comprised those regions inhabited by Oromo populations, who are in turn reckoned to constitute more than half of the population of Ethiopia⁶³³. These regions were integrated into the rest of today's Ethiopia during the period of Menelik II. The Oromo nationalists have regarded the Menelik adventure a colonial one, effected with the connivance of foreign powers, notably Britain, France, and Italy, and the Oromo nationalists embraced the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Ethiopian student movement. In addition to such historical justifications, the OLF leadership believed strongly that a colonial categorisation of the struggle of the Oromo peoples was essential if the international legal principle of self-determination was to be recognised as applicable. Although the TPLF disagreed with this analysis, "it was not an issue to prevent cooperation against a common enemy between the two organisations"⁶³⁴.

⁶³¹ See Asafa Jalata, *op. cit.*, ch. 8, *passim*.

⁶³² See John Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 260; and Asafa Jalata, *op. cit.*

⁶³³ See in particular Godaa Melba, *Oromia* (Khartoum: The Nile Press, 1988).

⁶³⁴ Joint conversation with John Young and Marera, Addis Ababa, June 1996.

To be sure, the OLF claim was not the same as that forwarded by the Eritrean nationalists, the EPLF as we have encountered before. The Oromo claim had a second possibility. In other words, if the mould of the Ethiopian state could be transformed to the extent that real self-determination of nationalities could be achieved within its framework, “the OLF was prepared to leave the door open to the possibility of coexistence”⁶³⁵. Whilst the relative weight which this scenario carried out as a goal of the organisation fluctuated, it did nevertheless open the door to cooperation with other nationally based organisations fighting the *Dergue*. The fight for an Oromo independence cannot be proven given the well fast integration of the Oromos amongst the peoples of other regions of Ethiopia. In fact, such problem was summarised when Dawit Woldegiorgis wrote:

The objectives of the OLF are unclear at this point, but if secession is a goal, the movement is doomed to failure. The Oromos are so integrated into the Ethiopian soul that it is difficult to find an Amhara without some Oromo blood in his veins. It is equally difficult draw a boundary between the Oromo lands and the Amhara or Tigrayan lands. But if their objective is to achieve cultural autonomy and democratic political representation, then their cause will contribute enormously to the emergence of a strong Ethiopia united in diversity⁶³⁶.

Nevertheless, the Oromos still feel cheated given that they are the most populous community in Ethiopia but have remained in the peripheries of power. At the end of the day, the above armed resistance organisations found a common ground, fighting against a common oppressor government, the *Dergue* which they finally overthrew in coalition of forces under the banner of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in May 1991. With whom the OLF joined to form a TGE and pulled out of the coalition within a period of three months.

5.2. The Liberation Alliance: The Emergence of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)

⁶³⁵ Conversation with Marera, Head of PSIR, Addis Ababa University.

⁶³⁶ See his *Red Tears*, *op. cit.*, p. 117; this very words have also been quoted by Kinfu Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

Building the EPRDF could be said to have begun in the early 1980s. For instance, in 1981 cooperation between the TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) started on a successful footing. However, leading TPLF officials tell that the establishment of the alliance was postponed for some years in the hope that it might be founded with more than these two organisations (TPLF and EPDM). In an interview with Sarah Vaughan, Sebat Nega (TPLF Chairman 1979-1989) explained that immediate merger was not possible:

By the time the EPRDF was established the urgency of the formation of the Front was considerable: at the Rome talks [which opened in November 1989] the *Dergue* claimed that the TPLF, as a Tigrayan movement, had no right to discuss the situation of the whole Ethiopia; at the same time we were expanding the movement outside Tigray into the Amhara region. Diplomatically and politically the formal creation of the Front was urgent⁶³⁷.

The EPRDF was officially established in 1989 as a coalition of four major political-ethnic based groupings. These were the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), a core element in the alliance, the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation (OPDO), and the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM). In large part, the EPRDF is the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), because about two-thirds of the EPRDF army are the TPLF and the same is true of the political leadership of the alliance⁶³⁸. Very few, if any, expected that the TPLF would emerge as a dominant force in Ethiopian politics knowing that it was formed by a handful of ambitious university students from Tigray in 1975. The EPDM is a known junior partner of the TPLF, formerly set in 1980 and largely Amhara. The EPDM is a splinter group of the EPRP. The emergence of the EPDM has to date peripheralised the EPRP and MEISON in Ethiopian politics because it has assumed the role of Amhara representation in the coalition.

The EPDM was formally founded in 1980 with the help of the TPLF enabling the latter to penetrate Amhara region. As mentioned above, the EPDM has its origins in the EPRP, but split in the late 1970s after bitter infighting within the organisation. It was constituted mainly by the so-called Belessa Group, whose members later received military training, arms and had

⁶³⁷ See Sarah Vaughan, *The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶³⁸ When it openly emerged in 1989, four out of the seven members of the EPRDF Central Committee or Politburo were members of the TPLF. These were Meles Zenawi (Chairman), Abaye Tsehaye, Seye (Salah) Abraha and Tewolde Wolde-Mariam, and the other three were Tamrat Layne (EPDM), Bereket Helawi (EPDM), and Taye (Kuma) Demeksa (OPDO). See in particular Theodros Dagne, *"EPRDF'S Rise to Political Dominance"*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20; also John Young's Thesis, *op. cit.*; in idem, *"Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia"*, *op. cit.*, p. 531; and Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 115.

the permanent use of a large TPLF unit at their disposal in Gondar and Wollo. The crisis in the EPRP began when a group within the front began calling for a congress to review policy and change the leadership, were reportedly killed by those they challenged. In an interview with Sarah Vaughan:

Bereket reports that a group of some 112 EPRP cadres then left Gojjam and Gondar for Tigray, planning either to continue the struggle from there, if it were possible to reach some accommodation with the TPLF, or, if not, to seek safe passage through to Sudan. On arrival in the TPLF-held areas they were given practical facilitation and, after a 5-month discussion, a core of 37 were elected to form the EPDM and work alongside the TPLF who, whilst giving them every support reportedly "*never interfered in the internal matters of the organisation*". The first congress of the EPDM was convened on 20 November 1980⁶³⁹.

However, it is reported that the EPDM's first chairman left in protest at the growing influence of the TPLF against the organisation's position on the question of Eritrea. Thus, in 1989, Tamrat Layne, a close ally of Meles Zenawi, was elected Chairman of the EPDM as well as the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force (EMLF), which the former reportedly created. The other members of the EPDM leadership include: Dawit Yohannes (currently Speaker of the Shengo), Addisu Ebo, Tefera Waliva, Bereket Helawi (EPDM vice Chairman), and Haile Wolde Senbet (Chairman of the Military Committee). Despite the attacks it receives from its critics because of its close relations with the TPLF, the EPDM seems to be one of the leading organisations with substantial support in the Amhara regions of Gondar, Wollo, and Gojjam⁶⁴⁰.

The third member of the alliance is the OPDO, whose ranks were formed chiefly out of prisoners of war who agreed to fight against the *Dergue* without an aspiration for an Oromo independent state. When a rift developed between the OLF and the TPLF, mainly over the former's continuing support for an independent Oromia in the mid-1980s, the latter founded the OPDO as a rival to the OLF. The OPDO ranks were formed chiefly out of Oromo prisoners of war held by the TPLF in Tigray, and Oromos who had at one time or another joined the EPDM. As we mentioned earlier, the OLF has remained one of the most difficult groups alongside the EPRP and MEISON, that the TPLF could convince to join the alliance. Although on several occasions, with the mediation effort of the EPLF, the OLF temporarily

⁶³⁹ See Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁰ Interview with Yosef Tesfaye, Secretary to Dawit Johannes, Speaker of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Parliament, May 1996.

joined the EPRDF, its key minister resigned within three months of service in the coalition. The OLF and the EPLF were instead great allies and the latter is reported to have preferred delivering the Oromo prisoners of war back to the OLF rather than releasing them through the TPLF to reinforce the OPDO. Be that as it may, all Oromo prisoners of war were since then congregated together to form the powerful rival to the OLF to date⁶⁴¹.

The fourth member of the EPRDF is the little known Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM). It was formed out of the captured senior military personnel particularly during the battle for the capture of Enda Selassie in February 1989⁶⁴². The other members of the alliance include the Beni-Shangul Peoples Liberation Movement (BPLM) and the Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement (GPLM); the former was again a TPLF creation while the latter a creation of the OLF. The strategy of building the alliance was a real proof that the TPLF had grown beyond the parochialism of ethnic politics in Ethiopia. Pointing to the fact that the EPRDF benefited heavily from the organisational talents and tremendous capacity for discipline from the TPLF. The Marxist-Leninist ideology of the TPLF is basically an intellectual legacy of the leaders' radical student days in the 1970s. Even though the Marxist economic policies may have been dropped, Leninist organisation still plays an important role in the EPRDF thinking and this is manifest in its organisation principles⁶⁴³.

On policies, the EPRDF had initially formulated a Leninist two-stage theory of the revolution. The first stage was the national democratic revolution and the second stage was the socialist revolution. For this reason, strategic alliance with various fronts was permitted in the first stage but not in the second. In between the two stages was a transition period which had to be managed so that the possibility of moving on to the second stage was not lost. This required denying democratic rights to certain reactionary forces and putting the required structural transformations of the country's political life in place so that "democratic forces" were allowed to have their way. In this context, "democracy" does not allow a plurality of parties, but rather a plurality of opinions within one overall objective. It is a pyramidal form of self-government, with villages, districts and provinces each regulating their own affairs, and central

⁶⁴¹ *People's Voice*, 11(4), then claimed in the latter half of 1989 that "prisoners of war now number more than 40,000", p. 21.

⁶⁴² In an interview with Col. Asaminew Bedane, *op. cit.*, former commander with the *Dergue* and captured prisoner of war, he confirmed that most of them (POWs) found the liberation struggle for a democratic Ethiopia where all nationalities will coexist equally a genuine cause and they never hesitated forming their own front with the help of the TPLF.

⁶⁴³ See EPRDF, *EPRDF's Programme for a Smooth and Peaceful Transition of Power in Ethiopia* (London: EPRDF, 1990); and in idem, *On the Question of Peace in Ethiopia* (London: EPRDF, 1990).

policy being dictated by the considered outcome of all these local deliberations. In its first Congress in January 1991, the EPRDF resolutions 1 and 2 stressed the organisation of “popular assemblies” rather than “occasions on which the masses ‘elect’ their oppressors every so often”, and denial of unrestricted democratic rights to “anti-popular and anti-democratic forces” (specifically, those who held power under either the *Dergue* or the Emperor). Thus, the alliance did not as well yield to organisations without a coherent political platform other than national independence or liberation (specifically the “independence wing” of the OLF). Resolution 3 of the EPRDF Congress granted nationalities the right to self-determination, including secession, but only after a full and fair referendum.

Having dealt separately with Eritrea, the congress also stated that, under conditions of democracy, secession would not “safeguard the interests of the people” - implicitly closing the door to secession in the case of a democratic government. This pyramidal structure is reflected both in the *baito/gime gema* system of Tigray and in the June 1992 regional elections⁶⁴⁴. However, the new members of the coalition have undeniably diluted the identity of the core organisation by bringing in their own views on the future of a democratic Ethiopia where all nationalities must be treated as equals. Therefore, some of the creations of the earlier years have been quietly abandoned, and equally importantly, Meles Zenawi and his immediate circles have displayed remarkable pragmatism⁶⁴⁵. The process of the alliance intensified and by early 1991, the political and organisational base for an Ethiopia-wide anti-*Dergue* liberation movement had been forged. This paid off very quickly in military advances.

At the same time, Mengistu's zero hour was close⁶⁴⁶. He began reverting his policies by seeking negotiation with both the EPRDF and the EPLF who were a short distance away from victory. General Mengistu became more desperate because of his inability to obtain arms. Paul Henze reported, “It is not surprising that Mengistu leaped at the opportunity to exchange ambassadors and accept military aid from Israel in late 1989. Gorbachev had shown no warmth toward him and, though Soviet arms kept arriving, it was apparent that the Soviet relationship was cooling off. With all other expectations disappointed, Mengistu hoped that Israeli arms and counter-insurgency skills might still enable his armies to defeat the EPLF and

⁶⁴⁴ See *Local and Regional Elections in Ethiopia 21 June 1992*, Human Rights Report No. 1 August 1992, Report of the Norwegian Observer Group, Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, Oslo.

⁶⁴⁵ Interview with Ambassador Robert Houdek, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴⁶ Kinfe Abraham, *op. cit.*, Ch. One, rightly used the terminology “Mengistu’s Zero Hour” in the beginning of his first chapter to describe the *Dergue’s* changing position while increasingly surrounded by his powerful adversaries, the EPLF and the EPRDF.

the TPLF⁶⁴⁷. The Israeli alliance which in 1989 seemed to offer hope for rescue, produced no major diplomatic or military dividends, instead caused increasing complications over the problem of the Ethiopian Jews. One major force that helped to prune Mengistu's branches was the collapse of Communism in the former U.S.S.R and Eastern Europe. The *Dergue* was confronted with international isolation which forced it to compromise with Israel, a nation it had earlier condemned as a reactionary Zionist state and pawn of imperialism⁶⁴⁸. Mengistu had hoped Israel would lobby on his behalf to change U.S. thinking and he also tried to lull anxious and critical Western donors through the series of liberalisation measures undertaken between 1988 and 1991. That did little to bring about a change of heart in the U.S. because U.S. officials still viewed Mengistu grudgingly. According to Ambassador Robert Houdek, "the bottom line was that the United States did not want to support a loser". Whatever measures General Mengistu wanted to use in order to better the relationship between him and the Western world came far too late and against a background of a series of military victories by the EPRDF in the heartland of the country, the EPLF in Eritrea, and the OLF and other movements elsewhere.

In all, the EPRDF continued its systematic advance southward against the *Dergue* armies that occasionally put up stiff resistance. However, they more often crumbled under assault from the less well-armed supplied insurgents, who had the advantage of high morale and the support of the rural population of the areas they took over. One strategy the insurgent movements adopted was not to occupy cities, because it was believed they preferred to be free of the logistic and administrative responsibilities cities demand. In addition, they did not also want to provoke the increasingly irritational and vindictive Mengistu who would not hesitate from indiscriminate aerial attack and bombardment. Thus key towns such as Bahr Dar, Dessie, and Gondar were left unattacked until rural areas around were secured. In order to cut off Addis Ababa from the west, the EPRDF soldiers crossed the Blue Nile and advanced into Wollega and Western Shoa. At the same time, other sister forces were advancing from the eastern part, cutting off the city from its artery port of Asseb. The EPLF forces too were beseeching Asseb from the north. Mengistu's major response to such a situation was to shuffle his government, most of whose officials either fled away with him or were/are still under house arrest in Addis Ababa. On May 21st 1991, he slipped out of the capital in a small plane that was supposedly taking him to inspect military training camps in the south of the country. Thereafter, informed sources tell the pilot found himself ordered to fly across the

⁶⁴⁷ See Paul B. Henze, "Ethiopia in Transition: Downfall of the Derg and Establishment of New Government", Part II, *Ethiopian Review* (August 1992), p. 24.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

border to Nairobi. From where he was flown to Harare where he has been granted asylum to date, while some of his close aides are still either languishing in prison or are now undergoing trial⁶⁴⁹.

Thus, many, whether in Addis Ababa or outside Ethiopia, felt things happened too quickly and that everyone, including the EPRDF, was taken off guard by the unprecedented collapse of the Mengistu regime. This version was of course repeatedly denied by the EPRDF who maintained that the end of the war was in fact delayed by the initiative of the London talks. In an interview President Meles Zenawi explained:

Side by side with these discussions [with the *Dergue*], the war was going faster than the political preparation, and there was a continual conflict between speedily concluding the war and preparing the political basis for a new arrangement. At times we bent in the direction of giving time for the political work ... until finally we felt that we couldn't continue to slow down. The war had its own dynamics, its own logic ... And so we decide, some time immediately after the EPRDF congress, some time in January [1991] - that the war should end before the beginning of the rainy season, and planned our operations accordingly. The EPLF had also come to the same conclusion from their own angle, and we were co-ordinating with them⁶⁵⁰.

A few days after their entry into Addis Ababa, the EPRDF formed a transitional government on June 1st 1991, with Ato Meles Zenawi as new Head of State of the TGE. The following day, the new president's address was broadcasted on nationwide radio and TV, promising Ethiopians a broadly based representative government involving all opposition groups and prominent Ethiopians except those associated with the old regime⁶⁵¹.

Although the taking over power in Addis Ababa seems to have caught the alliance by surprise, documents of both the TPLF and the EPRDF provide evidence of earlier preparations for a transitional government in Ethiopia a few years before the collapse of the *Dergue* regime. For example, the March 1989 3rd Congress of the TPLF adopted an 8-point

⁶⁴⁹ It is no secret that Tesfaye Gebrekidan, a senior general, former chief of staff, and defence minister, appointed by Mengistu to act as head of state, is still in the Italian Embassy in Addis Ababa surrounded by Ethiopia's military security.

⁶⁵⁰ Reported by Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁵¹ President Meles Zenawi repeated the same pledge in an address to representatives of foreign governments and international agencies in Addis Ababa, and in interviews with foreign and local journalists. See Kinfu Abraham, *op. cit.*, p. 4; and Alemayehu Gebre Mariam, "Appointment with Destiny: The Dawn of Democracy in Ethiopia?", *Ethiopian Review* (August 1991), pp. 10-14.

“proposal for a peaceful solution to the situation in Ethiopia”⁶⁵². The proposal included the establishment of a provisional government “constituted from all political organisations” to be established on the conditions of: a cease fire; freedom of political work for all parties; the release of political prisoners; and the removal of the *Dergue’s* security apparatus and foreign military forces. In addition, the provisional arrangement would respect the choice of the Eritrean people regarding their fate, and would prepare a constitution: in accordance with this last point a government would be selected to replace the provisional one.

As expected, the newly founded EPRDF adopted the proposal in October the same year [1989], and produced a further elaborated programme in the following year [1990]⁶⁵³. The latter programme actually detailed many things and alterations in it and provided a broader and more precise agenda for the July 1991 Transitional Conference in Addis Ababa⁶⁵⁴. In order for them to be adopted by the alliance’s leadership, substantial changes were undertaken on the TPLF programme. These included: the EPRDF’s intention to remove the government by force if it refused to accept and participate in this programme (Art. 1); the need for a referendum in Eritrea (Art. 3b); the limitation of a provisional arrangement to a period of no more than two years (Art. 4a); the need for the provisional government to effect economic reforms, help victims of war, and rebuild the war-torn economy (Art. 4c); and the need for international supervision of all elections (Art. 5e).

Finally, the EPRDF’s proof of its commitment for democracy and public participation in Ethiopia was explicit in the first document of the organisation - the Charter of the Provisional Government⁶⁵⁵. In summary, the charter encompassed four major sections which the TGE was to implement within two years. Most important are sections 1 and 4 which discussed among other things: declarations on “democratic rights”, the right of every nationality on “self-determination and self-government”, the right to insure preservation of one’s own “culture, language and history”, the right to participate in “national government”, that the TGE will observe all UN declarations on human rights. Freedom of speech, association and

⁶⁵² See Tigray People’s Liberation Front, *Proposal of the TPLF for a Peaceful Solution to the Problems of Ethiopia* (London: TPLF, 1989); also published in *People’s Voice*, 11 (1/3) 1989.

⁶⁵³ See EPRDF, *A Democratic Alternative for Ethiopia* (London: EPRDF, 1989); and EPRDF, *Programme for a Smooth and Peaceful Transition of Power in Ethiopia* (London: EPRDF, 1990).

⁶⁵⁴ For details of the Addis Ababa Conference, see Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵⁵ There were four sections which the charter addressed: (I) Democratic rights; (II) Principles guiding foreign policy; (III) Structure and Composition of the TGE; and (IV) Transitional programme. Refer to appendix VI for the “*Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia*”, *Negarit Gazetta* (Addis Ababa, July 22nd 1991); and Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-76.

conscience, the right to organise and establish political parties. In two years, the National Council of persons and ministerial bodies will establish a constitutional commission which will draft and present a draft constitution for consideration by the Council. Following debate in the Council the draft document will be presented to the public for debate and comment. The final draft will be presented to a popularly elected government for ratification.

Like other African countries, Ethiopia has had no tradition of political party organisation and activity - legitimate or underground. Local personal connections provided the basis for candidacy throughout the imperial reign. Even the opposition that emerged in the 1960s onwards had no party organising character. It has been noted that, "This absence of parties is often ascribed by Ethiopians to cultural traits, and especially the pronounced lack of interpersonal trust, and the difficulty of organising any cooperative institution in a hierarchically structured society"⁶⁵⁶. Thus, even the political factions that emerged after the 1974 Revolution were mainly a creation or continuation of Ethiopian student unions abroad, and not meant to organise the Ethiopian masses the way political parties elsewhere did. The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was a product of academic exposure to ideological imperatives of the time. This lack of political organisation enabled the military to hijack the people's revolution, thus, delaying Ethiopia's path to democratic order. Even after the *Dergue* had assumed the political leadership of post-imperial Ethiopia, the military coterie never provided a ground for free political party organisation. Instead, it either used them against one another or liquidated their leaders. Mengistu himself, admitted in a visit to Moscow in 1978, that "the historical uniqueness of the Ethiopian revolution' consisted in the fact that the army had assumed the vanguard role which was normally reserved for the communist"⁶⁵⁷.

5.3. Discourses on Liberation and Democracy: Ethiopian Self-Views

Ethiopian self-views on the liberation struggle for democracy in their own country are slightly different from those expressed by Eritreans in the previous chapter. Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic society with over 80 major nationalities compared to Eritrea's 9 ethnic groups. Eritreans portray themselves as one people and a wide range of evidence suggests the thirty years of war has tightened the relationship that has in turn led to the optimism Eritreans hold about the future stability of their country. The same cannot be said of Ethiopia where liberation movements never overcame the impact of ethnic influence. As mentioned above, liberation

⁶⁵⁶ See Christopher Clapham, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

movements in Ethiopia were all ethnically-based, and post-liberation politics is still heavily conducted under the auspices of ethnicity. However, this form of political organisation does not imply Ethiopian self-views would reflect those of a people who strive to dismember their regions in order to destroy mother Ethiopia. The liberation alliance attempts to resolve the disintegration threat by putting the case of nationalities at the top of the agenda of post-liberation restructuring. Many Ethiopians and foreign observers cited the preservation of the unity of Ethiopia as one major achievement the liberation alliance must be praised for since they took over power in Addis Ababa in 1991. According to the Charter of the TGE which has now been incorporated into the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, “every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession”⁶⁵⁸. It is clarified in the constitution that the exercise of self-determination, including secession of every nation, nationality and people of Ethiopia can take place when a two-thirds majority of the legislative council of any nation, nationality or people approves it, after which a referendum is then organised by the federal government within three years, and a majority of the vote in the referendum must support it to be granted. In addition, informants also believe that the demand for secession by any nationality will automatically be rendered redundant when democratic institutions are fully promulgated and the implementation process is seen to be taking place. A major indicator of the democratic process can only be seen when the people have the right to choose their leaders and are given equal opportunity in economic, social and political development.

The long time yearning for democracy and democratic institutions, self-determination or the right to form autonomous governments, and lack of equal opportunity for all nationalities is a grievance shared across the majority of the Ethiopian society. So that in Ethiopia, the term liberation often refers to the achievement of such principles, and not like in Eritrea where liberation became synonymous with independence. Thus, such dichotomy should be kept in mind when listening to Ethiopian self-views on their liberation struggle for democracy. Even though Ethiopians talk of similar structural factors that gave rise to widespread dissent which in turn led to the proliferation of liberation fronts, their experiences often reflect serious ethnic consciousness. For example, an identification and systematic analysis of the ethnic-based guerrilla formation is clearly explicit in their recruitment bases, orientation, size, and level of organisation⁶⁵⁹.

⁶⁵⁸ For details of this, see Article 39 of the *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.,

⁶⁵⁹ Interview with Prof. J. ‘Bayo Adekanye, Programme Leader, *Ethnic and Nationalist Conflicts Programme*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). I met Prof. ‘Bayo in Addis Ababa when we were both on our different research trips to Ethiopia in June 1996. His two-months research

Every Ethiopian I spoke to justified taking up arms as the very last resort of a peaceful struggle for change. Thus, liberation movements were/are all justified on the basis of such explanation. Below, I have lumped Ethiopian self-views together under five major themes: liberation, the question of nationalities, democracy, transition, and other social issues that include-land reform, women, demobilisation, reintegration of soldiers and refugees.

(a) Ethiopian Self-Views on Liberation: practical definitions and conceptions

Contemporary Ethiopians who managed to survive the frustrations of both monarchical and military autocracies have expressed their feelings on the current political change in the country which they all consider was long overdue. Real political change should have taken place in the late 1960s or early 1970s during the rise of clandestine political parties and protests led mainly by the student movement. It is argued that some of the more impatient students who expected instant change went and joined the Eritrean independence movement which at the time was the only organised force opposed to the feudal regime. Narratives of Ethiopian experiences about their own liberation struggle for democracy are normally referred to the activities of the student movement, and the successes of the 1990s have their roots grounded on them. Ethiopian intellectuals date the origins of present experiences with the student movement. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, for example, presents the experience in a fascinating fashion where he takes the story of 'Animal Farm' to illustrate the way the long struggle for democracy began in Ethiopia. He quoted George Orwell's words:

Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, labourious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength ... our life is misery and slavery, that is the plain truth. But is this simply part of the order of nature? Is it because this land of ours is so poor that it cannot afford a decent life to those who dwell upon it? No, comrades, a thousand times no! The soil ... is fertile, its climate is good, it is capable of affording food in abundance ... why then do we continue in this miserable condition? ... all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings. Only get rid of man and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we would become rich and free. What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the

trip was on "*Disarming Ethnic Guerrillas, Power-Sharing and Transition to Democracy in Africa*", with the particular cases of Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda.

overthrow of the human race!! That is my message to you, comrades:
Rebellion!! (George Orwell, *Animal Farm*)⁶⁶⁰.

Although the irony at the end of the novel does not apply here, Orwell's work is indeed a perfect illustration of how liberation movements for political change began in Ethiopia. Ethiopians still resent the difficulties they endured for centuries and years under both the Haile Selassie and Mengistu's rule. George Orwell's presentation of the speech, especially the style and delivery in 'Animal Farm' is similar to those spoken and distributed in the form of pamphlets by leading student revolutionaries in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover the characters in the novel - Snowball, Napoleon, Molly, Boxer - are also a perfect representation of revolutionary personalities in the student movement. During the students movement, leaflets full of ideals, the cry for freedom, removal of injustice, destruction of the old order, and the desperate desire for political democracy, floated the streets of Ethiopian cities and towns⁶⁶¹.

Therefore, Ethiopian practical definitions and conceptions of liberation normally refer to the desperate strive to destroy the roots and foundations of autocracy. To many Ethiopians, "deprivation by the ruling class of basic rights-political, economic, or social; exploitation and suppression of nationalities and denial of their respective heritages-history, culture, or language, led to the rise of ethnic-based guerrilla insurgencies in different parts of the country". According to Richard Pankhurst, many nationalities and regions still resent the domination by Amhara mainly from central Shoa and their language⁶⁶². Whether Tigrayans, Oromos, Somalis, Afars, the Gambella and Southern peoples, or even the larger Amhara community from Gondar, Gojjam or Wollo, all talk of being dictated upon by the ruling few. There are two major types of political oppression described by many Ethiopians in my encounters. The first type of political oppression is what many term "cold oppression that bites in bits and kills one via sleep like euthanasia". This type of political, social, economic or cultural oppression was experienced mainly under the monarchy for centuries⁶⁶³. The second type of political oppression is often characterised by brutality and terror. This was mainly

⁶⁶⁰ See Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears, op. cit.*, p. 5. At the end of the novel, the irony is that things never really changed for the better because the new rulers became worse dictators. See George Orwell, *Animal Farm, op. cit.*

⁶⁶¹ See *Challenge*, no. 1(1968), pp. 26-32, also quoted as footnote no. 17 above.

⁶⁶² Interview with Professor Richard Pankhurst, formerly Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University (Addis Ababa June 1996).

⁶⁶³ Conversation with Tesfa Girmai, an elderly man, is now a dealer in buying and selling of foreign currencies in Addis Ababa (Addis Ababa, 24th April 1996).

under the military government that succeeded the monarchy. Mengistu is, in particular, remembered for having liquidated not only the emperor and close allies, but for having eliminated his own aides and close friends of the revolution. Mengistu nurtured ethnic animosity, and worse launched the “Red Terror” campaign which caused massive destruction countrywide. These are issues that recur in the minds of many Ethiopians like Ato Zemikael from Tigray⁶⁶⁴.

The categorisation of citizens into classes, the *Amharisation* of everything in the country—culture, education, civil administration, even foreign policy, caused bitter resentment from other nationalities in Ethiopia. For example, the wrong thing to do was when a Tigrayan, an Oromo, a Somali, or a Gurage lawyer, teacher, or any official was forced to conduct business in Amharic, the language of the ruling class, instead of using his/her own indigenous language (the local language of the inhabitants of a province, district or town). Therefore, liberation is conceived and defined as a total reversal of such order. Article 5 of the FDRE Constitution states that: “All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Each member of the Federation shall determine its own working language”. Similarly, Article 6 states that: “Any woman or man either of whose parents is an Ethiopian citizen, shall be an Ethiopian citizen”⁶⁶⁵. These provisions are the applauded consequences of post-liberation restructuring.

According to Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse, liberation is emancipation from the yoke of oppression where monarchical and military order that exploited the ordinary citizens are totally extinguished. It is a situation where the people become judges of their own life, determinants of their own destiny, participants in societal affairs, and become tolerant of the pros and cons of life. This is also when a people can be seen to be operating in a democratic environment⁶⁶⁶. Thus, a fundamental link between liberation and democracy emerges from such conceptions and definitions. “In which case, the idea of Tigrayan domination which is drummed mainly by Amhara centralists in the 1990s remains basically unfounded”, he added. For Haile Kiros:

⁶⁶⁴ Conversation with Ato Zemikael, a former combatant who has been disabled by a *Dergue* bullet that entered through his right knee during the war, and now works for the regional government as an administrator in the Headquarters of the Regional Government of Tigray (Mekelle, Tigray, 4th June 1996).

⁶⁶⁵ See *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse, EPRDF Member and Head of Foreign Relations, formerly EPRDF Representative in Washington, London and Khartoum (Addis Ababa, 19th June 1996).

The struggle began in Tigray and capable people evolved in the course of the struggle who could now participate fully in the running of society. Such people should naturally be assigned to play a major role in the restructuring process in the country. But we have only two ministers in the cabinet-Prime and Foreign Ministers. Three out of twenty Politburo members are from Tigray. Ambassadors and other high-ranking officials are highly balanced in recognition of the rights of every nationality in national affairs. Such balance is evident in the fact that very experienced Tigrayan and other fighters from other nationalities have been demobilised to balance the equation of nationalities⁶⁶⁷.

Therefore, liberation means there shall be no more problems in power sharing in the political life of Ethiopia. From such expressions, it could be discerned that the EPRDF is interested in the transformation of the Ethiopian society by enabling equal opportunity for all nationalities.

Others defined liberation as the total eradication of feudalism and its culture, the phasing out of external influence on domestic affairs, and giving the people a larger say in societal matters. In other words governments will have no external surrogates to seek help when questioned by their own citizens over national issues. Liberation means the restoration and institutionalisation of free press, freedom of association, freedom of movement, and the total destroyal of royal titles, feudal privileges, and military influence on politics⁶⁶⁸. As pointed out before, opposition politics in Ethiopia's past was more often conspirational and elitist, but today liberation fronts have made it a mass-based activity. For this reason, liberation is creating an environment where party politics, and different views can be tolerated. Today, there are more political organisations than before, that are active against the ruling party, the EPRDF. Newspapers, radio broadcasts, and public talking is now live in the streets of Addis Ababa and other principal cities and towns of Ethiopia than during both the imperial and military rule.

Similarly, military intimidation and incrimination which drove some elites and young intellectuals away forcing them to organise, with the help of the peasants, effective guerrilla insurgencies, have now been cleansed. According to Ato Chekol Kidane, "if the liberation alliance do not make a major difference in policies of governance, respect for human rights, equal opportunity for all nationalities, development etc., then liberation has no meaning yet"⁶⁶⁹. And for Netsanet Asfaw, the absence of principles of justice, the refusal of self-

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ Interview with Woizero Netsanet Asfaw, MP for Endemariam, Tigray, and Director of Public Relations in the Office of the Prime Minister (Addis Ababa, July 1996).

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with Ato Chekol Kidane, Advisor to the Regional Government of Tigray (4th June 1996, Mekelle, Tigray).

determination and equal development opportunity for all nationalities and regions, the inequalities brought about by the unfair distribution of land, and lack of equality between sexes, women, children, were the burning elements that led to the proliferation of various guerrilla fronts in Ethiopia⁶⁷⁰. Dr. Ethiopia Beyene further expressed that liberation may mean different things to different people depending on circumstances and time, but one element is present in all situations, “the yearning for freedom from dictatorship”. For her, liberation includes the breath of peace, no more threat of torture, or open robbery, discrimination and antagonism amongst and between ethnic groupings [interview EPRDF H/Qs, Addis Ababa July 1996]. It is the absence of terror, fear (sometimes of the unknown), greed, cure of diseases, eradication of hunger and/or poverty. She also confirmed that the Haile Selassie years marked the end of peaceful dictatorship, while Mengistu’s reign epitomised terror and the use of brute force to cow down any opposition. That is why forces of change (positive) took up arms to fight for liberation where no one is capable of inflicting pain to the others any longer⁶⁷¹.

Woizero Mebrat Beyene on the other hand narrated a story of how she and her friends were recruited into a guerrilla group in Tigray. For her, their decision to join the liberation front was a reaction to a situation which was widely felt unbearable. In her own words she expressed:

I left university studies in the first year at Addis Ababa and joined the TPLF. When the *Dergue* took over the control of power, it (*Dergue*) decided to send all university students to villages in different parts of Ethiopia in order to explain to the ordinary citizens the objectives of the 1974 Revolution. The campaign was named *Zemecha* whose main purpose was to disseminate the philosophy of ‘Ethiopian Socialism’ through the medium of students, and to systematically avoid the latter and minimise challenge at least at the center of power. My colleagues and I were sent to Harar where we spent three months of campaign. Generally, students' response was not favourable to the government. We in Harar did not carry the message of the *Dergue*, instead we were accused of agitating the peasants against the military. As a result, fourteen students were arrested from our group and so were many others from groups in other parts of the country. Those who were not arrested were relocated in different parts of Ethiopia. Fortunately enough, I was transferred to Tigray my home region, for another three months campaign in Macho. While in Tigray, we started hearing and getting information about the struggle there. That is how most of us first got touch with the TPLF. My friends and I

⁶⁷⁰ Interview (14th June 1996, Addis Ababa).

⁶⁷¹ Interview with Woizero Mebrat Beyene, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Addis Ababa, 20th June 1996).

started working as clandestine agents for the TPLF for about nine months. Feeding them with information from towns was very important for their success. For example, telling them in advance about convoy journey, the number of commanding officers and troops, cars and so on. We actually realised later on that we were a large cell group operating throughout Tigray but without knowing one another for security reasons. The fear was that in case one is caught, then others will be protected not to be revealed. At the end, we did a good job for the TPLF countering *Dergue* propaganda very well. Most of us converged in the field after fear of the possibility of being exposed⁶⁷².

In a way, the TPLF had the most effective means of recruitment and mobilisation. However, other informants from different fronts also confirm that strategies were similar in some cases. For example, all fronts operated secretly and had each their own cell groups in cities and towns of the country. John Young explains how all fronts would “describe the route to take to particular destination, the junction to turn or wait at, the person to meet, the colour of shirt, trouser, shoes worn, and so on”⁶⁷³. Mebrat Beyene again confirmed that: “Recruits were at times requested to climb buses without being sure of their destination. However, at some point in the journey, someone in the same bus suddenly tells you to drop in the middle of nowhere and within minutes or seconds, other persons would remove you from there without delay”. Although every liberation front had complicated directives of the journey to the location of camps where training and organisation of fighters would take place, the actual training programmes were similar including the time schedule just like training of the army with all governments does not differ much. All operated using guerrilla tactics, except in the case of the EPLF, liberation fronts in Ethiopia never behaved like a conventional army. Whether guerrilla or conventional, liberation fronts are renowned for their craftiness⁶⁷⁴.

The tales of combat, loss of heroes, martyrs and spending of sleepless nights in terrains and bunkers is a common experience expressed by many members of the different liberation fronts both in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Moreover, all the fronts in Ethiopia shared the same enemy with their counterpart in Eritrea, even though their objectives were clearly different. Many ex-fighters in Ethiopia converge in the view that liberation is synonymous with death on the one hand, and capturing towns, cities, and victorious celebrations on the other. According to an

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*

⁶⁷³ Conversation with Dr. John Young, PSIR (Addis Ababa, 15th June 1996).

⁶⁷⁴ John Garang, Leader of the SPLM/A named one of his operations in southern and eastern Sudan “Operation Black Fox”, where he argued that the nature of liberation is to be as crafty as a fox, but in African folklores, a black fox is even more craftier or cleverer. Interview, *Eritrea Profile*, April 1996.

Oromo ex-fighter, it was normal to be prepared for death every time there was a combat with the enemy. "The people who suffered the effect of loss more were the parents, wives, children and other relatives"⁶⁷⁵. Similar feelings were echoed by fighters from other nationalities. They all talk of acceptance of difficulties or tolerance, firm determination and commitment to struggle for the liberation of the country from retrogressive policies of the past.

The concept of freedom was more understood by the fronts members and inhabitants of captured territories than to those who were still in government held areas. Many simply explained that in the liberated areas, the fighters controlled their own destinies, shared things in common, tolerated difficulties together, and proved their solidarity with the masses under control by sharing with them the meagre supplies: food, medicine, or clothes. This was a phenomenon common amongst all the different fronts in Ethiopia. A Catholic Nun from Nazareth (a hundred miles from Addis Ababa) summarised the feelings of peasants and ordinary Ethiopians during the struggle when she expressed:

I worked in Nazareth where we take care of a number of responsibilities as religious. Our role is to serve the people as God's commandments prescribe in the Holy Scriptures. The *Dergue* considered the Church a waste of time because of the communist ideology. Even when it (*Dergue*) pretended the revolution was for the masses, nothing was done to prevent hunger, diseases, and torture of the innocent continued. Where I worked, the people feared the *Dergue* soldiers and instead found security in the liberated areas. The government and its soldiers were associated with torture, terror, looting and raping of civilians, intimidation and indiscriminate arrest of people and all kinds of suffering. So when the liberators arrive in a place, the impression the people got was that of security, co-operation, peace, and as a result, young men and women deserted villages and towns to join the liberators. For me, liberation means the opposite of everything bad the *Dergue* and its soldiers were doing. We can now move from place to place without incrimination and fear, there is freedom of expression, people can now elect their leaders such as the local councillors and/or legislators. Ethiopia is now liberated⁶⁷⁶.

As pointed out earlier, there is a clear-cut difference in the tone of the voices of civilians from those of senior officers who fought and commanded the arms of their respective liberation fronts. For example, many officers never cited events that annoyed the civilian population in relations to their activities during the war. Whereas a number of civilians pointed out the difficulties they encountered with either the TPLF, OLF, WSLF or the EPRP, ex-guerrilla

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with Tesfa Guma, an ex-Oromo Liberation Front member and now a civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture (Addis Ababa, 19th 1996).

⁶⁷⁶ Interview with Sr. Abebech Getu (Nazareth, 18th June 1996).

fighters always told the positive aspects of their encounters with the civil population. But it is common knowledge that there were times when members of, say a Tigrayan front, EPRP or OLF fronts fell in collision with civilians of different nationalities, where maltreatment and torture of civilians was reported. Thus, the advantage of talking to the ordinary Ethiopian is that his/her self-views are expressed in a much more blunt way than those expressed by a Colonel or a Major in the former government or any of the fronts.

According to Col. Asaminew Bedane, liberation is to be free from oppression and suppression of any kind; it is a situation when the use of force against the will and interest of others is totally eradicated. In other African countries, liberation was synonymous with anti-colonial forces, in Ethiopia, liberation is synonymous with anti-dictatorship, oppression by indigenous non-white or non-European regimes. The attitude, actions, policies and directives of the old regimes laid a foundation for the rise of ethnic-based liberation fronts in different parts of Ethiopia. But what proved more significant and nationalistic, is the emergence of a broad based organisation under the banner of the EPRDF in 1989. The organisation of the different fronts into an alliance was aimed at shaping the direction of the fight, improvement of war tactics, and transformation of ethnic-guerrillas into a national army. What was crucial is the fact that the formation of the alliance created an environment for retraining and reorganisation of the army to counter *Dergue* propaganda and indiscriminate offensives. The ultimate results of the alliance were disastrous for Mengistu and the EPRDF operations were crowned with victories and successes. The Colonel summarised:

In my own experience, one remarkable thing to remember is the attention given prisoners of war (POWs) by the different fronts and later the alliance forces EPRDF). I was a prisoner of war myself for years and it was law not to kill the POWs. A number of options was given the POWs: (i) going abroad as a refugee could be facilitated *via* Sudan and Kenya, or to the outside world, (ii) returning back to towns if no special harm is expected from the government side, (iii) living in the liberated areas and doing one's own business, and (iv) Joining the struggle against the government. Most POWs chose to continue fighting on the side of the fronts. However, later, we were even allowed to form our own front, the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM) where I became at different times Chairman and Deputy Chairman⁶⁷⁷.

The Colonel further argued that it is wrong to think all army officers and soldiers working with the *Dergue* were against the liberation struggle because most of them were known for having been anti-establishment since the Haile Selassie years. He explained that it was difficult

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with Col. Asaminew Bedane, *op. cit.*

to find one's way out especially when one was known for not being a staunch loyalist to the system. Those with experience of Ethiopia's past politics say that the *Dergue* structures were probably the most controlled and centralised, even more than during imperial period. The *Dergue* planted informers in every corners and corridors of the army, the civil service, local government, and other areas of public service. As a result, those who had a chance could not hesitate joining their respective fronts since it became much clearer that a militant approach was perhaps the only way to bring about changes in Ethiopia's political order.

In another interview with Col. Halefom Alemu, he expressed that liberation is the commitment of one's life to struggle for the welfare of all in society, sacrifice for the benefit of many rather than of the few. For him, it is the believe in democratic principles that drove many away to take up arms and begin a long struggle for change. He argued that the influence of the student movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s influenced the thinking of the younger generation, especially students from overseas and abroad. Ethiopia was a closed society for years until after WW II when scholarships began taking students to study in Western institutions, in particular in the United States and Europe where democracy had long found public resonance. Thus, Ethiopian students abroad and overseas tested the advantages of conducting business in a free environment where freedom of choice governs. So that when most of these returned home, they were highly suspected by the establishment, and young people, whether in the army, civil service, higher institutions and universities, became a target of the military intelligence. Such suspicion led to the development of strong hatred between the establishment and the intelligentsia who in anger decided to join clandestine organisations against the *status quo*. Some guerrilla fronts had formed already such as the EPRP, but were not able to attract larger following. Some fronts were scrutinising recruits but the TPLF was more open and took members without reservation. Most people joined the fronts because of intimidation, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, and more because many understood the advantages of a democratic society.

In his own words, Col. Halefom further argued:

In the front, we were indoctrinated with correct ideas of liberation which included the desire for freedom, democracy, equal development opportunity for all nationalities, and the desire for the reign of justice. The regime tried hard to make officers in the army, the police, prisons, Wild Life and so on, to feel different from their own people. Officers were not allowed to mix with civilians, a total mess of military institutions and order. Such attitude was severely resented by many people who became bitter against the *Dergue* activities. The regime's aim was to create different classes between soldiers and their respective communities. Even officers who were brought up in peasant families were made to shoot the peasants. Yes, some officers acted on

the orders of the regime, some of us defected in the face of it. For example, in 1990, one officer ordered the setting of villages on fire in Northern Shoa and Wollo. Everything was done in support of the ruling class and not the citizens. Because of such brain-washing by the regime, many officers were made to believe they were part of the ruling class even when they know their parents were in the ghettos of Ethiopian cities or remote villages⁶⁷⁸.

The *Dergue* tried to recreate the minds of many officers and ordinary soldiers, and what helped the regime is the fact that the rank and file of the army was acting on the orders of their commanders, who were mainly loyal to the *Dergue*. Those who realised the dangerous manipulations by the regime quickly defected and joined to fight on the side of the various fronts in Ethiopia.

Most informants tended to impress that the opposite of what the *Dergue* did was practised by the various liberation fronts, in particular the TPLF and later on the EPRDF. The guerrilla fighter had to be convinced in order to carry out the gun against the enemy during the offensive. “The ordinary fighters did not respond simply to orders from commanders”, explained Ato Guma Buyo, an ex-OLF fighter. This is basically why the *Dergue* could not defeat the fronts even when the latter were more poorly equipped than the former’s massive army. The *Dergue* were heavily armed and injected with Western technology, but all that did not change the course of the war in their favour. In other words, fighting against a liberation struggle is not fighting a poorly equipped army but fighting against a firm conviction, the mind, the attitude developed, the resentment against harsh experiences of the past. The relations between the ordinary fighter and commander was a major strength to the guerrillas in Tigray and other parts in Ethiopia. “What is the mission? Why fight? What would be the outcome? What would be the advantage? Who is the enemy? and so on”, are major questions that were well explained to the rank and file of the fighting forces for liberation. In addition, “good planning and strategy, broad ideas, critical analysis of events and decisions, analysis of the capacity, efficiency and moral of a unit or brigade before launching attacks were salient guidelines during the struggle. Discussion before every offensive was mandatory to the TPLF”⁶⁷⁹. In general, plans were set for discussion amongst different officers of the unit/brigade for execution. In cases where differences arose during the process of discussion and assessment of plans and strategies, they were often resolved amicably and in compromise.

⁶⁷⁸ Interview with Col. Halefom Alemu, Head of Chief of Staff Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, Ethiopian National Defence Force (Addis Ababa, 20th June 1996).

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Many members of the different liberation fronts in Ethiopia concur that there were no leadership squabbles because individuals were all elected to positions according to the measure of their performances and ability. Team work was hailed because everybody in the frontline was aware the struggle could only be won when there was a unity of purpose. Major decisions were often reached through secret voting and majority decision was often honoured. Like every army, punishments and rewards were also there in every front in extreme cases. Wearing uniform did not make fighting soldiers different from civilians given that the latter also had a crucial role to play in the struggle. The guiding policy was that the purpose of being a soldier is to protect and give society security, and sharing a common cause brings people in society together. After all, the army is developed from the people, therefore it is for the people. Even though members of the same family existed in the frontline, many fighters expressed in their different experiences that the immediate neighbour was important or, as Woizero Mebrat Beyene put it: “it is my comrade who can assist me and not my brother, cousin, or uncle”. The relationship among fighters was well established, which is very vital for success. Every senior officer I encountered in the Ministry of Defence actually shared similar views. In all, the view that peace of mind, family, and society as a whole is a perfect explanation of a liberated society especially when it comes to comparing the Ethiopian past to the present, is also upheld by many Ethiopians. Today, there is a widespread belief that if something is inappropriate in society as a whole, or in some parts of it, there is the liberty to discuss with the authorities concerned without fear. This never happened in the past where a few were not only mismanaging society but even lacked the aspiration for better management. National issues were handled like personal property by both Haile Selassie and Mengistu. Thus, one former fighter expressed: “The EPRDF, even when inappropriately criticised, has brought freedom to Ethiopia, it has changed it and put it in a direction that history alone will be the best judge”⁶⁸⁰.

(a) Ethiopian Self-Views on Democracy:

Ethiopian discourses do link the issue of democracy to that of nationalities, because only in a democracy can people control their own destinies, be they of a political, social, cultural or economic nature. Many Ethiopians expressed the view that the liberation struggle for democracy is a continuous process aimed at the establishment of a system where the majority as well as minority rights will be upheld. Ethiopian self-views on democracy do not diverge from those expressed by Eritreans in the previous chapter and/or by other African peoples in the 1990s. In fact, many interviewees uphold the view that both the imperial and military

⁶⁸⁰ Woizero Hagosha expressed in her own way in a conversation at the EPRDF’s Press Department (Addis Ababa, 13th June 1996).

dictatorships made democracy become an alien term in the country. For years, Ethiopia never had a democratic constitution and as a result, has never experienced any election exercise. Public participation in national matters is unheard of throughout the past political history of the country. Many Ethiopians associate the beginning of a democratic discourse in the country with the rise of the various ethnically-based liberation fronts.

According to Dr. Teshome H. Gabriel, “if Ethiopia is to be democratic, a new way of thinking must prevail; democracy after all, is more than just elections; it’s also an attitude - a way of thinking that celebrates differences without being divisive. The search for the soul of Ethiopia rests here. Democracy, like history, can only operate as a system of inclusion rather than as a system of exclusion. Democracy, in other words, must allow a place for opposing voices and contesting visions of the various peoples and interests in Ethiopia”⁶⁸¹. According to a Tigrayan fighter, the mobilising factor was that democracy can only be achieved when the oppressive political system prevailing in Ethiopia was removed and replaced by a more democratic one, based on the full equality and voluntary unity of all nations and nationalities in Ethiopia⁶⁸². The democracy that would allow the recognition of the people's right to self-determination or the right to secession was impossible under a monarchical or a military autocracy. The success of the liberation struggle for democracy in Ethiopia has strengthened the popular view that unless the nationality issues are resolved, there is no way out from those vicious civil wars and economic crises that have wrecked the country in the past. In the Ethiopian liberation struggle, democracy was the goal viewed by many as a means of resolving the concrete issue of nationalities. In fact, one can say democracy in Ethiopia has been reformulated to mean balance between nationalities. Representation of the different nationalities in every aspect of national affairs has been implemented by the EPRDF, in the armed forces, diplomatic service, university, civil service and so on.

For Woizero Netsanet Asfaw, democratic rights include the right to organise and form associations that are not necessarily supportive of the government. Democracy means freedom of the press, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and full public participation in the affairs of the nation. Her views and those of others on democracy are actually well stipulated in the FDRE Constitution which states:

⁶⁸¹ Expressed in an international conference and published as “The Other Ethiopia”, *Ethiopian Review*, vol. 1, no. 8(August 1991), pp. 22-23:23.

⁶⁸² Interview with Ato Seeya Abraha, Director, Tigray Development Association (Mekelle, 2nd June 1996). Seeya Abraha is one of the pioneers of the TPLF, but now left government to work in a parastatal.

Everyone has the right to hold opinion without interference. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his or her choice. Freedom of the press and other media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed. Freedom of the press shall specifically include the following elements: (a) Prohibition of any form of censorship, and (b) Access to information of public interest. ... Every person has the right to assemble and demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition⁶⁸³.

The FDRE Constitution draws a lot from the respective documents of the various liberation fronts in the country. For example, the TPLF's proposals for peace in 1989 included democracy as a principal goal of the front. The proposal outlined clearly that the TPLF's intention was to overthrow the *Dergue* and institute a democracy and not to proclaim the Province of Tigray an independent state (which was the goal of the Eritrean guerrillas), but democracy within Ethiopia⁶⁸⁴.

According to Ato Haile Kiros, contemporary democracy equated with such positive results-development, progress, technology, and above all peaceful management of national affairs, has caused a contradiction to the traditional African old order. He argued that the association of these elements with democracy tends to distance the latter from the African traditional way of life, where traditional African democracy operated without being equated necessarily with issues of modernisation. For example, sharing of things together, be it a problem or a fortune, is a characteristic of village or community life in traditional African societies. In every community, traditional leaders existed who often dedicated their roles for the service of the people. In Tigray, for example, every person or family owned land, either through inheritance, or acquired it in some legal way or bought it or battered it in lieu of some valuable property. But the feudal system invaded society and robbed all the land by force, while the military regime that succeeded it did not do much to alter the situation completely. The success of the liberation struggle has restored peoples' rights to property and land ownership in particular.

Except for the Amharas and the Tigrayans whose traditional governments were run by monarchs, the majority of Ethiopian nationalities had loose rather than fixed traditional leadership. According to a number of interviewees from the Nilotic nationalities in Ethiopia, both the *ancien regime* and the *Dergue* destroyed traditional democratic way of deliberating

⁶⁸³ See in particular articles 29 and 30 of the FDRE Constitution, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁸⁴ See Interview with an TPLF Member of the Central Committee in the *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 3(April 1989), p. 4.

issues in society. In the past, public discussions were fashionable in non-Amhara/non-Tigrayan communities and villages across Ethiopia. In fact, some Tigrayans even dispute the likening of their way of life to that of the Amharas because many believe a similar system to that practised in Eritrea described above was common in Tigray. The *baito* system resolved a range of issues that mattered in the Tigrayan society. It is, however, agreed that consensus rather than secret balloting was the principle channel of deciding affairs, including selection of leaders. Such exercise was absent in those societies that had strict monarchical rule, in particular among the Amharas. But the internal conquest by Amhara emperors transformed the whole country into what many have termed “a modernisation of monarchical autocracy”⁶⁸⁵. The reign of the emperors in Ethiopia has been for years blamed for having sowed the seeds of anti-democratic culture in the country. Thus, the failure of the Haile Selassie regime to yield to the popular demand for democratic change led to the eruption of the 1974 Revolution that brought centuries of monarchical rule to an end. However, even though hopes for a democratic Ethiopia were high during and after the 1974 Revolution, lack of democratic culture and supporting institutions quickly gave way to a more despotic government.

On the other hand, the belief for democracy and democratic principles was building in the countryside with the effective influence of guerrilla insurgencies. For example, it is reported that there were no feuds over the contest for leadership during the liberation struggle. Leaders were chosen through the secret ballot during congresses. For example, the TPLF had four congresses during the liberation struggle. Informants tell of incidents when incumbent leaders themselves resigned their positions at will to take charge of other desired responsibility. In 1989, for example, Sebhat Nega, the first TPLF Chairman, resigned in favour of another assignment in the liberated areas, and his resignation actually paved the way for the emergence of Meles Zenawi to the leadership⁶⁸⁶. Occasionally minor differences over the means of the execution of programmes rather than principle arose but were often resolved amicably. Today, pictures of leaders are not in public offices or business places as is the case in other African countries. Foreign observers reckon the political situation in Ethiopia is perfectly different from that under the *Dergue*. According to Kerstin Wilde, the freedom of the press, recognition of nationalities, freedom of movement, reduced robbery and crime, are major signals that Ethiopia is moving towards true liberation⁶⁸⁷. In this case, liberation refers to the process of possessing certain “rights” that protect individuals and groups from arbitrary acts committed by the state or other third parties.

⁶⁸⁵ See in particular Harold Marcus, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸⁶ John Young confirmed such story as an incident that puzzled everyone, but the truth is he genuinely decided to do something else (Interview, Addis Ababa June 1996).

⁶⁸⁷ Interview (Addis Ababa, 14th May 1996). Kerstin Wilde is Director of GTZ in Ethiopia.

According to Colonel Asaminew Bedane, the revolutionary fronts, in particular the TPLF truly represented a serious struggle for change, a change towards democracy. For him, the only time he witnessed serious debating was after being captured by the TPLF. Otherwise, discussions were not allowed under Mengistu who decided everything for execution whether anyone liked it or not. It is the spirit that has been built and nurtured during the struggle that has now been transplanted into a practical and workable project. He further argued that true democracy has been instituted since 1992 when local and regional elections were held. In 1994, a Constitutional Assembly was elected that ratified the FDRE Constitution. In 1995, Regional and Federal elections were held, and a federal government was democratically elected, with a wide representation of all nationalities, an experience that has never happened before. Opposition groups now operate in Ethiopia including those run by people who held top positions in the previous regimes. “These people say things openly against the government and because we have fought for democracy, we allow them to do so”, remarked an EPRDF official. Nobody could ever utter a single word against the Dergue or else you be butchered alive. What is expected, one EPRDF official told me, to set a sound and good example so that future governments that may emerge in some kind of opposition election victory can treat others as they have been treated and can concede defeat in their turn. Multi-party elections are no longer a problem in Ethiopia, but have become part and parcel of the post-liberation order.

Ethiopian self-views on democracy maintain the line that their country has never tested democracy for centuries of monarchical rule and many years of military dictatorship. However, after one year of transition, Ethiopia held what was to be the first democratic elections in the country's history. As part of the elections preparations, the TGE invited foreign representatives to observe the process of the elections. As a result, the UN established what became the Joint International Observer Group (JIOG), with a secretariat in Addis Ababa whose purpose was to coordinate the work of the international observer teams during the final period of the election. Although the findings did not match the high expectations of many people mainly due to the imperfect conduct of the elections, a Norwegian Observer Group (NOG) remarked that “the Ethiopian people has a strong desire and firm commitment to develop a democratic political system, as these elections substantiated, the road to democracy may become patchy and difficult”⁶⁸⁸.

⁶⁸⁸ See Human Rights Report No. 1, “Local and Regional Elections in Ethiopia 21 June 1992”, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The 1992 elections, however, provided a ground for a Constitutional Assembly elections in 1994. The TGE again invited the international community, through the foreign embassies in Ethiopia, to observe the 1994 elections, as had been done in 1992. The elected Constitutional Assembly members had the crucial assignment to debate and ratify the draft constitution which had undergone a countrywide consultation. Though regarded as less controversial, some external observers expressed reservations. For example, a Norwegian team pointed out certain anomalies in their report such as: “free and secret voting was not always guaranteed”, “voting stations did not have any booths for marking a ballot unseen, often people had to do so under the eyes of an election officer, who in some cases even guided their finger”. It is also reported that an election officer directed one voter who to vote for, and that in some election locations there was only one candidate⁶⁸⁹. A number of foreign diplomats were realistic to remark that nobody should expect everything to be perfect from the very beginning given that Ethiopia’s political past had never tested a democratic exercise like in the 1990s⁶⁹⁰. Moreover, long-term experiences with democratic procedures after decades of repressive authoritarian rule and military dictatorship, coupled with the complexity of ethnic (national) composition of the country, represent a serious challenge to the establishment of a stable democratic system in Ethiopia.

Finally, the 1995 Regional and Federal Elections were intended to stand as the democratic culmination of a four-year transitional period after the fall of the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. According to most observers, the National Election Board managed a tremendous logistical achievement in conducting the 1995 election, because no polling station lacked necessary election material on voting day. Moreover in a country with so underdeveloped an infrastructure as Ethiopia the preparations were a great accomplishment, and a considerable improvement from the previous elections⁶⁹¹. Overall, several interviewees expressed that if certain aspects of the election process deserve praise others must be critically addressed if the democratic process is to improve in the future. In addition, the present government has begun the trial of former Ethiopian government officials, an exercise which many see as another gesture of the seriousness of the leadership in trying to ensure the process of justice⁶⁹².

⁶⁸⁹ See Siegfried Pausewang, *The 1994 Election and Democracy in Ethiopia, op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶⁹⁰ Separate interviews with Viatcheslav Reghus, Military Attache, Embassy of the Russian Federation (Addis Ababa, May 1996); and Charlier, Counsellor, Embassy of the Belgian Kingdom (Addis Ababa, May 1996).

⁶⁹¹ Separate conversations with Viatcheslav Reghus, and Mr. Charlier, Consul, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹² Refer to the short report by Oyvind Aadland, Knut Rognlien and Odd Bolmdal, “*Trial of the Former Ethiopian Government Officials Before the First Division of the Central High Court of the*

(a) Ethiopian Self-Views on the Question of Nationalities

For many, Ethiopia is a 'museum of peoples' or a 'prison house of nationalities'. It houses over 80 linguistic groups with 200 dialects. The major nationalities include the Amhara, Oromos, Tigrayans, Somalis, Gurages, Afars, and Agows. These are then joined by other minority nationalities such as the Aderie, Annuak, Bella [Beni] Shangul, Falasha, Kaffa, Kembata, Kimant, Kunama, Saho, or Shinasha⁶⁹³. The ethnically-based liberation fronts fought a war of liberation in order that every nationality will be granted autonomy, equal development opportunity, and cultural and linguistic freedom. The least common multiple for a unitary state, many Ethiopians argue, is for the freedom of every nationality to be granted. Teshome H. Gabriel had summarised the feeling of Ethiopian intellectuals when he wrote:

To be born into a particular nationality is an accident, to become an Ethiopian, however, is a choice. This choice, which requires a sense of tolerance, will be imperative for democracy to work and to flourish. A democratic Ethiopia implies precisely this kind of attitude, in which the scars of history - painful as they are - become the lessons of a history yet to be written. Only in this way, can Ethiopia retain the richness of its diverse history and culture and the long deferred promise of a democratic future⁶⁹⁴.

The whole crisis of nationalities began when the Amharas, since Menelik, started to dominate the socio-economic and political life of Ethiopia. Menelik's southward expansion marginalised the Oromos, who not only lost their sovereign kingdoms, but also their dignity and above all their very means of subsistence when their lands were taken over by the Amharas. The Tigrayans too, though akin to the Amharas, felt cheated by the monarch since the last of their emperors, Yohannes IV was deposed from the throne. The Tigrayan long time resentment led to the Woyene rebellion of 1943. The Somalis, unlike other Ethiopian groups, have for years been regarded as an acute threat to the national unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Thus, they were peripheralised and very few even had the opportunity to join higher public institutions including Addis Ababa University. Their existence was not felt in the bureaucracy or in the army. Worse of all, the Somali people in Bale, Harar, and Ogaden were relegated to

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia", Report of the Observation of the "Dergue-Trial" in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Oslo: The Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, 1996).

⁶⁹³ See Ghelawdewos Araia, *op cit.*, p. 152.

⁶⁹⁴ See his "The Other Ethiopia", *Ethiopian Review*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

their nomadic and cattle breeding mode of living with very few of them engaged in merchandising and contraband activities.

The Gurages are the most industrious people of Ethiopia, but they were still despised by the feudal system. Even though they were able to resist against Menelik's expansionist ambitions, the Gurage are fairly absorbed by the Amhara culture. Like other nationalities in the country, the Gurage were never given the opportunity to participate in government. However, they managed to beat the system by engaging in commercial activities. For example, most of the small to medium businesses in hotels, restaurants, Mercato stores, tea rooms and even shoe shine throughout most of Ethiopia's big cities like Addis Ababa, Jimma or Harar, are all under their control. The Annuaks and Beni [Bella] Shangul were since time immemorial targets of slave trade, for that reason they have never enjoyed any form of equality in Ethiopia, let alone determining their own fate. Other nationalities like the Kemant, Woyto, Falasha, and Shinasha are well known as the forgotten minorities of the "forgotten Ethiopians". The Afar, scattered throughout the Horn of Africa, were for centuries made subjects to Ethiopian Emperors; while the 1974 Revolution scrapped their semi-autonomy under Ali Mirah who fled to Saudi Arabia and later on joined to found, with other aristocrats, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU). The Saho, the Kunama, the Agow and many other minority nationalities that now have a share in national affairs were all marginalised in the past. Even among the Amharas, it was Shoan Amharas who had the upper hand in Ethiopian politics throughout the reign of the emperors up to its finale during Haile Selassie I.

While the Amharas from Gojjam were often perceived as prime challengers to those from Shoa, those from Gondar and Wollo were as destitute as the rest of the oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia. To be sure, it is the Amharas from Shoa who benefited heavily in terms of material and psychological domination, the others from Gojjam, Gondar, and Wollo only enjoyed physically because of the general use of the Amhara language, the Shamma as a national dress, and Christian Orthodox being the official religion. These are elements that made the Amharas in general feel more superior to other nationalities in Ethiopia. But in all, Amhara or non-Amhara in Ethiopia were all subject to class exploitation, whose gravest result was the emergence of liberation forces drawn from respective nationalities: OLF, TPLF, WSLF, ALF, EPDM, EPRP, and the EPLF in Eritrea. The OLF wanted (and is still fighting for) the creation of an Oromia nation, the WSLF wanted the self-determination of the Ogaden and its merger with Somali Republic, the TPLF headed for the self-determination of Tigray, the ALF's emergence was a manifestation of regionalism versus centralism, the EPDM's was a fear of a total disintegration of "greater Ethiopia", and the EPLF were probably the most clearly defined front with the objective of Eritrean independence.

The popular view in Ethiopia maintains the line that the establishment of a democratic state is unrealistic without giving nationalities the right to run their own regions. Thus, ever since the war was won in 1991, Eritrea is now independent, regional autonomy has been granted to different nationalities in Ethiopia, and democracy is undergoing systematic institutionalisation. According to Desta Aregawi of Alemaya Agricultural Institute, “nobody, no government has ever allowed this before in the history of Ethiopia”⁶⁹⁵. For him, the past experience of the political history of Ethiopia, is a major testimony that the EPRDF will be remembered for having founded a political system that may turn out to be a strong democracy. And according to Dr. Engineer Hailu Ayele, Academic Vice President, Addis Ababa University, “there are definite makers of history, the EPRDF has become one in Ethiopia”⁶⁹⁶. Bahru Zewde too, believes democracy is not alien to traditional African societies, and argued that as an activity it was practised but its application today requires the incorporation of modern-Western conceptions. Traditional African democracy was seen in the way business was controlled by the people rather than individuals in the community. There were what are popularly known as *Baitos* in every village, a council of elected individuals to run the affairs of society⁶⁹⁷. As mentioned earlier in the case of traditional Eritrean societies, the *Baitos* in Ethiopia also acted as parliamentary bodies. In every community, there were local administrators, village attorneys or even errands that acted at times as mediators in cases of conflict. The people resolved their own conflicts over land, cattle, or any kind of property in an open manner through the raising of hands leading to a consensus. So it can also be said that every nationality practised some kind of democracy which was destroyed systematically by the feudal system and much later by the military regime.

Ethiopian self-views on the question of nationalities is often expressed in the demand for self-determination or the quest for some kind of regional autonomy. Every nationality in Ethiopia, except for members of the traditional ruling class, resents domination and all its attributes. Widespread scepticism and fears of future ethnic domination have increased so much that critics do regard the EPRDF project on nationalities as a sheer ploy determined to camouflage Tigrayan domination. Others, however, think the EPRDF is more emphatic on assimilation and integration of nationalities. Many observe the EPRDF aspiration to resolve the question of nationalities is bound to falter because it looks at the concept of self-determination from the

⁶⁹⁵ Interview (Woldia, Wollo, 5th June 1996)

⁶⁹⁶ Interview (Addis Ababa, 25th April 1996).

⁶⁹⁷ Prof. Bahru Zewde is the writer of *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*, and he is currently the Director of Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University. Interview (Addis Ababa, 14th May 1996).

Western perspective *a'la* Woodrow Wilson and socialist outlook *a'la* Lenin. These, critics argue, do correspond well to realities of a politics buttressed by ethnic rivalries in the country⁶⁹⁸.

Be that as it may, Ethiopia is now decentralised and the other challenge is now how to create and strengthen the process of multinational harmonisation. It can be said that dependable harmony can only be achieved if and when the different nationalities become more altruistic and work toward a formula of sharing both power and responsibility. For Demtaw Hailu, the leaders of the different nations bear the burden of guiding the people in their national and political constituencies. Unless this takes place, a process which will make the Ethiopians direct actors in a forum where they can discuss their common future will remain a pipe dream. Only then can the leaders who represent their people be accountable to them and to the rules and logic of democratic practice. The new thinking post-liberation Ethiopia has pursued is the formation of the council of representatives or parliament and a government which embraces nearly all nationalities.

In summary, what most observers demand of every government in Ethiopia is that it must do more in order to gain a wider popular anchorage. For example, every Ethiopian government must not project a military image, and instead project itself as politically-pluralistic, multinational, and indeed multi-lingual. A representation of every nationality in the political and military leadership is a bonus for national harmony. Post-liberation order must epitomise a healthy human rights record, anti-corruption, and serious engagement in rural development across the country without discrimination. Many share the view that the present regime must generate some optimism via realistic promises and avoid lavish language and making pledges that guarantee personal gains rather than public individual and public rights. It must stimulate production and productivity, and finally restore the sanctity of the family that has been destroyed by widespread poverty. Then and only then can the country be said to have been totally liberated from inequality, injustice, discrimination, exploitation, oppression and/or dictatorship.

(c) Ethiopian Self-Views on the Transitional Period to Democratic Governance

Transition in Ethiopia was marked by the downfall of the *Dergue* in 1991, and the call for the establishment of a new government in Addis Ababa by the forces of the liberation alliance, the EPRDF. It was believed that a lasting solution to the political crisis in Ethiopia required the

⁶⁹⁸ Interview with Prof. Endashaw Ayele, Head of Research Programme, Graduate School, Addis Ababa University (Addis Ababa, 24th April 1996).

creation of a broad-based government that would include all nationalities. It was also timely that a conference which was organised early in 1991 in order to broker a peaceful settlement between the liberation forces and the government, was turned into a forum for the discussion about the formation of a transitional government in Ethiopia. Thus, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Mr. Herman Cohen, took the opportunity of the conference to impress on all participants the U.S. expectation that future governments in Ethiopia be democratic and committed to the protection of basic human rights.

The London Conference was followed by the Addis Ababa July transitional conference that year which constructed comprehensive policies that guided the TGE⁶⁹⁹. When the liberation alliance entered the center of the seat of power on 28th May 1991, it was well anticipated that the EPRDF was bound to inherit the structures and bureaucracy of the old regimes, and as a result, early precautions were to be undertaken during the July conference to prevent a return to the old order. After entering Addis Ababa, the EPRDF leadership pledged to convene within one month an all-inclusive conference of Ethiopian political groupings. The convening of the conference was hailed widely as a fundamental break with an autocratic Ethiopian political past. The conference deliberated on a number of important issues which included: the basis upon which the TGE would be organised, a transitional period before democratic elections take place, self-determination of nationalities and building confidence amongst different fronts that were outside the alliance⁷⁰⁰.

According to the Foreign Minister, the idea of a transitional period after the defeat of the *Dergue* was upheld by many liberation fronts in Ethiopia because every front knew it could not alone form a government acceptable to all Ethiopians⁷⁰¹. Furthermore, a gesture of *realpolitik* was shown by the EPRDF in a statement that “it would have been ridiculous for one organisation, operating in only a part of the country, to have formed a government”. Thus, the decision to form an “all-inclusive” Transitional Government was justified by EPRDF's sources with myriads of ideological statements, fundamentally boiling down to the assertion that reflected the intrinsically democratic nature of the organisation. For example, TPLF's 1989 Congress outlined eight major points for the establishment of a Provisional Government “constituted from all political organisations”⁷⁰². The proposals were incorporated

⁶⁹⁹ Details of this arrangements have been well documented by Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, 79 pages.

⁷⁰⁰ See appendix VI for the transitional charter.

⁷⁰¹ Interview with Seyoum Mesfin, Ethiopian Foreign Minister. See Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁷⁰² See TPLF, *Proposals for a Peaceful Solution to the Situation in Ethiopia*, *op. cit.*

into the broader alliance's programme when it formed in 1989. The liberation alliance had always been known for its advocacy of direct democracy and prolonged discussions of *Gim-Gema* (a Tigrayan term for debate), based on mass gathering of the population at the grassroots, but later it began to overlay its statements with the language that included ideals of Western-type "liberal-democracy". The shift was meant to reflect the recognition of the form of democratisation for which international pressure on Africa was mounting. It as well wanted to demonstrate that Ethiopia was moving from the one-party system to that of multi-partyism.

Post-liberation restructuring in Ethiopia has been difficult but the commitment of the elites across the country seems to water down any pessimism. One major difficulty was the lack of agreement between the alliance and other fronts in the country. According to the OLF deputy leader, the EPRDF had their own programme, the EPRP had theirs, and so on: each group proclaimed its stand and announced "all you who agree march behind me"⁷⁰³. However, a consensus was build before the July conference where all nationalities shared a similar feeling as expressed by a representative of the Hadiya nationality:

We had a serious discussion with Seyoum Mesfin, in which he explained the position and intentions of the EPRDF, and how they wanted to approach the problem. After that the Executive Committee of the Hadiya National Democratic Organisation (HNDO) met Tewolde Wolde Mikael at the State Building. He had a handwritten draft of the charter from which he read out the main chapter headlines. I was learning. It was a magnanimous and positive gesture: the EPRDF was unchallenged but now they were calling to a conference others who had not contributed. We were cautiously impressed: What are they up to? What is cooking? That was the first step. In the absence of other information we decided to take things step by step⁷⁰⁴.

It is also reported that after protracted discussions on the principle of dividing the country along nationality lines, the chairman of the conference confirmed suggestions that: "the provision is that the regions will be drawn on the basis of nationalities, and that each will administer itself, and use its own language. There are existing studies by the Institute of Nationalities, which may be useful, but the issue is complex and will require time for clarification"⁷⁰⁵. The Eritrean question was clear because the EPLF had occupied it militarily

⁷⁰³ See Sarah Vaughan's interview with Lencho Letta, OLF Deputy President and Representative in *The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁷⁰⁴ Interview with Dr. Petros Beyene, Biology Department, University of Addis Ababa, Council Representative for the HNDO. See Sarah Vaughan, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁰⁵ Ato Meles Zenawi was the Chairman of the July Conference and these words are recorded in a video tape of that conference, available in the EPRDF Head Quarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

and it did not require any decision for or against during the conference and the EPLF were simply observers during the July conference.

Many top officials of the new regime also explained the limitations the inheritance of the old structures has created in the transformation process, but all are optimistic time will phase out the legacies of the old system. In the words of Colonel Asaminew Bedane:

People can tell the difference between the way the bureaucracy during both the imperial era and that of the Dergue made things more difficult, because they were well known for their slow process in tackling issues; a practice which has been proven inadequate by the liberation fronts who often exemplified efficiency in the liberated areas. This is the kind of system Ethiopians believe would result to progress and peace in society. Administrative organs in the liberated areas were effective and efficient. The people who visited the liberated areas were able to confirm the type of administration desired for the country. Thus, from 1989, there was a widespread longing for a speedy takeover of the country. Ethiopians have seen the difference in economic progress, increase housing, development, health services, the infrastructure and so on and so forth⁷⁰⁶.

The present government in Ethiopia of course brought with it a lot of its own administrative apparatus that operated in the liberated areas. It is all accepted that every liberation front established some kind of effective administration to prove to the inhabitants of captured territories that it was capable of providing an alternative government. Like the EPLF, the ethnic based liberation fronts in Ethiopia had their own structures which enabled them to manage the affairs in their respective areas with some kind of efficiency.

In a nutshell, the transitional period is still on and there are a lot of difficulties Ethiopia still faces especially *vis-a-vis* the Oromo, nationally acknowledged as the largest ethnic group in the country. The Oromo Liberation Front and many other parties that were initially in the government withdrew after three months of a temporary coalition. The result of the OLF withdrawal was, as expected, violence which has continued in many parts of the country that are particularly under the opposition control. For example, serious fighting between the EPRDF and the OLF broke out in mid-1992, where suspected OLF members and sympathisers were put in rehabilitation camps. Although the confinement of about 19,000 OLF fighters restored a degree of tranquillity, observers maintain the view that it can hardly facilitate reconciliation between the OLF and the government⁷⁰⁷. In addition to the OLF, other political

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with Col. Asaminew Bedane, *op, cit.*

⁷⁰⁷ See in particular Kerstin Wilde and Anteneh Belete, "Lessons Learned in Ethiopia", Paper presented in a workshop entitled, *Experiences with the Demobilisation of and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*

parties such as the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), the All Amhara People's Organisation (AAPPO) and the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) are also severely opposed to the EPRDF government in Ethiopia, which many perceive as Tigrayan dominated. And given the fact that democracy cannot please all, such kind of protests will continue to persist until the democratisation process matures from that of a transitional system to a full democracy with firm supporting institutions.

(d) Ethiopian Self-Views on other Social Issues

Other topical issues that concerned everybody in Ethiopia after the end of the liberation struggle, and in particular during the transition period, include the issues of land, demobilisation and reintegration of soldiers into society, the status of women and children, repatriation of refugees particularly from neighbouring countries, the improvement of the infrastructure - housing, medical services, schools, roads⁷⁰⁸. These are among other social issues that have become major test cases for the new regime because impoverished Ethiopians expect quick positive results of the liberation struggle. The country has been ruined by war and the preceding governments spent the country's meagre resources on defence. Even worse is the fact that the famine had also created apathy which has to be rehabilitated. And post-liberation restructuring seems to have restored some hope for the improvement of life in the Ethiopian society. The decentralisation of administration was also followed by the decentralisation of resources. Every region now plans its own development budget and presents it to the federal government for funding. In other words, the blame of mismanagement has been removed from the federal authorities and lies now with the hands of local authorities. It is competitive development rather than animosity between peoples of different regions that has dominated post-liberation politics and national resources are shared proportionately according to the size and population of each region.

Land has been a major issue of contest in Ethiopia's political history. It was the subject of conquest during the reign of the country's first emperors, the architects of "Greater Ethiopia". In traditional Ethiopia, land belongs to God, who passes it to the emperor, His anointed on earth; the monarch in turn, grants it to deserving individuals as *gult* or *rist*⁷⁰⁹. The term *gult*

(Addis Ababa, 17th-19th April 1996). This was also confirmed in an interview with Kerstin Wilde, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰⁸ Separate interviews with Ato Alem Ghebre Wahid, EPRDF Branch (Axum, Tigray, 31st June 1996); Ato Abdurahum Ahmed, Administrator EFFORT (Mekelle, 3rd June 1996); and Ato Tekelewoine, Director, Relief Society of Tigray (REST), (Mekelle, 4th June 1996).

⁷⁰⁹ See in particular, Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 201-203.

refers to land granted as fief, and was used as early as 1300s, during the time of Amde Seyoum. *Gult* was held temporarily at the pleasure of the monarch, and its holder became the judicial and administrative authority of these lands, entitled to collect taxes in kind or labour. The *rist* on the other hand was more or less equivalent to private property or could be inherited, sold, and subdivided. In addition to *gult*, specific lands held by the Crown were the source of supplies to the court. The property holdings of individuals were expressed in terms of which *gult* and which *rist*s they held. So great were the variations - according to provinces and their relatively autonomous lords - that the history of land tenure in Ethiopia defies summary.

For years, land was surrounded with incidents of confiscation and reallocation. For example, Tewodros II (1855-1868) reduced the power of the Church which was believed to control up to one-third of all land, by confiscating much of its *gult* land, thus, incurring the wrathful opposition of the religious establishment, a factor that led to his downfall. Successful emperors had varying land tenure systems which included barring Muslims in Tigray and Hamasien from land ownership unless they converted into Christianity, especially during Yohannes IV's reign. During the reign of the emperors, measurement of land was the necessary prelude to a tax on the amount of land held, though distinctions were maintained in many areas according to the fertility of the land. Land reform was generally understood to mean breaking up the large land holding held by the elite and the Church. Although Haile Selassie I, in the face of mounting unrest, offered some ineffective palliatives, land reform made little progress in his era. After the overthrow of Haile Selassie I in 1974, the *Dergue* mounted radical changes that led to the confiscation of the property of the nobility⁷¹⁰. The changes resulted to mixed reactions among farmers and the Ethiopian poor were of course the beneficiaries. Thus, during the *Dergue* early years of office in Ethiopia, their land-reform experiment was regarded one among the most successful in Africa, at least from the peasants' viewpoint. In order to bring disputes on land into a halt, post-liberation restructuring has made land a subject of national concern. Land has become an integral part of the democratic process, justice, human right, equality, and development. Every Ethiopian national and citizen has the right to land ownership without discrimination. Land is now distributed equally for the purposes of development, farming, private business and entrepreneurship. The government has democratised land distribution by facilitating the programme of land distribution in advising or litigating any difficulties that may arise.

⁷¹⁰ See *Land Proclamations* issued between March 1975 and September 1977, which outlined *Dergue* policy of "land to the tiller", where every family was allocated ten hectares of land for farming.

Since 1991, the government has engaged in the immediate rehabilitation of the war ravaged regions and the revitalisation of the Ethiopian economy at large. War and famine affected areas have been given priority by the government in the improvement of basic services such as education, public health, water, telephone, electricity and light utilities, and transportation services. Specialists were dispatched to gather empirical evidence in those areas labelled as war and famine ravaged in the country, and their findings facilitated government plans in terms of budget and financial arrangements. The regional governments take the responsibility for the implementation of federal decisions and programmes. However, the government appoints a committee to monitor the implementation of its directives in order to make sure devolution of power does not falter in the hands of irresponsible individuals.

As state patronage in education and health services has proved inadequate, post-liberation restructuring will include the encouragement of private clinics and health centers, private schools and training institutions. The government encourages community participation in the construction of clinics, health centers, schools, and road building. Efforts are being exerted to enable these institutions become self-financing rather than depend on government finances. For example, there should be an integration of adult education with community development skill development projects leading to improved farming, soil conservation, hygiene and sanitation practices. The government has also encouraged the participation of foreign and indigenous NGOs in the provision of social services and setting up of economic and entrepreneurial ventures which might boost a process of self-sufficiency. In addition, education should not be undertaken as a job provider, but rather as a catalyst of change and a provider of essential skills for self-sufficiency in agriculture and for self-employment in business or in various skills co-operatives.

Post-liberation government policy encourages self-reliance where regional administrations are accorded the necessary facilities needed for the exploitation of the rich agricultural plains and basins, the production of staple crops, heat resistant cereals and crop varieties, horticultural schemes-including fruit trees, animal farms and animal breed improvement via crossing of breeds and raising improved breeds, poultry farms via the establishment of hatcheries which can supply farmers with baby chicks of better breed, and fish farming on an experimental basis in artificial ponds. Environmental rehabilitation is also seen as a survival strategy for the whole country and/or regions. One system that guarantees environmental rehabilitation is through the practice of sustainable agriculture. This combines the conservation of soil, forests and habitat via an integrated approach of rural development. When travelling throughout Ethiopia, one witnesses the gully building, hillside terracing, agroforestry projects and environmental protection to conserve the existing reserves. Small scale projects have also been undertaken in valleys and rivers which have potential for the development of irrigation.

This is done by the use of water, building concrete dams, earth dams and the drilling of wells. Most important is the conservation of water by the construction of earth dams for the storage of water for human and animal consumption. This is a common approach both in Ethiopia and Eritrea and even some parts of eastern Sudan and the northeastern province of Kenya. This is normally done by piling and compacting earth with very little concrete.

Ethiopia also has a potential for developing an export-oriented agriculture. For example, it is a major producer of Gum arabica, cotton, sisal, sesame, fruits of all types, oil seeds, has the largest livestock in Africa where meat canning can be processed for export, and semi-processed and processed hides and skins. Secondly, the viability of the exploitation of several minerals which are available in Ethiopia on a commercial scale such as gold, marble, iron, copper and tin, limestone, sulphur, and/or salt, has also received attention. In addition, Ethiopia's tourist industry is impressive, it includes tour operations focusing on the traditional historic sites of Lalibella, Axum, relaxation locations like Lake Tana in Bahr Dar, the Lakes region in the south, wild life, and other new sites in the country, including battle grounds and grave sites. The government's task is to ensure equality of women by sharing developmental roles through the allocation of important offices to women candidates. The University of Addis Ababa has increased its intake of women in all faculties to ensure women's participation in public affairs. Children too, are a major concern to the government today because they are the future of the country. Improved health facilities have been increased since the end of the war and schools have been given major attention. These are areas that no previous regime in the political history of Ethiopia has had interest on.

The other major social issues are those of demobilised soldiers and repatriated refugees. "We shall build an invincible force! Everything to the war front", was one of the famous slogans used to mobilise all kinds of material and human resources⁷¹¹. In its efforts to suppress opposition forces the Mengistu regime recruited an estimated number of 1.2 million soldiers with about half a million mobilised at the time of defeat⁷¹². The reasons for the attraction of recruits into the army had nothing to do with the commitment to defend the incumbent government. Many informants pointed out that a number of issues including poverty and lack of alternative income sources that pushed the majority of people to join the army of the *status quo* regime. In addition to the massive army of the *Dergue*, the different fronts also owned its army in thousands, such that when the liberation struggle came to an end in 1991, the TGE

⁷¹¹ Interview with two unnamed members of an NGO that dealt in cooperation with the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Members of the Former Army and Disabled War Veterans (Addis Ababa, 13th June 1996).

⁷¹² See Kirsten Wilde and Anteneh Belete, *op. cit.*

was forced to cut down the size of its army and, as a result, it had to demobilise both the army of the liberation struggle and of the *Dergue*. In a positive response, the TGE established the Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Members of the Former Army and Disabled War Veterans on June 11th 1991. This commission was charged with the registration, disarmament and demobilisation of the target group and later on spearheaded the reintegration efforts.

Apart from hundreds of thousands of soldiers who were initially assembled in camps for registration, others made their own way back to their home areas, often taking their weapons with them. A considerable number of others fled across the borders to neighbouring countries fearing vengeance. The number of ex-combatants in need of reintegration assistance increased when the OLF withdrew from the TGE and started armed resistance against the EPRDF in mid-1992, some thousands of OLF-fighters were captured and kept in camps. No definite time frame was initially set to accomplish the reintegration task. Four to five years were envisaged but by the time I was in Ethiopia in 1996 financial shortage had forced some reintegration offices in the regions to close. The TGE had appealed for financial assistance from the international Donor community to achieve the objective of the Commission. Between June 1991 and August 1992 about 70 million US\$ were mobilised for the emergency programme. The UNHCR and ICRC financed the larger share of the budget. The Federal Republic of Germany was the first foreign Donor government to establish a programme aimed at supporting efforts to reintegrate former soldiers⁷¹³. Thereafter, the British and Swedish Development Agencies also made contributions towards the assistance of the programme. According to the World Bank estimates, a total of US\$ 170 million for demobilisation and reinsertion was followed by various actors' spending of about US\$ 130 million on reintegration between 1992 and early 1995. Until now, the programme of reintegration is at its closing stage. Jobs were created to cut down unemployment problems. Many groups voice a lot of dissatisfaction with the whole process, especially from the side of the former army of the overthrown government and the OLF. However, the problems seem to be well contained by the government.

Many other projects have also been dedicated to the repatriation and reintegration of refugees. These are handled mainly by both indigenous and foreign NGOs. For example, in Tigray region with the largest number of refugees, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) has done a lot in the resettlement of refugees⁷¹⁴. Other regions too do have their respective programmes for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees. Similarly, a number of legislations have been

⁷¹³ Interview with Kirsten Wilde, Director GTZ, *op. cit.*

⁷¹⁴ Interview with Tekelewoine Assefa, Director, *op. cit.*

passed to guarantee the rights and equal participation of women in national affairs, and the rights and place of children too. The liberation struggle, many comment, has brought total change in all aspects of the Ethiopian society.

5.4 The Role of the Elites and the Rise of Peasant Consciousness

The primary aim of the rebellions by rural peasants against local landlords and colonial infiltration in the African continent was not to capture the state but to defy constant material exploitation and political suppression. But as to who inspires peasant movements is a question that we have tried to address above in the examination of the Eritrean case. Are peasant movements rural grown or they are urban but transported to the rural areas? As in the case of the Eritrean rebellion, enlightened elites took hold of the crises over land and other political grievances and turned them against what was widely perceived to be the most unfair regimes in Ethiopia. Thus, the leadership of all ethnic-built guerrilla groups in Ethiopia valued the role of peasants in the success of the liberation struggle. In order that peasants could be mobilised for the overthrow of a system that had encouraged exploitation, discrimination, and political suppression, the elites played a major role in their conscientisation.

Therefore, massive peasant response to rebellion against the political system in Ethiopia took place after the last of the country's monarch was overthrown by a military cabal in 1974. Unwilling to share power with civilians or acknowledge the right of Ethiopia's nations to self-determine themselves, the new government was challenged on many fronts. In these chaotic conditions a small group of university students went to the countryside of the northern province of Tigray in 1975 and launched a national liberation struggle under the banner of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). This front, together with the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) were then instrumental in the encouragement of other ethnic-based liberation fronts in Ethiopia, including EPDM, OPDO, and EDORM. The TPLF, with the help of the EPLF, started building an alliance with the OLF, which had began armed resistance much earlier than other organisations in mainland Ethiopia.

Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea was the home ground for guerrilla activities since the 1960s and early 1970s. Since the Eritrean case was more a fight for independence, other ethnic-based liberation fronts in Ethiopia sought their case to be more of self-determination of the diverse nationalities and the democratisation of the country's political system. The TPLF in particular became the primary organiser of the new agenda for Ethiopia. They organised themselves first in the northern province of Tigray which possess only 7% of Ethiopia's population, then moved to help others in the country to strengthen their rebellions. According to a recent

study, the Oromos constitute 40% of the population, followed by the Amhara with 30%, and a further 20% speak *Amharigna* as a second language. Only 12-15% of the population speaks Tigrigna⁷¹⁵. The northern region is a poor area without an industrial or valuable exports, and its overwhelming population of peasants had the highest percentage of land holders in imperial Ethiopia⁷¹⁶. The case of Tigray as a home ground of rebellions in Ethiopia contradicts the thesis of some of the most influential theories of revolution which argue that peasants are often moved to revolt because of economic changes and disruption to relationship with patrons caused by commercial agriculture. Although such theories do recognise that intellectuals lead revolutions, they largely confine their research to the peasant economy and discount the part played by conditions in towns or by other political factors. The case of peasant rebellion in Ethiopia confirms that peasants rebel not because they are opposed to markets, nor do they object to the break up of the feudal economy and destruction of patron-client relations. In spite of their poverty, most peasants did not initially join the struggle of the urban-based intellectuals. Contrary to the emphasis on economic factors by theories of revolution⁷¹⁷, an examination of peasant rebellion in Ethiopia found that peasant commitment to revolution was also stimulated by political factors, including government policies, nationalism, and leadership of the revolutionary party⁷¹⁸.

It was, as Barrington Moore had argued, the actions of the few upper class that in large measure both provoked peasant rebellions and defined their outcome⁷¹⁹. The argument is perfectly represented in the case of Ethiopia's peasant rebellions. Although political dissent was restricted during the imperial reign, the feudal system did not have the capacity to

⁷¹⁵ It should, however, be noted that these statistics were derived before Eritrea's independence which removed a substantial proportion of Ethiopia's Tigrigna-speakers. See T. Ofcansky and L. Berry (eds.), *Ethiopia: A Country Study* (Lanham, Maryland: Bernan Press, 1993), p. XVI.

⁷¹⁶ See Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, *Report on Land Tenure Survey of Tigre Province* (Addis Ababa, 1969), p. 54.

⁷¹⁷ See Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); John Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution: Pressures Towards Political Change in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974); and James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976); and J. Walton, *Reluctant Rebels: Comparative Studies of Revolution and Underdevelopment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 15.

⁷¹⁸ Students and other intellectuals who fled out of the cities and major towns were instrumental in the mobilisation of peasants to rally behind the liberation struggle for democracy and the self-determination of nationalities. Refer in Particular to John Young's works, *op. cit.*

⁷¹⁹ See his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 457.

eliminate it entirely. Thus, in post World War II era a more strong and open opposition to the old regime began to surface in the towns. Again the successor regime's prohibition against political activities and the state to carry out its proscription in the urban areas forced opposition leaders to move to the countryside and launch peasant-based guerrilla insurgencies. The *Dergue* used political mobilisation, bureaucratic measures, terror, and the ideological appeals of socialism and nationalism to establish its rule and attack the largely student based opposition which pressed for democratic civilian rule. The military government's use of violence against its political opponents alienated many Ethiopians, and as a result, helped build the ranks of the opposition and defined the political and military context of the rebellion. Thus, although peasant discontent had its roots in growing crisis of the rural economy that developed prior to the collapse of the old regime, it took the form of armed opposition in response to the policies of the *Dergue* and the means it used to implement them.

The other mobilising factors were the result of the military government's activities. Although the *Dergue* announced radical agrarian reforms, these were treated with suspicion by peasants who feared that the elimination of their traditional system of land tenure would allow the government to gain control over land. Land reform was not welcome in all parts of Ethiopia after the 1974 Revolution. For example, while land reform was welcome by the indigenous population in southern Ethiopia who saw it as a means of repossessing land lost to outside interlopers, in Tigray and Eritrea landlordism was limited because there were virtually no non-indigenous land holders, and in the highlands there were few large concentrations of land. Many people believe the *Dergue's* land reforms might still have served as a valuable means to gain peasant support had it not been for the authoritarian means by which they were implemented. Because of the political threat the *Dergue* faced its land reforms were hurriedly carried out and thus became the source of many grievances.

Therefore, widespread dissatisfaction with the policies of the new regime drove many people away in protest to join the various fronts. Domination of its peasant associations by government allies also caused bitterness and undermined peasant support. Peasant dissatisfaction increased further when the *Dergue* began forcibly procuring agricultural surpluses at less than market prices and restricting the employment of seasonal farm labour which many peasants depended upon for survival. The introduction of state and co-operative farms, forced resettlement, and villagisation caused further anger. As the rural insurrection spread, the *Dergue* introduced compulsory conscription, conveyed, ever higher levels of taxation to finance the war, and resorted increasingly to terror attacks on civilians and religious leaders.

Moreover, the petty-bourgeoisie's resentment at political marginalisation, peasant concern over declining living standards, and their joint fear that the *Dergue* hegemony in the state represented a new form of domination by a non-indigenous ethnic elite, gave rise to an equal forceful nationalism which became the central focus of the liberation struggle for democracy and self-determination of nationalities.

Therefore, effective mobilising factors included: the rise of land problems, national question, constant famine and drought, the issues of women and children rights. Thus peasants were mobilised to understand the political, social, economic and cultural objectives of the struggle on such basis. And as Haile Kiros had put it, "What the ordinary people need is effective leadership in terms of organisation. Otherwise, the effects of deprivation, exploitation, suppression, and alienation were equally felt". According to Haile Kiros, two important characteristics defined the liberation struggle for peasants. (1) The fight for justice in society. Fight internal exploiters, the feudal regime-*Ras Mengesha*. The ruling classes had very strong firm allies behind them. Haile Selassie had American and Western backing throughout. Mengistu at one time had the backing of both poles. Thus, the fight was also against external enemies. (2) The other point was of extending the struggle to other Ethiopians. Not all Amharas are enemies, but a sizeable group that have assumed the role and right of a ruling class are Amharas. These are the few who resisted the extension of the struggle but peasants were quick to understand the whole logic of the struggle. Thus, a lot of Amharas joined the TPLF, disregarding the antagonism exerted by MEISON and the EPRP (dominant Amhara fronts).

Many recruits from universities in the United States joined the various liberation fronts in Ethiopia. There was a strong Ethiopian Student Union in North America in the early 1970s. Unfortunately, Amhara chauvinism threatened to wreck the union by infiltrating it with EPRP programmes. As a result, the question of nationalities was always pushed to the periphery because it was seen as an encouragement of Eritrean, Tigrayan, or Oromo nationalism and struggle to secede. In the end, students in the diaspora became convinced that the democratic right and the right of nationalities to self-determine themselves was only achievable through armed struggle with the various fronts in Ethiopia. Many regarded the struggle as predominantly peasant in organisation because most of Ethiopian students abroad had a peasant background. Thus, the leadership encompassed peasants, students, working class and some defected soldiers.

According to Tekelewoine Assefa, the struggle was a socialist revolution in which the peasant became an appendix and the proletariat a major actor, while the enemy was a bourgeoisie. There was a deep belief amongst the intelligentsia not to undermine the peasants. For them,

peasants are not lifeless, or just a bunch of illiterate, feeble dormant group in society, but they often justified their needs, and perceived the essence of the project(s). In the various fronts, there was no discrimination of any kind on the basis of education, class or status. In fact, an ex-fighter expressed the importance of informal knowledge which many had acquired through long-term experience during the struggle. The success of the struggle also owes a lot to the harmonisation of roles of the masses who were accorded high regard by the elites. “Creativity, the gift of God, is not learnt from the classroom, but one is naturally born with it”, echoed one ex-fighter from Wollo. So farmers are clever enough to discover and articulate their needs and interest, the total deprivation of which may lead to revolt. Farmers are not interested in theory, but they want practical consequences, so that regimes that do not respond to their needs often risk rebellion by the masses.

Peasants were mobilised and organised in order to effect total change. Mobilisation was based on the fact that young officers, intellectuals, young students left their jobs and lowered themselves down to struggle with the peasants for better change in society. The elites indoctrinated the masses with policies for change, and their response was to contribute in the liberation struggle. The effective message of mobilisation was “fight to change the miserable life of the peasant, because there was lack of infrastructure for the peasants: hospitals, schools, water supplies, electricity and all kinds of services a modern people and society requires”,⁷²⁰.

⁷²⁰ Interview with Ato Yosef Tesfaye, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA - A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

This thesis endeavoured to study the impact of post-colonial liberation movements on the on-going democratic political changes in Sub-Saharan African countries. It was argued in the first chapter that studies on liberation movements are scarce and those that are available often concentrated on liberation movements that brought about the total decolonisation of Africa and Asia in the 1950s through until their culmination with the independence of Lusophone Africa and former Rhodesia in the 1970s and 1980 respectively. This study points out the differences between the liberation struggles for decolonisation and the post-colonial ones. The former were mainly directed towards the removal of white-minority-regimes in the continent, while the latter are mainly against indigenous, non-white-minority-authoritarian regimes. Unlike the liberation struggles for freedom from European colonialism, post-colonial liberation movements have not been widely studied and contemporary scholars have hardly given time to empirical research in order to establish facts about them. Thus, this thesis has been one of the few attempts to bring post-colonial liberation movements in Sub-Saharan Africa to the attention of scholars, both in the Third World and in the West.

Throughout the thesis, four major themes - liberation, democratisation, self-determination and transition from a liberation structure to a government structure have been discussed. The study reiterates that the three themes in particular: liberation, democracy and self-determination, functioned symbiotically throughout the struggles. This thesis also draws examples from post-colonial liberation restructuring to contradict the pessimism surrounding publications on the current democratisation process in the continent. For example, one such pessimistic view contends that “the prospects for continued democracy in Africa remain extremely uncertain”⁷²¹. This has often been the position of scholars who borrow Western-type democracy wholesale and try to apply it to the African situation; and in defence of the failures of their own assumptions, they in turn argue that “social conditions are not [more] conducive for democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region of the world” (including even the Middle East ones where the social conditions are better but with democracy still in the threshold)⁷²². On the contrary, this thesis takes the stand that

⁷²¹ See Christopher Clapham, “*Democratisation in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects*”, Paper Presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops (Leiden, 2nd-8th April, 1993); Thomas Callaghy, “Africa: Back to the Future?”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5, no. 4(1994), pp. 135-145; and Marina Ottaway, “African Democratisation and the Leninist Option”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1(1997), pp. 1-15.

⁷²² See in particular Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 127-141 (emphasis added).

democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to date began mainly because the continent was already *ripe* for change, and external factors only added to indigenous efforts. It was also pointed out that the struggle for democratic restructuring began a few years after the decolonisation of the continent but the only problem was that world attention neglected them for long.

The cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia selected for study in this thesis are only two among other post-colonial liberation movements in Sub-Saharan Africa. Those which are not studied here include the struggles in Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, or the Congo (formerly Zaire). These were struggles against what were widely perceived as authoritarian indigenous-non-white-minority regimes, different from those, say fought in Angola or Mozambique which were a creation of ideological allies who perceived the MPLA and FRELIMO as being communists/Marxists. Post-colonial liberation struggles had a tough time trying to get their message across to the international community, and were mainly hampered by the now defunct geopolitical divide. Despite the fact that the end of the Cold War has never really provided a favourable climate for their success, post-colonial liberation struggles can no longer last for years as recent cases in Rwanda and the Congo have shown. Moreover, the significance of an international donor community that began to exert pressure for 'better governance' cannot be denied. Such pressure forced other African countries whose peoples have not taken up arms to succumb to pluralistic elections. Better examples being Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Benin or Togo⁷²³, even when they are arguably still more on a slow transition, than what is going on in Eritrea, Ethiopia, or Uganda.

To be sure, since the early 1990s the continent has witnessed the proliferation of political democracy, and countries that have undergone change through liberation struggles such as those which are the subject of this thesis have become models of social transformation in the continent. Having spearheaded the struggle for liberation, the EPLF and NRM in Eritrea and Uganda, for example, are now engaged in the construction of a democracy that may suit the African situation. What they are searching for is a democracy defined in terms of 'participation', which I purport to discuss in some detail later in this concluding chapter. Eritrea, in particular, is retrieving a strong and rich democratic tradition that built its roots up from the village (*baito adi*), district (*baito woreda*), and province (*baito awraja*) levels⁷²⁴. On

⁷²³ See Samuel Decalo; Julius E. Nyangor'o; Peter Anyang' Nyong'o; and Catherine Anglin, *op. cit.*

⁷²⁴ Democratisation in Eritrea is structured in three different levels: *baitos adi* (village level); *baito woreda* (district level); and *baito awraja* (province level). Refer to Eritrean self-views on democracy in chapter four; and see also Olusegun Abassanjo, "Reclaiming Africa's Democratic Roots", *Choices: The Human Development Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 1(1993), pp. 18-21; and A. Abedeji, "An Alternative for Africa", *Journal of Politics*, vol. 5, no. 4(1994), pp. 119-132.

a similar, though slightly different development, after seventeen years of liberation struggle various rebel forces, representing different regional and ethnic groupings, finally entered Addis Ababa after Mengistu Haile Mariam had fled the country and formed a government of national unity that began preparations for democratic change for the first time in Ethiopia. The cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia have been selected particularly because they are clearly linked and still allow the reader to look at two different narratives on liberation. As was pointed out earlier, Eritrean self-views centred around self-determination and independence while Ethiopians referred more to democratic principles and devolution of power. These are two different narratives on liberation *qua* self-determination on the one hand and liberation *qua* democracy on the other, however, in one concrete historical setting.

As we saw in chapters one and two and in the empirical studies, the theories of liberation and democracy contain explanations that were also raised by Eritreans and Ethiopian as causes of their respective liberation struggles. For example, the ideals of justice, freedom, equality, or material deprivation are all located within the parameters of revolutionary thinking. It was also pointed out that recent scholarship on African liberation theorists identifies more Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral as founding fathers of African liberationist discourse. However, an examination of anti-colonial discourse also requires greater attention to mid-and late twentieth century liberation theorists and statesmen in Africa⁷²⁵. For this reason, Marxist discourses on African liberation have been discussed in chapter two, mainly because of the influence Marxism exerted on African political theorists like Cabral and Fanon and statesmen like Nkrumah, Toure, Nyerere, Kaunda, Neto or Machel. This thesis adds a new list of second African generation leaders, some of whom were not necessarily influenced by Marxist ideals. These are Eritrea's Issaias Afewerki, Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Rwanda's Paul Kagame, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Laurent Kabila. This group, if successful in their respective projects of continental restructuring, may provide a new brand of leadership for Africa with a clear vision for the future.

In chapter three, it is argued that in addition to the problems generated due to the authoritarian nature of the first generation of African leaders, the origins of the entire African state-system has also been found an issue. Unlike the way other state-systems developed (for example most European), the African state had significant time constraints, its boundaries were hurriedly constructed and have today become major causes of interstate and even more intrastate conflicts. Ethnic-interest conflicts erupted over the control of state power and all its apparatus.

⁷²⁵ See in particular Immanuel Wallerstein and Aquino De Braganca, *op. cit.*

Even though there was enormous variation in traditional African politics, ranging from societies governed by hierarchical structures through to those characterised by dispersed authority and consensus-building, colonialism distorted the process of state-making in the continent by modernising traditional sources of authority. For example, it encouraged families and clans of chiefs and rain-makers (royal traditional families) who normally controlled villages and ethnic groups to assume the control of the state. These to some extent reflected underlying socio-economic factors, such as resource endowment and population densities, although the precise political arrangements emerged from complex societal processes. According to Gluckman, a rich body of constitutional practices existed in pre-colonial Africa, defined in particular by reciprocity, accountability and a form of political legitimacy by which rulers could be challenged if they transcended established cultural and political norms⁷²⁶. In precise terms, not only did colonialism in some cases supplant traditional political institutions in Africa, it also distorted the process of autochthonous government. Instead pre-colonial rule was tamed to become a basis for imperial hegemony, in which existing political leaders collaborated with the colonial authorities in return for preservation of their power and status⁷²⁷.

In Africa, the use of the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' do not follow their original use in European politics. In most of Europe, state boundaries often coincided with national ones but during the formative years of the African state-system, the idea that states should coincide with nations was not applied. Thus, the search for a coherent theory of the state has remained difficult to establish in Sub-Saharan Africa⁷²⁸. In fact, the whole exercise of the scramble for Africa and its partition has rendered colonialism to be cited more often as one major reason for the ills of contemporary Africa. It was also pointed out that Africa emerged in the era of ideology, when it was not clear as to whether capitalism or communism was good or bad. World polarisation left liberation struggles hardly supported since the struggles were regarded an internal matter. However, today the general consensus is that democracy is the best way.

⁷²⁶ See M. Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965). See also F.A. Kunz, "Liberalisation in Africa - Some Preliminary Reflections", *African Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 350(April 1990), pp. 223-235.

⁷²⁷ See J. Lonsdale, "States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical Survey", *African Studies Review*, vol. 24, nos. 2-3(1981), p. 139; and R. Hodder-Williams, *An Introduction to the Politics of Tropical Africa* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1984).

⁷²⁸ See Adrian Leftwich, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-70.

In chapter four, the genesis of the Eritrean struggle for liberation was presented in detail. In order to articulate the dynamics of Eritrean nationalist discourse, a historical background to the conflict deserves attention. Major antecedents of Eritrean struggle have been traced back to early years of foreign occupation and colonial involvement in the region some four hundred years ago. Typification of early foreign occupation included those by the Ottoman Turks and the Egyptians in the 16th and 18th centuries respectively. However, European colonialism was the latest, where Italy and Great Britain became the sole architects of modern Eritrean nationalism because they introduced political concessions, spread education and print culture, and a war economy that led to the widespread expansion of the urban population. Specifically, such phenomena exposed and created the social and political conditions for the growth of the first generation of Eritrean nationalists. These groups of activists seized the global discourse on self-determination as an entitlement that they could put more claims on. The case was discussed in the UN General Assembly where res. 390(V) was passed, but unfortunately federating Eritrea and Ethiopia instead. What in particular mobilised the Eritrean activists to take up arms is the abrogation of the federal act and the total annexation of Eritrea ten years after in the face of a divided international community. Thus, the actual armed resistance began a bitter war against Ethiopia accusing it of imperial tendencies.

Unfortunately, the budding movement could not survive the legacy of early divisions that befell early Eritrean nationalists of the 1940s and 1950s. A series of inter-factional feuds ensued in the 1960s right after the struggle had picked up momentum and culminated only in the 1970s with the emergence of a stronger front, the EPLF. It was the EPLF who provided the passage into a clandestine and subterranean world of guerrilla warfare which relocated the centre of gravity of nationalist agitation away from the civic and associational dynamics of the public sphere to the increasingly tightly organised and disciplined structures of a liberation front. With the conviction that the development of national self-awareness had to be actively systematically pursued, the nationalist movements used varied strategies of mobilisation to fashion local solidarities into a society-wide, counter-imperial project. Thus, the front educated ranks and file members into a more ambitious sense of their own political capacities. It was in this way that the EPLF may have transcended the conventional distinction between the intelligentsia and ordinary people. Seeing from what the Eritreans themselves have expressed in chapter four, the EPLF nurtured collectivist and co-operative ideals of solidarity and promoted a non-competitive ethos of participation that opposed an individualistic cult of achievement. It can therefore be argued that the EPLF understood quite correctly that the struggle for liberation required the creative involvement and engagement of rural Eritrea, and thus, had to take peasant issues seriously to enable the growth of a broad alliance with the masses.

Therefore, the political and cultural project found practical embodiment primarily within the EPLF and, even today in Eritrea, an extraordinary degree of collective self-reliance and resilience is evident. To be sure, it is the imperatives of order and discipline that provided the ground upon which the success of a liberation struggle became realised. Thus, as the beginning of the war in the 1960s marked the closure of political activity in Eritrea, its end in 1991 has once again retrieved the field of political contestation back to the arena of a budding public sphere. The sort of renascent public sphere understood not in terms of a post-structuralist ideal-type of a source of rational deliberation, but as a zone of contestation between the emerging public groupings⁷²⁹. This is likely to intensify and may form one of the central axes along which post-liberation politics in Eritrea will be conducted. Meanwhile, it is difficult to predict its final outcomes, but there are indications that its evolving shapes will be the result of the interaction between the formal process of institutionalisation, informed as it is, by the PFDJ's own political culture and the dynamics of autonomous social groups and movements within the wider public arena⁷³⁰.

Similarly, four major areas have been thoroughly dealt with in chapter five about the liberation struggle for democracy in Ethiopia. Part one of the chapter traced the genesis of the struggle back to centuries of monarchical rule and seventeen years of military dictatorship. The modern Ethiopian state was founded on a feudal monarchical system stretching some three thousand years back. In its political evolution Ethiopia has experienced both transformation and disintegration. It was Emperor Menelik II who succeeded in consolidating modern Ethiopia into a unified Empire State in the late nineteenth century. Haile Selassie I, who ruled Ethiopia from 1930-1974, continued the modernisation of the Empire's institutions begun by Menelik II. For example, he produced a written constitution, creating a Parliament and Senate, even though his powers had remained absolute. It was Haile Selassie who transformed a 'traditional autocracy' into a 'military autocracy', by building a strong standing army. So that the military cabal that later deposed him was, in itself, a product of the professionalised army of Haile Selassie which was supposedly trained to protect the ruling monarchy but for reasons explained in the foregoing chapters turned against it.

Haile Selassie I was involved in the international negotiations over Eritrea which he later annexed in 1962 after abrogating the federal arrangements set up by a UN resolution in 1952.

⁷²⁹ See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); and Geof Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).

⁷³⁰ See EPLF, *A National Charter for Eritrea*, *op. cit.*

Thus, he sparked the rise of the Eritrean struggle for liberation which turned out to become the first major challenge to the restored Emperor. Furthermore, internal upheavals ensued triggered mainly by the foiled coup d'état in 1960. Later on the disastrous famine which killed an estimated 200,000 people in Wollo and Tigray provinces worsened things for an already ailing Emperor Haile Selassie. In February 1974, widespread protests culminated in several months of strikes, demonstrations against the government and the military junta, the *Dergue*, assumed power on the 12th December 1974. Unfortunately, detentions and arbitrary arrests followed by summary executions characterised the new regime. The military cabal declared Ethiopia a socialist state and measures to achieve a socialist order were enacted drastically. Despite its failures, the 1974 revolution brought a radical change by altering the Ethiopian social fabric that had endured from 1855 to 1974. For the first time, the means of access to high office changed. But the *Dergue* did not do any better to achieve a phenomenal change that would have made it the first architect of social change in modern Ethiopia's political history. On the contrary, the military rulers turned against their own people by terrorising them, suppressing their political views, and continued the discrimination against the diverse ethnic nationalities and regions of the country. In a way, a revolution that began with high hopes of transforming the country ended up as an infamously military dictatorship. Thus, university students, intellectuals and the working class, who were the revolution's first instigators in 1974, were thereafter forced to ally with the masses and wage unprecedented guerrilla insurgencies throughout the country in order to salvage the increasingly deteriorating state and society. This is how the ethnic-based liberation fronts discussed in chapter five emerged in the late 1970s until a group of them managed to come together in 1991 to form a rebel-alliance, the EPRDF, which has now thrown national issues out to public discussion for the first time.

Therefore, the two chapters on Eritrea and Ethiopia provide room for an assessment of competing explanations of liberation and democracy in the light of empirical findings. The different narratives by Eritreans and Ethiopians about liberation and democracy, and their feelings about post-liberation restructuring are summarily compared. The questions both countries asked themselves in 1991 are: After overcoming all the difficulties of decades of struggle what type of life do we now deserve?; What is the best possible political system for us?; What type of government should we build?; What do liberation and democracy mean to the Eritrean and Ethiopian of all walks of life?; And this thesis adds another question: what is the possibility of the applicability of the experiences and concepts drawn from Eritrea and Ethiopia to the wider African continental political reordering? In other words, Eritreans and Ethiopians have tried to answer the philosopher's question of "what does it mean to lead a good life?"

6.1. Analysis and Comparison of the Previous Two Chapters

The Eritrean and Ethiopian cases provide two different narratives on liberation within, however, one concrete historical setting. While the Eritrean self-views were preoccupied with the desire for self-determination or independence, Ethiopians referred more to devolution of power arrived at *via* a democratic constitution. While the Eritreans styled themselves more as “nationalists”, the TPLF and other ethnic-based liberation fronts in Ethiopia fought for a loosely structured state that can accommodate the diverse nature of their society. Like in other African countries, Ethiopia favours devolution of power as a means of addressing the delicate multiplicity of the state.

Unlike Eritreans who were inspired by a vision of a state of their own, Ethiopians were united by the common perception of material deprivation and social discrimination, sustained and compounded by political oppression. For example, Tigray (TPLF), Somalis (ALF & WSLF), Oromos (OLF & OPDO), Amharas from Gonder and Gojjam (ANDM, EPRP, EPDM & MEISON). This perception nurtured the proliferation of ethnic-based liberation fronts in an attempt to salvage the bad conditions of life perpetrated by a history of monarchical rule and military dictatorship. In fact, material deprivation, evident in an uneven development and social structures, has become a necessary explanation for the emergence of liberation movements in the post-colonial African political order. For example, it was the excesses of corruption and marginalisation in Uganda under Obote (twice) and Idi Amin, in former Zaire under Mobutu, in Ethiopia under both Haile Selassie and Mengistu, or in Sudan under the ruling northern families, that provided a fertile ground for the growth of liberation struggles in those countries.

Moreover, an enforced process of national integration, promoted by the state which embodies the culture of the group that dominates it, more often leads to social and cultural discrimination. For example, Amharas (in particular from North Shoa) in Ethiopia, again the ruling northern families (the UMMA and the DUP) in the Sudan, the Hutu in Rwanda and/or the Baganda in Uganda. This leads to political emasculation of groups in the state. Political oppression and suppression in most of Africa emerges out of such situations and is often meant to stifle the opposition and their activities. Thus, the Eritrean struggle for liberation incorporated the nine different Eritrean ethnic groups, the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), and/or the different social classes to avoid similar instances in a post-liberation order. Thus, the common perception of victimisation in and by a state controlled by others (Ethiopians, particularly the Amharas), transcended and submerged the mutual differences and contradictions of pre-liberation Eritrea. The liberation struggle meant the ending of the

Amhara domination and the realisation of a state of one's own, a home in which one would not be treated as a guest⁷³¹.

Unlike Ethiopians who viewed liberation more as a means for democratising state structures, Eritreans viewed liberation as a way of life, a road to self-determination and independence. A theatre through which they could design structures suited for running their own society. Liberation for the Eritrean becomes a civic virtue through a common war experience. The actual struggle is not viewed as a way toward liberation, but as 'liberation or emancipation' itself, even at the individual level. In Eritrea, the individual is defined in the context of the community so that individual rights also become defined in terms of duty and responsibility for the community as a whole. Liberation is how individuals relate to each other, and in the case of Eritrea, is an agent of cohesion rather than division. Liberation becomes a civic virtue - civic virtue as sacrifice, resilience, self-reliance, hard work, tolerance, perseverance and/or happiness. Civic virtue and diversity - where harmony is forged between ethnic, linguistic, religious or social classes in a polity. Thus liberation is defined as a uniting and harmonising element.

In Eritrea, the struggle itself was a liberating element. It led to the formation of a common spirit (sameness) and the construction of a new identity through a unified cause. For Eritreans, a constitutional order alone which is not embedded in the life of a people is not enough. Thus, the notion of liberty which nurtures the Eritrean struggle entails "positive" aspects. At stake here is not just the freedom *from* oppression, interference, poverty etc., but also a positive vision of communal life.

A liberated people are a favourable climate for the growth of democracy. Thus, democracy when preceded by a common life of struggle permeates society. Democracy falls under liberation or, said differently, liberation overrides democracy. Democracy evolves during a liberation struggle, and as a result, it becomes existential. Virtuous democracy is built on the *baito* and *gim gema*. The Eritrean experience supersedes those of other African countries that have not made progress after multi-party elections. The democracy born out of a long struggle is existential because it is not influenced by a desire to respond to external international trends. Democracy in Eritrea is not viewed as a dogma or a concept upheld only by elites and imposed from up-down! Thus, liberation is viewed as post-ideology and a self-disciplining factor, but democracy as post-pedagogy, experienced and lived by the people through a protracted common struggle, democracy where individual rights are never

⁷³¹ See Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*

particularly given precedent. This type of democracy transcends that of political party organisation.

On the other hand, liberation in the Ethiopian experience is not viewed as a way of life, but rather as a means for solving a concrete political problem. As was pointed out earlier, the question of nationalities, fuelled more by lack of “better governance” for over three thousand years of monarchical rule and military dictatorship, was one major war aim in Ethiopia. It was pointed out in chapter five that democracy was not tested during both the imperial and military regimes in Ethiopia. This is however no explanation as to why Ethiopia has no democratic tradition. Imperial and military autocracies concealed traditional values of democracy to enhance their personal and family rule. This was further perpetrated by scholars who often praised the multiplicity of modern Ethiopia even when it is clear the country was kept unified by the iron hands of monarchical and military rule⁷³². That order has been deconstructed by severe armed insurgencies, mainly led by revolutionary intellectuals and backed by the working class and peasants in the countryside. The compass of political activity has been redirected to include the views of the wider public in Ethiopia for the first time. The various ethnic regionally-based liberation fronts all pushed for the creation of a political order that respects and upholds the rights of all Ethiopians. Again, ‘rights’ in Ethiopia are defined more in the context of ethnicity rather than the individual. However, since Ethiopia is extremely ethnically heterogeneous, the legalistic approach is the answer to the question of nationalities *via* self-determination. Thus, the struggle in Ethiopia had a clear target, rescuing the threatened unity of a disintegrating state.

Today, Ethiopia is a new country in the making. After thirty years of resistance war within, a new model of state government is under implementation. Ethiopia has changed from a People’s Democratic Republic (PDRE) framed on Marxist/Socialist models to a Federal Democratic Republic (FDRE), with ten ethnically defined regions, with a democratic constitution compatible with Western democratic standards. Although the changes are seen from a continental context as a bold attempt at African political restructuring in the 1990s, others view them sceptically fearing the repercussions the EPRDF constitution will have on the traditional ‘Ethiopian entity’ when ethnic division is legally sanctioned. While other African states, including Ethiopia’s former province of Eritrea, have been neutralising ethnicity in politics, and have banned political parties formed along ethnic, religious or regional lines. Ethiopia has now encouraged devolution of power along the opposite direction. Unlike Eritrea whose constitution wishes to bar and legalise the means to forbid and if necessary

⁷³² See Donald Levine, *op. cit.*

suppress ethnic, religious or regional feelings, Ethiopia chose the opposite path. In a way, Ethiopia is fulfilling one of its major conceptions of democracy as an exercise in self-determination. And indeed, no government could win political support from the Ethiopian public without solving the nationality question raised earlier in chapter five. It is along this line of reality that the EPRDF was compelled to offer “self-determination up to and including secession” to satisfy the demand of Ethiopian nationalities. This historically is in fulfilment of the agenda of the student movement in the 1960s which was later on adopted by every liberation front in the country.

Although the EPRDF believes the establishment of the ten new ethnically-defined regions in Ethiopia are a solution, and defining all political aspects on an ethnic basis, to quell ethnic problems and help in the reconstruction of a peaceful Ethiopian society, critics maintain such attempts will endanger the unity of the country instead. They argue that “to take the destructive sting out of ethnicity in Ethiopian politics and society, it would appear vital to follow a line which can facilitate a more equitable distribution of material and social goods among the population. A crucial point here will be a fair new land policy, giving the control of land back to the peasants themselves”⁷³³. It is further argued that:

To avoid state disintegration of the Ethiopian entity along ethnic lines, it is even more important that ethnic identity should not become the only valid rallying point in national politics. One must rather encourage a political environment which can encompass both an Ethiopian and an ethnic identity operating parallel to each other, together with various other identities. Only by such a strategy may a multi-cultural society like Ethiopia nourish a system which allows different ethnic groups to live in peaceful coexistence⁷³⁴.

Although the ideals of freedom, equality or justice also featured in the various documents and declarations of the many liberation fronts in Ethiopia, democracy was viewed as a least common denominator for uniting the present state together. Many fears particularly increased after the independence of Eritrea that other regions may also want to partition. Therefore, a democratic constitution that allows the right of self-determination and up to secession of the different ethnic groups in Ethiopia was widely perceived as a necessary and final answer⁷³⁵. Democracy is viewed by the many fronts as the last instrument for the conservation and preservation of a multi-ethnic society already on the brink of collapse and disintegration. In

⁷³³ See *Human Rights Report 1995*, Oslo, p. 2.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁵ See *The Constitution of the FDRE*, *op. cit.*

this case democracy becomes a requirement of political correctness, a mechanism for resolving conflicts and/or grievances of the different ethnic groups in the country. Thus, the EPRDF believes a democratic constitution that recognises the right to self-determination of nationalities is a better formula for resolving the chronic equation. However, in this way it is also believed, coexistence, trust, and mutual respect of difference may become strengthened in the long run. In other words, the major political problem in Ethiopia is identifiable as concrete and democratic laws are the concrete answer. In this case democracy can be legalistic, negative, and/or defensive because it is expressed in laws, as a dogma rather than as a way of life, and a written document or constitution.

However different, both conceptions of liberation and democracy in Eritrea and Ethiopia are complementary in nature. First of all, liberation is a common factor where democracy and self-determination in both cases are realisable through it. The referendum for independence in Eritrea was an expression of self-determination in practice. Similarly, the various local, regional and national elections held in Ethiopia are democracy expressed in practice. The two liberation struggles targeted a common enemy, and shared strategies and political plans together. Thus, the various narratives discussed in chapters four and five typify how the three major themes - liberation, democracy and self-determination or independence functioned to reinforce each other symbiotically during and after the struggle.

In all, it must also be noted that to establish an electoral system in a politically, socially, and economically underdeveloped African country like Ethiopia or Eritrea remains a tremendous task. The political environment in Ethiopia, for example, is filled with distrust and allegations from various political actors. This in turn produced a polarised setting which has led to election boycotts on various occasions. Moreover, political restructuring in both Eritrea and Ethiopia must take into consideration the historical relationship between the ordinary citizens of those countries and the rule of the previous regimes of Emperor Haile Selassie I and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. It must be remembered that both leaders employed state coercion to control and dominate their citizens, thus, prohibiting their divergent political views. The legacy of the past is responsible for creating the prevailing political apathy among the Ethiopian public. Unlike Eritreans who finally overcame their divisions and followed one solid liberation front during their struggle, the Ethiopians were organised ethnically and/or regionally, and as a result, did not develop a united nationalist ethos. Thus, the democratisation process in Ethiopia, unlike in Eritrea, is most likely to face some difficulties because the majority of Ethiopians would not dare to openly challenge the government parties and structures fearing similar repercussions experienced during the previous regimes. This kind of behaviour again produces disinterest and apathy towards a political process as one way of showing political discontent.

6.2. On the Possibility of an African Discourse on Liberation and Democracy

The unrelenting struggles for liberation by the African peoples in the post-colonial era have created great optimism in the current democratisation throughout the continent. This optimism has been backed more by the recent events in the Great Lakes region and the final recognition of the cause of the liberation struggle in the Sudan under IGAD's Declaration of Principles (DOP) agenda by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), in particular, by the traditional ruling families of the Mahdi's UMMA party and the Mirghani's DUP for the first time. Other events elsewhere in the continent also deserve to be cited including the recent elections in Liberia that have finally legitimised the presidency of Charles Taylor after almost a decade of conflict. All these point to a significant turn in Africa's political direction and the end of the century may find the continent on a better footing than ever before. Africa may enter the new millennium totally transformed both politically and socially. Political stability may hold in post-colonial liberation countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and/or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even the Republic of South Africa whose transition into a non-racial democracy attracted greater pessimism early this decade has remained stable. These examples may break the pessimistic mould about the current political transformation in the African continent.

Moreover, in Eritrea and Ethiopia, the seeds of a liberation struggle have begun bearing fruits. Apart from the social improvements governments there are exerting, democratic political restructuring is taking root. While in Eritrea liberation was the foundation of a new life, in Ethiopia it was the solid ground upon which democracy and the self-determination of nationalities was founded. In many cases of post-colonial liberation struggles, democracy is viewed more in terms of 'participation'. The demerits of multi-partyism are more hazardous in Africa than other parts of the world because political parties have tended to follow ethnic, religious, or regional lines. In these cases multi-partyism has also reduced democracy to a mere exercise of termly elections without any reciprocation to the voters in terms of services from the "democratically-elected" government. Instead post-election experiences have shown that the opposition and their followers, be they ethnic, religious or regional, have more often been excluded from the services of an elected government. In other words those perceived as supporters of the opposition are subjected to the consequences of a total loser in a game, say of sport. In this way, many would lose their jobs, business, or properties.

The major consequences of the whole process is that not only does it fuel hatred and protracted enmity between the ruling party and the opposition, but also between their followers. Thus, post-liberation restructuring in Eritrea, Ethiopia or Uganda takes such

experiences into account when talking about change in their respective societies. Instead of emphasising party politics, they now purport to construct political systems that must not polarise their populace but keep them in harmony. Most of Africa is ethnically, religiously, and regionally heterogeneous, and such fragmentation has rendered multi-partyism counter-productive since political parties have tend to form along those lines. Political party organisation has led to some bitter debates and polarisation in parliament such as those that terminated in the Commons or Congress in Britain or the United States. One major difference is that in the Western World, defeat in elections and thereafter in debates in the Commons or Congress are often acceptable to both individuals and party members, and it has not often meant defeat in every aspect of one's life.

In Africa, real politics suggests defeat in elections or failing to push a bill through in parliament means the failure not only of the individual persons or parties, but of the whole household, village, ethnic group, and religion or region. In other words, multi-party politics has generated some of the most severe conflicts in African societies such as the constant ethnic clashes in Kenya's Rift Valley and Coast Provinces and the political quagmires in South Africa's Kwazulu Natal. Such examples have often been cited to back the Eritrean and Ugandan argument that the embracing of an externally imposed political system is counter-productive, and both countries are not at ease to see their peoples returning back to severe conflicts after years of struggle. Thus, Issaias Afewerki and Yoweri Museveni have more often emphasised the view that it is possible to practise democratic governance without necessarily adapting systems that are incompatible with the African way of life. In other words, multi-partyism is not viewed as the only way of proving a system is democratic or not. Democracy in both Eritrea and Uganda is therefore defined in terms of 'participation', which is discussed shortly below.

It must be noted that post-colonial liberation movements in Africa do not investigate whether rules of democracy are familiar and cherished, but rather whether the process of it is conducive to inspire confidence. Moreover, leaders of post-colonial liberation struggles are informed that certain fundamental principles exist which are universal in regard to democratic models of governance. For example, open and equal opportunity to participate in politics for all, freedom of speech and organisation/assembly, advocating a pluralistic society are all principles that are requested for a system to be labelled democratic. Democracy depends on a minimum of confidence in the goodwill of others, and in everybody being able to represent her or his ideas in a peaceful dialogue with an equal chance of being heard. Thus, whether a state is independent in its local historical or cultural contexts, these standards must be respected for it to qualify as a democratic society.

In traditional African societies of Eritrea and Ethiopia, there is a considerable tradition of democracy. Traditionally, people resolved local problems and affairs without resorting to violence because it is understood in every African traditional society that discussion rather than violence leads to better solutions. For example, the experience of the Amhara *rist* system, the *gada* of the Oromo, or the *ottuba* of the Sidamo, and corresponding procedures in other Ethiopian societies, have all one thing in common: established set of rules by which issues are discussed and solved by collective decisions. Like in other traditional African societies, the rules are such that everybody feels represented and everybody is made co-responsible for the well-being of all.

Similarly, conflicts in traditional African societies are negotiated by a group of elders who usually follow a general African tradition of giving every involved party a chance to voice their views and interests, and discussing as long as necessary to reach a solution with which all parts involved become satisfied. This way of resolving conflict was distorted by the long period of colonial domination. To be sure, African traditional legal practice is committed not so much to localising and apportioning guilt and to administering punishment but to re-integrating a deviant into the collective life of society. So that an external imposture of political practice, say as attempted by the *Dergue* on Marxist/Socialist models, do not simply work. However, the difference in cultural practise does not imply African countries must develop their own form of democratic rule based on their own traditions and principles. Moreover, we have pointed out earlier the existence of certain fundamental principles which are universal in regard to democratic governance.

It must also be noted that African democratic traditions are often confined to the community, thus, may lack protection for minorities/individuals and outsiders. Today, no democracy excludes respect for human rights which apply to everyone irrespective of age, gender, race, status, religion, political or regional affiliation, and/or other dividing criteria. These democratic values are at best rudimentary. Thus, what post-colonial liberation movements have worked for throughout the struggle is to transform traditional democracy from local communities to the level of the state. In which case democracy becomes a uniting and harmonising factor at a national level be it on political, social and economic grounds. Democracy becomes a measure by which equitable distribution of resources is tested, and in the case of Ethiopia in a federal structure. Post-colonial liberation restructuring seeks to incorporate into discourse external procedures in the democratisation process where the values and virtues of democracy are drawn from the experience of autochthonous life of collective decision making. In traditional African societies, the principle that rights derive from responsibility and participation in decision making is closely linked to a collective

responsibility for the well-being of all. So that local economic issues and interests often become subjected to a collective decision making process.

It is on this basis that post-liberation restructuring in the 1990s drew significant international attention in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda or recently the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is mainly because the world would like to see whether the transition from liberation structures to governmental ones will be successful. Moreover, change had occurred in these countries at a time when what Huntington terms the “democratic wave” has swept the whole world, leading for the first time to “free and fair” elections in many countries of the world⁷³⁶. Since the dawn of this decade, the discourse on democracy and “good governance” has seized hold of the political imagination not only of African elites and citizen activists, but also of the ordinary peoples.

The main argument post-liberation restructuring highlight is the importance of participation rather than multi-partyism. Participation of every people of all walks of life in the affairs of the state. Participation, when explained in the Eritrean or Ugandan model does not entail the competition of ethnic, religious, or regional groupings. These groups must function in harmony rather than in opposition because opposition in traditional African culture leads to political elimination. In Eritrea, Ethiopia, or Uganda, ethnicity and religion have in the past led to severe conflicts. For example, it was pointed out in chapter four that the 1940s and 1950s in Eritrea were dominated by the activities of divided nationalist elites. Such divisions later recurred in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s before the EPLF emerged to heal the wounds of the past divisions. Even in Ethiopia where political party organisation was unheard of until the demise of the monarchy, the *Dergue* was controlled by the Amharas mainly from North Shoa on religious credentials and dynastic claims. In Uganda too, severe ethnic divisions have often characterised party formations such as DP being predominantly Baganda and UPC in the North mainly the Acholis and Langi. Divisions between the Anglican and Catholic Churches have also in the past led to the assassination of Church leaders in Uganda. These examples pose a threat to the smooth political restructuring along the lines of multi-partyism in every African country.

It was pointed out earlier that one major conceptions of democracy is that it is an exercise in self-determination. That means there should be a democratic process that informs and equips people to make the right choices. In the cases of Eritrea and Ethiopia, the media, in all its forms-including print, radio, television-should serve this purpose. According to Bereket

⁷³⁶ See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave, op. cit.*

Habte Selassie, this is when a constitutional arrangement in relations to the media as a guiding tool becomes important⁷³⁷. It is often the case that for the democratic responsibility of the media to be robust and independent, freedom of the press is absolutely important. Yemane Ghebreab, a high-ranking official in the PFDJ, argued quite convincingly in an attempt to explain the controversy surrounding African countries on whether 'one-party', 'multi-party' or 'no-party' democracy is applicable or not. For him, most African leaders and their governments should make sure that people's participation does not end only in the casting of the termly ballot but that people must also participate in receiving equal services from the elected regime⁷³⁸. It is not the four or five years of termly elections that are important, but such elections must be followed with the necessary services of health, education, clean water, better roads, food, and everything that any government can provide its citizens irrespective of the political parties, ethnic, religious or regional groupings they belong. Moreover participation entails the freedom of the people to choose, say or do everything free citizens wish to do without inflicting discomfort to others in a polity. Therefore, this is an indication that there is no refusal of party politics in Eritrea and Ethiopia provided that political groupings are not created along ethnic, religious or regional lines.

In most of Africa where post-colonial liberation struggles have taken place, there is a widespread realisation that having opposition alone is not enough, especially opposition politics that does not generate progress and benefits but would instead derange society. In Eritrea and Uganda, for example, what makes a government democratic is the dominance of a democratic behaviour in the life of the individual, family, institutions like schools, Churches, factories or elsewhere in a polity. It is the duty of every member of society to see to it that democratic principles are upheld. It is often the case that the citizens of a democracy must be informed about societal affairs and functions in particular those which affect life in a polity. The citizens of a democracy must be avid and must continuously seek after the facts about what matters in society. The primary duties of a democracy are said to be at work when citizens express themselves freely and make their views known, and to speak up when they need to be heard. The citizens of a democracy must participate responsibly in societal affairs and cease from thinking that societal affairs belong to political leaders alone. The Eritrean and Ethiopian experience has proved that democratic behaviour is learned behaviour and citizens must be willing to learn and each generation will follow the same route⁷³⁹. According to the

⁷³⁷ Interview, *op. cit.*, and see also *International Symposium on the Making of the Eritrean Constitution: A Summary Report, op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

⁷³⁸ Interview, *op. cit.*

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

EPRDF's Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse, a citizen of a democracy must act on the basis of considered judgement and utilise all channels of legal and rightful participation in affairs that concern him/her⁷⁴⁰.

Since independence one-party systems or military dictatorships dominated the political life of the African continent. This culture of one-partyism and militarism has just began disappearing in a number of countries where liberation movements occurred. There are many reasons why liberation movements will become a major means of rooting out dictatorial governments in the continent. For one, in Eritrea the EPLF brought with them values and virtues of representative government, a fresh ground for public contestation, tolerance of difference of views and diversity of belief. In Ethiopia, a wide variety of social values and forces have emerged for the first time since the modern empire state was born some three thousand years back. A robust and independent media can be witnessed today in Ethiopia. Post-liberation politics and social restructuring has shown how quickly the benefits of democracy could be reaped. Democracy is the opposite of absolutism which says there is one way, and only one way, of meeting human need and that it is fixed and final. In Ethiopia, there is a growing belief that differences could best be resolved democratically and new designs acceptable to all can be created. In other words, a healthy competition of ideas and a firm foundation of belief is emerging when ideas stand the test and security of people who ask challenging questions, in particular, *gim gema* and *baito* are a challenging ground of discussion in traditional Ethiopia.

From practical historical experiences, democracy is dynamic and developmental. Democracy is in a sense always a "process of becoming" as each generation broadens its concepts and deepens motivations. Democracy stresses the rule of diversity rather than the rule of uniformity, democracy is creative and accepts the fact that it is the business of all of us to work on the "unfinished business" of the democratic community. Democracy calls for participation on the part of the many. It cherishes freedom of speech and expression. It believes deeply in free inquiry and the utilisation of the scientific method. It is based upon responsible citizenship. In a democracy, there are no perfect functioning ideas instead all ideas function partially⁷⁴¹. Thus, a democratic agreement does not necessarily imply uniformity but arises out of the thrilling experience of prolonged discussions (*gim gema* and *baito*) and conferences. Participation in public debates and affairs is a self-fulfilling experience. A democratic group is equally a responsible one because it is accountable to the public.

⁷⁴⁰ Interview, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴¹ See Abraham Adhanom, "Primary Duties of the Citizen in a Democracy", *Eritrea Profile*, vol. 3, no. 19(20th July 1996), p. 5.

Commensurate ability to share in public activities. The best productive methods are a guiding principle since a democratic society is always in a state of flux and change. Thus it modifies itself according to the changes that take place. A democratic society makes constructive use of conflict, opposition, or criticism. It does not shrink from such behaviour but considers each example or situation as a further means of strengthening its own fabric. Post-liberation restructuring in Sub-Saharan Africa requires a lot of commitment one that has been shown in Eritrea, Ethiopia or Uganda. In these countries, each government gathers the facts, studies, analyses, makes its decision as a result of discussion, and then acts on the basis of such findings. Post-colonial liberation movements have germinated a thoughtful, vigorous, active group basically dedicated to the improvement of society.

6.3. “*Quo Vadis?*”: Reflections on the Future of Africa in the Changing World

To be sure, life in the world is not static. When Africa first got her political independence in the second half of this century, it must be recalled that Marxism-Leninism was presented as a panacea to developing countries' problems during the post-independence era. However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of the governments of what used to be the Eastern block, democracy and the market economy are now presented as the solution for eradicating poverty and political problems in developing countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia or Uganda. Further, with the dismal performance, and in many instances total failure, of one-party systems in Africa, multi-partyism is also presented as an integral component of the new solution. Thus, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), namely, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the United States Aid for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), and many other members of the development community, have all used their influences to speed up democratic change in donor recipient countries.

Post-liberation countries have, however, expressed caution in considering the new phenomena. Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, and add now former Zaire, are more cautious than other African countries like Kenya, Zambia, Malawi or Cameroon, who are viewed as having succumbed to political pluralism due to external pressures only. I argue that countries that have experienced the liberation struggle in the post-colonial era provide Africa with an optimistic future because they tend to give new content and meaning to democracy within the countries' own unique political history and conditions. This has been reinforced more in Eritrea through independent and innovative thinking, and self-reliance nurtured during the many years of the struggle. Expressing their commitment to the building of a democratic political system, the EPLF wrote:

We Eritreans, for the first time in our history, are starting to build our own state. This is a great opportunity which we have gained after a long struggle. It is natural that we now desire to build the best political system and government we can, as many people would. History has recorded that the human race has desired to build the ideal political system, and that its best philosophers have studied and written about such political systems. Although it is impossible to achieve the ideal political system, it is vital to strive to establish the best political system⁷⁴².

In Eritrea, the strong desire to build a stable political system is grounded on their respect of law and order, lived through a long struggle. In Ethiopia, a strong desire for democracy as an exercise in self-determination is derived from the long yearning to solve the burning issue of nationalities. As Africa is undergoing political liberalisation, the Eritrean and Ethiopian efforts of trying to craft political systems that may safeguard unity and peace, human rights and freedom of expression and association should serve as major exemplary features.

The other most striking aspect of the current discourse on Africa's future is the deep growing awareness on the part of the people that their involvement in the making of their own governments through the ballot box is salient. Since Africa got her independence almost four decades ago, the experience of its peoples has been that of disappointment, frustration and disillusion. The only hope now is that the future must not remain equally difficult⁷⁴³. The new thinking provided by the new generation of African leaders who emerged after years of struggle is that the continent must re-evaluate its place in the global political arena. For example, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni scathingly referred to the OAU recently as a "trade union of criminals"⁷⁴⁴. This is a renegade statement that exemplifies the challenge new leaders pose to the rest of the continent. The re-evaluation project is in particular important for (1) the thirty years of independence have been utterly lost decades⁷⁴⁵, and (2) the international system has undergone a drastic metamorphoses, where the end of the Cold War has meant the triumph of Western democracy and economic liberalism⁷⁴⁶. Similarly, scholars of African politics (both Africans and Africanists), have been forced to shift their approaches from the old paradigms to more pragmatic ones. The old levels of analysis such as developmentalism or modernisation, Marxism-Leninism, non-alignment or even integration as shown in the failures

⁷⁴² See *A National Charter for Eritrea*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁴³ See Ralph I. Onwuka and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Africa in the World*, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

⁷⁴⁴ See "Will Kabilla Live up to Mandela's Expectations?", *Southern Africa Report*, vol. 15, no. 23 (June 1997), pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴⁵ See Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.), *30 Years of Independence*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴⁶ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and Last Man*, *op. cit.*

of the OAU, or the now revitalised East African Community in the 1970s, have all proved inappropriate. New and innovative suggestions include: self-reliance and self-sufficiency, devaluation and privatisation, devolution of power, development and encouragement of civil associations.

The development of an African civil society is in particular crucial to the development and strengthening of participatory democracy. This argument remains, however, mooted because it is not agreed whether democracy provides a better growth civil society or vice versa. That debate aside, civil society is people's capacity for self-development. It enables people to participate fully in the political life of their countries. External intervention on behalf of democratic principles can be at best ineffective and at worse dangerous unless they are anchored in and supported by the indigenous population. But civil society cannot be created or shaped by a constitution alone. What the constitution can do is to provide the necessary conditions for the emergence and development of civil associations. This has been deep rooted in the history of the Eritrean struggle for independence and the Ethiopian struggle for democratic restructuring. Direct and participatory democracy has been nurtured through the establishment of people's assemblies up from the village, district and provincial levels. It is evident that this direct popular participation *via* the *baito* and *gim gema*, more than anything else, accounted for the success of the liberation struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia. It is on this basis of participatory experience that the PFDJ envisions a development process based on true democracy and social justice for Eritrea⁷⁴⁷.

Therefore, the 1990s and beyond will be different and analysis of African politics and international relations seem to be predictably becoming more exciting than in the immediate post-independence years. For example, most countries have shifted from parastatals to privatisation, from stagnation to expansion, from one-party to multi-party democracies, from militarism to more civilised government. The new post-liberation countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo will lead the way for pragmatism because their leaders have proved they can assimilate new global dynamics and respond in imaginative ways to contemporary problems and likely projections. There is now a more positive perception that the content of seeming continuities, such as bipolarity and EurAfrica, have changed to multi-polarity and to new South-South connections or dialogue, notably with the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs). If African politics and international relations becomes transformed, the changes will be counted as one major contribution from the revolutionary thinking of post-colonial liberation leaders.

⁷⁴⁷ See EPLF, *A National Charter for Eritrea*, *op. cit.*

6.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is true that although upheavals are not a new phenomenon to Africa, those in Eritrea and Ethiopia were qualitatively different from those elsewhere in the continent. What took place in Eritrea and Ethiopia were revolutionary upheavals-deliberate, disciplined and organised⁷⁴⁸. Most of our empirical findings confirm the peculiarity of the revolutions, which have in turn formed a new brand of discourses on liberation and democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The emergent discourses are entirely those of a post-colonial nature because they are completely different from the previous African liberation struggles that were mainly directed against colonialism and white settlerism. Since these latter liberation struggles were perceived as being waged mainly against the external enemy, they enjoyed the total support of the African people and continental governments as a whole. For example, they were supported and funded by, among others, the OAU Liberation Committee (OAU-LC). The UN's Decolonisation Committee (UN-DC) also gave them the green light to fight for their independence, sanctioned mainly by Woodrow Wilson's conception of self-determination in after the First World War..

On the other hand, the situation has not been the same with the post-colonial liberation movements. The newly independent countries of Africa took hold of the reinterpretation of the concept of self-determination to mean instability because it threatened the unity of the state and society. Thus, far from being supported by Africa, the revolutions in Eritrea and Ethiopia were vilified and vigorously opposed and shunned virtually by the whole continent. For example, the Eritreans were mostly condemned as "separatists" and not infrequently named the "enemies of Africa". Their only "crime" was that they were fighting against internal oppressive regimes, if not against the corruption of neo-colonialism. The EPLF, EPRDF, and NRA (though not included as a case study here) in Uganda have won their wars against all odds - against the powerful and well-established indigenous armies and in an unfavourable international diplomatic climate. For example, Emperor Haile Selassie's diplomacy and shrewd manipulation of Eritrean rivalries during the 1940s succeeded in gaining him imperial control over Eritrea which he finally annexed in the face of the UN and Western powers. The military regime that succeeded Haile Selassie, the *Dergue*, not only continued the imperial

⁷⁴⁸ See EPLF, *Political Report and National Democratic Programme*; this has been reflected in the Eritrean National Anthem, see *Hadas Ertra*, no. 76 (May 22, 1993), p. 8; Ruth Iyob, *op. cit.*, p. 136; and A.M. Babu, "A Hopeful Dawn of Post-Colonial Initiatives", *SAPEM*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-17.

tradition of combining clever diplomacy with military campaigns but justified its methods by new ideological symbols (Ethiopian Socialism and Marxism-Leninism)⁷⁴⁹.

Moreover the OAU, being the servant of the regimes under attack, dutifully condemned these movements with all its diplomatic ferocity⁷⁵⁰. Thus, the liberation struggles in Eritrea and Ethiopia enjoyed neither external support nor sympathy. They virtually fought alone, depending entirely on the justness of their cause and on their own ability, ingenuity and sound leadership. The total collective experience of these two cases is enormous. The Eritreans struggled for thirty years while the Ethiopians took seventeen years. This leaves us with a total of almost half a century of collective struggle. In a marked contradistinction with the decolonisation struggles that had preceded them, the post-colonial liberation movements were fought, organised, supplied and administered within their own countries - in liberated areas - gaining a wealth of experience in the process. After decolonisation, most African countries adopted a one-party system of rule, a tradition that continued until at the close of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. But post-colonial liberation struggles in the continent have brought with them a culture of democratic practise and are now introducing democratic institutions and civic government.

In a nutshell, what lessons have these new emergent governments learnt and brought with them from the bush and what contributions can be drawn from their experiences for the rest of the continent? It is possible to catalogue the contributions they have come up with, as a penultimate project for future research, in the following:

- (1) They have learnt and mastered the rudiments of self-government, of administration, of building essential institutions and the skills of self-reliance, and the virtues of sacrifice and tolerance. In this case the EPLF/PFDJ has received external support in form of aid with less conditions attached.
- (2) Through experience, they have developed the ability to identify reliable leadership under severe and stressful conditions, for example, surviving the severe splits along ethnic, religious or regional lines during the early days of the struggle.
- (3) They have developed the mature skills of give-and-take negotiating for survival whether

⁷⁴⁹ See Ruth Iyob, pp. 3, 29-58.

⁷⁵⁰ With the institutionalisation of the African state system and the subsequent establishment of the OAU, unity was enshrined as the primary purpose in the organisation's Charter (art. II of the Charter speaks of the promotion of "unity and solidarity of African states"); see Ian Brownlie (ed.), *Basis Documents on African Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 3 Article III (2) affirms the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, see Makumi Mwagiru, *op. cit.*, and other references therein; and C.O.C. Amate, *Inside the OAU, op. cit.*

on the battlefield or at a round-table. In other words, they have mastered the intricate art of flexibility, of being firm when firmness is required, and of compromise and reconciliation when no strongly held principles are at stake.

- (4) Tough and rough experience has also enabled them to develop the ability to constantly distinguish and make a choice between primary and secondary contradictions, and to act on them according to the needs of the required objectives. Said differently, they have developed that rare capacity to be able to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable.
- (5) Last but not least, they have learnt that stability and success are only possible through cohesive leadership that would in turn foster national unity for the realisation of progress and development.

This rare wealth of experience is now seen in action demonstrated by leaders of revolutionary governments in Africa. Eritrea's Issaias Afewerki, Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi, and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni are definitely the most outstanding examples of leaders who went through the rigid experience of fighting wars that had no regional and international support. They now provide the new type of leadership in Africa. These leaders were civilians who took up arms to fight the dictatorial civil and military regimes, and they have won. They are now working hard to lay foundation for a type of democracy in Africa. What they are purporting to construct is a type of democracy that sounds "deviant". It is deviant because their articulation of democracy seems contradictory to the orthodox meaning and application of it. Moreover the new approach takes certain fundamental principles which are universal. These leaders have come to know and trust one another only after the victory of their respective struggles, but not during the struggle. After having fought and won their wars separately without any common strategy (though TPLF/EPRDF and EPLF had renewed relationships from time to time)⁷⁵¹, they now seem to share views on the type of democracy that might be acceptable to Africa. In fact, they have also now developed a solid identity of purpose, the purpose of regional stability and prosperity seen in the strengthening of Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), constituted mainly by Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and Djibouti. The pragmatism of their economic co-operation policies reflect the realisation that Nkrumah's "*seek ye first the political kingdom*" in the 1960s later had nothing added unto it!

⁷⁵¹ See John Young, "The TPLF and EPLF Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism", *op. cit.*

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Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

Research and Information Centre on Eritrea (RICE), Asmara, Eritrea.

Appendix I:

Lists of Interviewees in Eritrea

While in Eritrea from January to July 1996, the researcher interviewed the following:

A. High Ranking Officials

- (1) His Excellency Ato Beraky Gebre Selassie, a leading member of EPLF and now Minister of Information in the PFDJ Government, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (2) His Excellency Prof. Bereket Habte Selassie, a Diplomat and leading member of EPLF and now Chairman, Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE), PFDJ Government, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (3) His Excellency, Ambassador Haile Menkerios, a leading member of EPLF and now Ambassador of the State of Eritrea to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (4) Ato Ibrahim Tottil, one of the oldest member of the liberation struggle and now Governor, North Red Sea Province, Massawa, Eritrea.
- (5) Ato Yemane Ghebreab, a leading member of EPLF, former Head of EPLF's Information Department and now Head of Political Affairs, People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), a substitute to EPLF, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (6) Ato Alem Araya, former EPLF and now a senior official of the Ministry of Mining and Industry, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (7) Ato Paul Highfield, a British who had served in the liberated areas during the struggle and now in the Planning Section of the Ministry of Education, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (8) Dr. Tesfa-Yesus Mehary, former Assistant Professor and also had served as Head of Division Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning in Ethiopia and now Vice President, Asmara University, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (9) Ato Afewerki Abraha, former EPLF, served as Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the State of Eritrea, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and now Hon. Consul, Eritrean Consulate to the UK and Northern Ireland.
- (10) Kiflezghi Zekarias, former teacher, had refugee in Sudan and now works as a trainer with the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), Asmara, Eritrea.
- (11) Mrs. Dahab Suleiman, former EPLF and now Head of Research and Documentation Department, NUEW, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (12) Mrs. Hadas Mussie, former EPLF and Head of Personnel Office, NUEW, Asmara, Eritrea.

B. Others

- (13) Mrs. Abeba G/her, civilian and now Secretary to the Dean of the College of Arts and Language Studies, Asmara University, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (14) Ato Angesom Efrem, former EPLF and now works at Keren Hotel, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (15) Former EPLF and now Director, Teachers Training Institute (TTI), Asmara, Eritrea.
- (16) Misghina Debessai, former EPLF and now a civil servant undergoing training at the Eritrean Institute of Management (EIM), Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (17) Tirhas Fesshaye, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (18) Berhe Andemariam, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.

- (19) Freweini Tekie, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (20) G. Mcbrat, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (21) Alganesh Mckonnen, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (22) Berhe Mesfun, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (23) Tseggai Teklehaimanot, former EPLF and now Head of the Staff, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, Public Administration Department, Hammasien Province, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (24) Tzighereda Elfu, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (25) Solomon Fesseha, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (26) Nasser Osman, Civil Servant who never joint the EPLF.
- (27) Johannes Haily, Department of Agriculture, Vertinary Section.
- (28) Abraham Debesai, former EPLF.
- (29) Henoc G.Himwet, Student, Asmara University, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (30) Tedros Abraham, Student, Asmara University, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (31) Alazar Abu, Trainee, EIM, and former EPLF.
- (32) Zewenghiel Serium, Department of Maritime Transport, Massawa, Eritrea.
- (33) Dawit Sium, former EPLF.
- (34) Tekeste Ghebrezghi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- (35) Solomon Kifleyesus, former EPLF.
- (36) Tekie Gheresus, former EPLF.
- (37) Yehdego T. Michael, former EPLF.
- (38) Russom Sereke, former EPLF.
- (39) Tekle Abraha, former EPLF.
- (40) Hailemichael Mathewos, former EPLF.
- (41) Yemani Tsegai, former EPLF.
- (42) Berhane Zemicael, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (43) Goitom Ogbai, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (44) Andeberhan Weldehans, Ministry of Defence, Dongolo, Eritrea.
- (45) Abeba Gebre Christos, former EPLF.
- (46) Belai Habtegabere Bein, former EPLF.
- (47) Senait Tesfay, former EPLF.
- (48) Zekarias Simeon, former EPLF.
- (49) Solomon Tesfahun, Education Office, Anseba, Keren, Eritrea.
- (50) Nerayo Taddesse, former EPLF.
- (51) T/Mariam W/Slassie, former EPLF.
- (52) Ghirmai Teklealfa, EIM, Embatkala.
- (53) Berhane Asress, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- (54) Berhane Habte, former EPLF.
- (55) Yebio Ogubaselassie, former EPLF.
- (56) Michael Zecarias, EIM, Embatkala, Eritrea.
- (57) Fesehagherghis Ocubazghi, Post Office Department, Asseb, Eritrea.
- (58) Alazar Ghirmai, Ground Force, Ministry of Defence.
- (59) Hassan Mohammed, Agordat, Barka, Eritrea.
- (60) Yosief Tewelde, Mendefera, Seraye, Eritrea.
- (61) Yacob Andemesrel, former EPLF.
- (62) Tekeste Tzegai, Taxi Driver, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (63) Bereket Fitwi, former EPLF and now works in the Project Development Department, Ministry of Education, The State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea.

Appendix II:

List of Interviewees in Ethiopia

While in Ethiopia between most of April and July 1996, the researcher interviewed the following:

- (1) Col. Halefom Alemu, former TPLF/EPRDF and now Chief of Secretariat, Ministry of National Defence, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (2) Col. Asaminew Bedanie, former Dergue Deputy Commander in Tigray 1987-88, former Chairman Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM) 1988-90 and Vice Chairman of the same organization 1991-93, former member of the Council of Representatives and now Department Head Foreign and Military Relations, Ministry of National Defence, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (3) Ato Haile Kiros Gessesse, former TPLF Representative in Washington, London and Khartoum, and now EPRDF member and Head of Foreign Relations, EPRDF Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (4) W/ Netsannet Asfaw, former Journalist with Deutsche Welle, former Head of Information in the Office of the President during the Transitional Government, and now EPRDF MP for Endamariam, Axum, Tigray and Director, Office of the Prime Minister, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (5) W/ Mebrat Beyene, former TPLF/EPRDF and now Head of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (6) Ato Teklewoini Assefa, former TPLF and Co-founder of REST and now Executive Director, Relief Society of Tigray (REST), Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- (7) Ato Chekol Kidane, former TPLF and now member of EPRDF and Adviser to the Regional Government of Tigray, Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia.
- (8) Ato Zemichael G.Medhin, former TPLF and now senior official of the Regional Government of Tigray.
- (9) Ato Alem G/Wahid, former TPLF and now Head EPRDF Branch Axum, Tigray, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
- (10) Prof. Bahru Zewde, Director Institute of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
- (11) Ato Haile Ghirmai, former TPLF and now Businessman, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (12) Ato Yosef Tesfaye, Secretary to Dawit Yohanes, Speaker of the House of Representatives, former member of the Constitution Drafting Commission, former Executive Committee member of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (13) Col. Tesfaye Asemanew, former Col. of Police, Imperial Regime and retired during the Dergue Regime, and now Hotel Businessman, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (14) A good number of people in Ethiopia did not want their names written anywhere. This includes students and teachers at Addis Ababa University, and others encountered at social places.

Appendix III:**List of Foreign Observers Interviewed in both Eritrea and Ethiopia**

While in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, the researcher interviewed the following Foreign Observers:

- (1) His Excellency Ambassador Robert G. Houdek, Ambassador of the United States of America to the State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea. Formerly in Nairobi, U.S Embassy as the NO. 2 (1980-84); in Uganda as U.S Ambassador (1985-86); and as U.S Ambassador to Ethiopia till the overthrow of Mengistu in 1991,
- (2) His Excellency Ambassador Wolfgang Ringe, Ambassador of Germany to the State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea. Formerly a German Diplomat to Niger, Malawi, Namibia and South Africa.
- (3) His Excellency Ambassador Claudio Bay-Rossi, Italian Ambassador to the State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea. Formerly Italian Envoy to Somalia and Canada.
- (4) His Excellency Ambassador Hussein El Hoghby, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (5) His Excellency Dr. Martin Ngwenya, UNDP ResRep and UN Coordinator in the State of Eritrea. Formerly UN ResRep in Southern African Countries.
- (6) His Excellency Ambassador Shi Yongjiu, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the State of Eritrea, Asmara, Eritrea. Formerly Envoy to Ethiopia till the overthrow of Mengistu in 1991.
- (7) Ms. Sally Crook, Representative VSO, Asmara, Eritrea.
- (8) Viatcheslav L. Regush, Attache, Embassy of the Russian Federation, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Also monitored the Eritrean referendum in 1993.
- (9) Jean-Paul Charlier, First Secretary, Belgian Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Also monitored the Eritrean referendum in 1993.
- (10) Kerstin Wilde, LUSO CONSULT Ltd., Hamburg Germany, Economist and Programme Officer GTZ, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- (11) Andrea Semplici, Journalist, Via di Mucciana 6, 50026 S. Casciano in Val di Pesa - Firenze, Italy. Did similar interviews with both President Museveni of Uganda (1992) and President Issaias Aferwerki of Eritrean (April 1996) on democratization.
- (12) Prof. Richard Pankhurst, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. professor of Anthropology and an authority on Ethiopian Studies.
- (13) Dr. John Young, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, former Journalist with the Sudan Times, and his Ph.D (September 1994) was on TPLF.
- (14) Dr. Aggrey Odur Oyat, Assistant Professor and Head of the Political Science Department, Asmara University, Eritrea.

Appendix IV:**A National Charter for Eritrea**

For a Democratic, Just and Prosperous Future
 Approved by the Third Congress of the Eritrean people's Liberation Front (EPLF)
 Nacfa, February 1994

EPLF (PFDJ) Transitional Constitution and Third Congress Resolutions**(A) Transitional Constitution**Introduction

- Whereas, during the transitional period, between now and the next Congress, the Front must be organized and conduct its activities in accordance with the Charter; and
- Whereas, during this transitional period, it requires a leadership and an organization to lead its programs;
- Now, Therefore, Be IT Resolved, that the Front shall operate under the following transitional constitution, which is based on the principles of the Charter, until the next Congress.

Chapter 1 Name

- The People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

Chapter 2 Membership

1. Any Eritrean who believes in the national unity of Eritrean people, and rejects all factional religious, regional and ethnic-based divisiveness; accepting the National Charter, is ready to contribute to the development, justice and prosperity for the people of Eritrea, and has attained the age of 18, is eligible for membership.
2. An individual who was against the independence of the people of Eritrean and collaborated with colonialism is not eligible for membership.
3. Applications for membership are completed and considered individually.
4. A member has the right to voluntarily withdraw his/her membership.

Chapter 3 Membership Responsibilities

A member of the Front has the following responsibilities:

1. To properly understand the National Charter, and earnestly strive to uphold and implement its contents and spirit.
2. On the basis of the Charter, to conduct political activities among people, and to uphold and strengthen the unity of the people of Eritrea.
3. To uphold and enhance the unity of the Front based on the National Charter.
4. To be loyal to the principles and laws of the Front, and carry out its decisions and programs.
5. To practice constructive criticism and self-criticism.
6. To establish close relationships with the people and forward views expressed by the people to the appropriate bodies.
7. To participate in practical programs and activities of the Front.
8. To strive to enhance his/her own political and cultural consciousness.
9. To be a trusted and honest servant of the people and country and to be committed to truth, justice and work.
10. To respect the confidential matters of the Front.
11. To pay dues on time.

Any member who does not fulfil his/her obligations shall be subject to disciplinary action, ranging from warning to dismissal.

Chapter 4 Membership Rights

A member of the Front has the following rights:

1. To participate and freely express views during meetings, seminars, conferences and in publications of the Front.
2. To receive continuous information on the Front's policies, programs and their results.
3. To present constructive criticism on policies, programs and their implementation, to leaders or to ordinary members.
4. To hold different views, provided they are within the Front's general goals and principles.
5. Based on the constitution, to elect, and run for office, for leadership positions at all levels.

Chapter 5 Central Council

A. The Central Council shall be the body with highest authority during the transitional period until the next Congress of the Front.

1. The Central Council shall be elected by the Third Congress of the EPLF.
2. The Central Council shall be composed of 75 members.
3. Two-Thirds (2/3) of the members of the Central Council shall constitute a quorum.
4. Decisions of the Central Council shall require a majority vote. In the event of a tie, the Chair shall have the deciding vote.
5. Regular meetings of the Central Council shall be held every six months as determined by the Executive Council.
6. Special meetings can be called by the Executive Council when it deems necessary, or upon request by two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Central Council.

B. The authority and responsibilities of the Central Council are as follows:

1. On the basis of the National Charter, to draw up plans by which the Front can be organized and expanded.
2. To organize the Congress of the Front.
3. To elect the Chair of the Central Council and the Executive Council from among its members.
4. To elect an Executive Council from among its members.
5. To review and approve reports of the Executive Council.
6. To legally discipline any members of the Central Council or the Executive Council who violates the principles and laws of the Front.
7. To have the authority to change the Executive Council as a whole or some members.
8. To perform other duties as may be assigned by the Congress.

Chapter 6 Executive Council

A. The Executive Council is the body with the highest authority during the period between regular meetings of the Central Council.

1. The Executive Council shall be composed of eighteen (18) members and a Chair, elected from among members of the Central Council.
2. Two-Thirds (2/3) of the members of the Executive Council shall constitute a quorum.
3. Decisions of the Executive Council shall require a majority vote. In the event of a tie, the Chair shall have the deciding vote.
4. Regular meetings of the Executive Council shall be held every month as determined by the Chair.
5. Special meetings can be called either by the Chair or by two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Executive Council.

B. Authority and responsibilities of the Executive Council are as follows:

1. To call meetings of the Central Council.
2. On the basis of the Charter and Central Council programs, to organize and lead the Front.
3. To plan programs of political activities and assess their implementation among the people.
4. To promote the National Charter's acceptance by government and society at large.

Chapter 7 Chair

1. The Chair calls for and conducts meetings of the Central Council and the Executive Councils.
2. The Chair is the most senior official of the Front.

Chapter 8 Central Office

1. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice shall have a permanent national central office which co-ordinates the administration of its activities.
2. During the transitional period, branch offices can be opened as needed.

Chapter 9 Departments

The Front shall have the following departments:

1. Political Affairs
2. Organizational Affairs
3. Research and Documentation
4. Economy

Chapter 10 Organizational Structure

1. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice shall have an organizational structure at national, provincial, sub-provincial and village levels.
2. During this transitional period, organizational guidelines for the Front shall be determined by the Central Council.

Chapter 11 Publication, Emblem, Slogan

1. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice shall have a magazine called Hedri.
2. The former emblem of the EPLF shall be the emblem for the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.
3. "Victory to the Masses" shall be the slogan of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

(B) THIRD CONGRESS RESOLUTIONS

I. Revitalizing the Front and its Political Work

Recognizing the immediate and long term importance of organizing a broad based Front in accordance with the National Charter,

Cognizant of the need for the effective organization of the Front as a dynamo of national construction, a guarantor of peace, stability, unity and development and a driving force for democratic progress,

Noting the decisive role that political work has played during our liberation struggle,

Aware that political work remains the major task of our Front,

Conscious that the National Charter, as an expression of our political experience and vision, must be disseminated, popularized and enriched in the crucible of real life,

The Congress resolves that:

1. The Central Council draw up and start implementing programs necessary to revitalize the Front,
2. Political work be conducted constantly and efficiently throughout the country both in the urban and rural areas, including in the remotest corners,
3. The letter and spirit of the National Charter be widely disseminated and known.

II. Reinforcing the Unity of the Eritrean People

Recognizing that the national unity of the Eritrean people has been forged and consolidated in the course of half a century of national struggle, and especially during the three decades of armed struggle,

Cognizant of the decisive role that the EPLF has played in promoting and strengthening the unity of the Eritrean people,

Aware of the existence of elements and groups who try to use religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity as instruments of political machination,

Mindful that all sectarian and divisive machinations are categorically abhorrent in free Eritrea,

The Congress:

1. Resolves that the Front play an appropriate role in the political, economic, social and cultural tasks of nation-building as the unity of the Eritrean people will be consolidated further in this process,
2. Emphatically condemns those who attempt to use religion, ethnicity and the language question as an instrument of sectarian political interests.

III. Establishment of a Constitutional Government

Aware that the establishment of a constitutional government in Eritrea is our fundamental goal,

Cognizant that the national constitution should be drafted and adopted through broad popular participation,

Conscious of our endeavors to base the Eritrean national constitution on the fundamental principles of the Charter—patriotism, democracy, secularism, and social justice,

Realizing that the establishment of a constitutional system, the development of constitutional institutions and culture is a long and basic process that goes beyond the adoption of a constitution,

Taking note of the preparations underway to establish a commission to draft the national constitution with broad popular participation,

The Congress resolves that:

1. The Front play an active role in the drafting and adoption of the constitution, and the dissemination and internalization of constitutional knowledge and culture among the people,
2. The Front exert all efforts to firmly put in place and strengthen the pillars of a constitutional system in Eritrea.

IV. Law on Political Parties and the Press

Aware that a democratic political culture in general and experience of political parties in particular are undeveloped in Eritrea,

Conscious that Eritrea is a new state which has just begun to build its own national government where the process of national building is yet unfinished,

Realizing that the primary and fundamental tasks of the moment is laying down the foundations of the national and the building of the economy,

Convinced that a pluralist political system that respects the basic rights of expression and association should be established in Eritrea,

Upholding that nationalism and secularism should be the basis of all political activity,

Conscious that the basis of political association should not be sectarian,

Mindful that political affiliations hinged on the negative experiences of our armed struggle should not be tolerated as they are contrary and detrimental to the beginning of a new political chapter and the development of a healthy and democratic political culture,

Aware that there should be no foreign interference, in whatever form, in our national politics,

Noting that the cultivation of a free and responsible press is vital to the development of democracy,

The Congress resolves that:

1. The Front play a catalytic and constructive role in the development of a healthy democratic culture as well as a free and responsible press,
2. The Front actively participates in the drafting and adoption as well as application of the law on political parties and a press code.

V. Building Institutions of a National Government

Mindful that the people of Eritrea are, for the first time in their history, building their own government,

Aware that the building of a strong and effective national government is a vital instrument for nation-building and reconstruction as well as for the attainment of stability and development,

Conscious that a strong national government cannot prevail without adequate and effective institutions and that institutional capacity-building requires resourceful, effort and time,

Assessing the generally successful efforts as well as the problems and constraints encountered after Liberation in the establishment and effective operation of the courts, assemblies at different levels, and executive departments and institutions,

Cognizant of the immense tasks awaiting us for building adequate and effective institutions in enhancing our performance,

The Congress:

1. Commends the successful efforts undertaken and results achieved in building institutions of national government by overcoming various problems during the past three years,
2. Underlines the need to prepare for greater effort, conscious that building a government is a complex and long process,
3. Pledges that the Front will contribute its share in the development of a strong national government that guarantees nation-building, stability and progress.

VI. Reconstruction of Eritrea

Assessing the efforts exerted and the results achieved since Liberation to rehabilitate and revitalize the Eritrean economy devastated by the long war and natural calamities,

Aware that transition is inherently difficult and jump-starting the economy even harder,

Conscious that economic recovery is a complex and long process,

Aware that the measures necessary for economic recovery entail temporary hardships for the population,

Cognizant that the decisive factor is the work we undertake on the basis of self-reliance and the development of our internal capabilities even if foreign assistance and investment play an essential role in the revitalization of our economy,

Realizing that we should bear with our temporary hardships and focus our energies on lasting solutions, since economic recovery and take off will necessarily take time,

Appraising the encouraging work undertaken after Liberation to expand educational, health and other services and implement development programs in the rural and urban areas,

The Congress:

1. Urges every Eritrean to work with dedication for the construction of the country by overcoming temporary obstacles and difficulties with the same spirit of self-reliance and confident struggle displayed in achieving the victory considered impossible by many,
2. Affirms that the development programs implemented so far are substantive and encouraging, taking all things into account,
3. Resolves that our Front play active a catalytic role in ensuring the success of reconstruction programs.

VII. State Administrative Divisions

Recalling that successive colonial powers had instituted different administrative set-ups to serve their interests in Eritrea,

Recalling that these administrative set-ups served, among other things, the colonial policy of divide and rule,

Realizing that the administrative set-ups introduced by the colonial powers should, as all dysfunctional colonial legacies, be supplanted by a new national administrative system,

Recalling that an administrative system serving our liberation strategy was operational during the armed struggle,

Convinced that a new national administrative system capable of serving nation-building, development programs, efficient and effective governance and promoting decentralized administration should be establishment in free Eritrea today,

The Congress:

1. Recommends that the existing administrative set-up inherited from colonialism be dismantled and replaced by a new national administrative system to serve nation-building and development programs and promote decentralized administration.

VIII. Land Issue

Aware that the prevailing land tenure system and associated laws and traditions are archaic, imposed by colonialism, incompatible with the nation's demands of the moment, and self-contradictory.

Aware that the work of reconstruction and development is being obstructed and land disputes aggravated on account of these laws and traditions,

Convinced that if a conducive environment for the socio-economic development of Eritrean society is to be created and our country to secure a competitive position in the rapidly advancing world, the land tenure system must be freed from the archaic and dysfunctional laws and tradition, and be:

- . conducive to agricultural and industrial development,
- . capable of providing initiative and incentives both to users and producers,

- . conducive to the promotion of private investment and initiative,
- . preventive of animosity, contention and dispute,
- . uniform and equally applicable throughout the country,

The Congress urges that the existing land tenure system which is obstructive of development be dismantled and replaced by a land tenure system that:

1. Affirms the sole right of the state of land ownership,
2. Vests the state with supreme authority in the formulation and implementation of policy regarding the use and distribution of land,
3. Bestows usufructory land rights on the people without any discrimination as to gender, religion, or ethnicity,
4. Allows the granting of land to a person or body for direct and effective use for residential or development purpose,
5. Introduces a mode of land distribution that abolishes the prevailing land tenure system rooted in family, village, tribal and similar parochial divisions of land, and replaces it by a uniform system based on individual use and subject to verification by registry while recognizing that villages constitute the basis for the identity of citizens,
6. Makes it incumbent on the Government to provide due compensation for land taken from users for purposes of reconstruction and development. Moreover, it urges the Government to issue this in the form of a proclamation and to give utmost priority to its implementation.

IX. Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Combatants and Families of Martyrs

Assessing the efforts and measures undertaken to date to rehabilitate members of the army, the militia and families of martyrs,

Aware that their total rehabilitation is linked to the capacity of the national economy and that it requires time,

The Congress:

1. Commends the measures undertaken so far with the limited available resources to assist and rehabilitate members of the army, the militia and families of martyrs,
2. Reiterates the imperatives to work with patience and vigor in the programs of rehabilitation and recovery of the national economy convinced that the total rehabilitation of the members of the army, the militia and the families of the martyrs is of crucial importance and, in the final analysis, the responsibility and mission of the people, the Front and the Government.

X. Role of the EPLF Popular Organizations

Recalling the substantive contribution of our mass organizations in the liberated and enemy occupied areas and the diaspora to our liberation struggle,

Cognizant that there are many who suffered in their private livelihood on account of their participation in the national struggle,

The Congress:

1. Commends the role of the mass organizations in the victory of our struggle and urges them to play an enhanced role in the new phase,
2. Affirms that priority must be accorded in economic opportunities to all those whose livelihood has deteriorated on account of this participation.

XI. Enhancing the Social Position of Women

Recalling the heroic role that Eritrean women played in the liberation struggle,

Cognizant of the changes brought about in the political and social status of women through the revolution,

Aware that backward, oppressive and chauvinistic ideas and sentiments are still strong in our society,

Realizing the existence of won-out ideas and attitudes that attempt to reverse the gains achieved during the revolution,

Noting that the building of a modern state is impossible without the broad participation of women and the solidarity of men and women in equality,

The Congress:

1. Reaffirms its categorical rejection of all ideas and practices that oppress women and detract from,
2. Resolves to preserve, advance and expand the gains achieved in the revolution and to combat all attempts to reverse or undermine them,
3. Resolves to draw up and implement programs to enable women to consolidate their political and social status, guarantee their economic freedom by enhancing their role in production, and broaden their access to education and training so that they may become self-sufficient and maximize their contribution,
4. Resolves to struggle to ascertain the right to women's equality in the family as well as in the ownership of land and other property,
5. Resolves to extend unreserved support to strengthen the movement of Eritrean women.

XII. Youth Affairs

Aware that the future of our society is linked to the state of our youth,

Recalling the decisive role of youth in our armed struggle and its victory,

Cognizant that in order to preserve and advance the gains of our liberation struggle and enable our country to modernize equitably, it is essential that our youth be imbued with the heritage of the revolution, i.e. self-reliance, hard work, and love of country and people, and carry forward the banner of our martyrs,

Realizing the crucial importance of the transmission of the heritage of our national struggle to posterity as nation building is the work of generations,

The Congress:

1. Resolves that the Front take systematic measures, as well as encourage individual initiative, to effect the proper documentation of the history of the armed struggle so as to teach and transmit this history and experience to our youth and imbue them with values developed in the revolution,
2. Resolves to draw up and implement concrete measures to enable our youth to be productive and critical thinkers, hard working and creative, and imbued with love of country and people as well as of truth and justice,
3. Affirms that the National Service Program is of great importance in the upbringing of youth and for gaining experience.

XIII. Repatriation and Reintegration of Eritrean Refugees

Aware that repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees and the betterment of their livelihood is their basic right,

Recalling that the EPLF has, during the struggle, established a Commission of Refugees and endeavored to repatriate and reintegrate them with the expansion of the liberated areas,

Recognizing the effort of the Eritrean Government to repatriate and reintegrate Eritrean refugees, particularly those in the Sudan who constitute the majority,

The Congress:

1. Supports the implementation of the program already drawn up to repatriate and reintegrate refugees with our limited sources in the absence of adequate international assistance,
2. Calls on the international community to assist in the program of repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees.

XIV. Establishment of the National Assembly

Appendix V:

Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia
Negarit Gazette
July 22nd 1991

EPRDF's Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia

WHEREAS the overthrow of the military dictatorship that has ruled Ethiopia for seventeen years presents a historical moment, providing the Peoples of Ethiopia with the opportunity to rebuild the country and restructure the state democratically;

WHEREAS the military dictatorship was, in essence, a continuation of the previous regimes and its demise marks the end of an era of subjugation and oppression thus starting a new chapter in Ethiopia's history in which freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all the peoples shall be the governing principles of political, economic and social life and thereby contributing to the welfare of the Ethiopian Peoples and rescuing them from centuries of subjugation and backwardness;

WHEREAS peace and stability, as essential conditions of development, require the end of all hostilities, the healing of wounds caused by conflicts and the establishment and maintenance of good neighbourliness and co-operation;

WHEREAS for the fulfilment of the aforementioned conditions and for the reign of a just peace, the proclamation of a democratic order is a categorical imperative, and;

WHEREAS to this end, all institutions of repression installed by the previous regimes shall be dismantled, regional prejudices redressed and the rights and interests of the deprived citizens safeguarded by democratic government elected by and accountable to the people;

WHEREAS from The Peace Loving and Democratic forces present in the Ethiopian society and having Varied Views, having met in a Conference convened from July 1-5 in Addis Ababa have discussed and approved the charter laying down the rules governing the Transitional Government as well as setting down the principles for the transitional period. Now, therefore it is hereby Proclaimed as follows:

**PART ONE
DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS**

Article One

Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly by resolution 217 A(III) of December. 1948, individual human rights shall be respected fully, and without any limitation whatsoever. Particularly every individual shall have:

- (a) The freedom of conscience, expression, association and peaceable assembly;
- (b) The right to engage in unrestricted political activity and to organise political parties, provided the exercise of such right does not infringe upon the rights of others.

Article Two

The right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nation, nationality and people is guaranteed the right to:

- (a) Preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its culture and history and use and develop its language;
- (b) Administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom, and fair and proper representation;

(c) Exercise its right to self-determination of independence, when the concerned nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated.

PART TWO PRINCIPLES GUIDING FOREIGN POLICY

The Transitional Government will conduct its foreign relations on the basis of the principles of respect for the sovereignty and equality of states and non-intervention and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as the promotion of mutual interests. Accordingly:

Article Three

The policy of destabilization and conflict-promotion hitherto actively pursued by the previous regime with respect to the country's neighbours shall cease forthwith the issuance of this Charter.

Article Four

It shall abide by all mutual agreements that respect the sovereignty of Ethiopia and are not contrary to the interests of the People.

Article Five

Local governments shall have the right to establish direct contact with relief organisations with respect to relief work.

PART THREE STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

Article Six

There shall be established a Transitional Government consisting of a Council of Representatives and a Council of Ministers.

Article Seven

The Council of Representatives shall be composed of representatives of national liberation movements, other political organisations and prominent individuals to make-up a total of no more than 87 members.

Article Eight

The Transitional Government shall exercise all legal and political responsibility for the governance of Ethiopia until it hands over power to a government popularly elected on the basis of a new Constitution.

Article Nine

The Council of Representatives shall exercise legislative functions as follows and oversee the work of the Council of Ministers:

- (a) draw-up its rules of procedure
- (b) election of its Chairperson, who shall also be the Head of State, and a Vice-Chairperson and Secretary; the Head of States shall appoint the Prime Minister whose appointment shall be approved by the Council of Representatives. The Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Vice-Chairperson and Secretary of the Council of Representatives shall be from different nations/nationalities;
- (c) approve the Prime Minister's nomination of members of the Council of Ministers, draw-up on consideration of ascertaining a broad national representation, technical competence and unwavering adherence to the Charter;
- (d) initiation and promulgation of proclamations and decrees pursuant to the Charter;
- (e) adoption of national budget;

- (f) provide for the administration of justice on the basis of the Charter; the Courts shall, in their work, be free from any governmental interference with respect to items provided for in Part One, Article One of the Charter;
- (g) establish the Constitutional Commission;
- (h) ratify international agreements;
- (i) create committees for defence and security policy during the transitional period;
- (j) provide the mechanism to ascertain the fair and impartial application of the mass media;
- (k) issue just labour law that protects the rights and interests of the workers.

PART FOUR TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

The following provisions for a transitional period have been adopted in order to lead the country towards full democracy.

A. POLITICAL

Article Ten

The Council of Representatives shall constitute the Constitutional Commission to draw-up a draft Constitution.

The Constitutional Commission shall submit to the Council of Representatives the draft constitution.

Article Eleven

Upon adoption of the draft constitution by the Council of Representatives, the Constitution shall be presented to the people for discussion.

The final draft shall be presented for adoption to the Constituent Assembly to be elected pursuant to the final draft of the Constitution.

Article Twelve

Elections to a National Assembly shall be held on the basis of the provisions of the new Constitution.

The Transitional Government shall hand-over the power to the parties that gain a majority in the National Assembly.

The said national elections shall be held no later than two years after the establishment of the Transitional Government. Provided however, that the period can be extended by the Council of Representatives for no more than six months.

Article Thirteen

There shall be a law establishing local and regional councils for local administrative purposes defined on the basis of nationality. Elections for such local and regional councils shall held within three months of the establishment of the Transitional Government, wherever local conditions allow.

B. RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

The Transitional Government is unequivocally determined to ensure the delivery of relief assistance to areas ravaged by war and drought. In connection with this:

