The Genesis of Ethiopian Federalism AARON TESFAYE

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After decades of central rule, there was a re-ordering of state-society relations by the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF,) resulting in 1994 with the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE.) The new leaders of Ethiopia embarked on a bold project and defined democracy primarily in terms of politically empowering national and cultural groups which required the establishment of institutions and procedures that varied markedly from those championed by adherents of liberal democracy. This paper explores the determinants of regionalization and federalism by tracing the evolution of the indigenous centralizing state, the development of centrifugal forces in the form of outright rebellion by societal groups and nationalities contributing to current federal arrangements.

Introduction

The legal foundations for the establishment of regions were agreed upon in the July 1991 national conference that established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. Article 2 of the Transitional Period Charter affirmed the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination and guaranteed each region the rights to:

> 1. Preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its culture and history, and develop its language. 2. 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. 3. Exercise its right to self- determination of independence where the concerned nation, nationality, and people are convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged, or abrogated. (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1991a, Article 2, p. 2).

The above general principles were enhanced by two key proclamations. Proclamation No. 7/92 established national and regional self-governments; No. 41/93 defined the powers and duties of the central and national/regional executive organs. Proclamation 7/92 established a three-tiered government: central, regional and woreda. These entities enjoyed their respective political rights. Legal personalities and rights were granted to them by the National Charter (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992c, Article 6, p. 9). Proclamation 7/92 allowed for the creation of fourteen regional governments, each formed when two or more adjacent nations or people, by their own choice and agreement, jointly established regional self-government. Five of the regions merged to become the Southern Ethiopia Region, thus creating ten regions for the country in all eventually leading to the crafting of a new national constitution. This paper traces the major driving factors that contributed to conflict in state- society relations in Ethiopia and will outline the broad contours leading to the establishment of a federal republic in 1994.

The Ancien Regime: Central Rule Emerges

According to many scholars, the modern nation-state of Ethiopia was partly realized, at substantial cost, by Emperor Menelik (1889-1913.) This was the colonization of Eritrea by the Italians circa 1882 and subsequent forays into the empire, as well as the conquest or re-conquest of the southern and western parts of the country (Donham 1986). Although efforts to reclaim Eritrea by the central powers in Ethiopia were to continue unabated for close to a century, the "Southern Marches" of Emperor Menelik in the south and west resulted in a considerable cost to budding states, kingdoms, and indigenous peoples (Garreston 1986; Mohammed 1990).

Scholars claim the penetration of state power in the conquered regions was facilitated by three instruments; the first was the rist, a lineage system of land ownership that allowed highland Abyssinian soldiers to settle on gult, or land grants. In time, as the settlers intermarried with indigenous peoples, their descendants claimed gult rights and saw themselves as pioneers.

The second was the Amharic language, Lisane Negus ("the king's language"), which was adopted by indigenous peoples because it afforded protection in claiming rights that others enjoyed in core areas. The third was Christianity, which spread throughout the country because of two factors: the mission of the Coptic Church to minister to the needs of the settlers, and the conversion to Christianity of the indigenous contingents raised for various campaigns by the center (Donham 1986).

Menelik was the architect of the centralized Ethiopian state. He ended the tradition of roving capitals (by which past emperors maintained control of territory) by founding a center in Addis Ababa. During this period, state power manifested itself in two ways: direct and indirect. On the one hand, the regions of Harar and Wollega and the newly conquered regions were administered mostly by highland Shoan settlers, who founded kettemas or garrison towns. On the other hand, other regions, such as Afar, Jimma, Gojjam, Tigray, and Wollo, became vassal states, paying tribute to the emperor. To consolidate state power, a strong monarchical administrative system was created by the appointment of governors who were mostly, but not always, Shoans.

However, in examining state-society relations during the period a word of caution is in order. As Donald Donham observed, “The tendency has been to […] emphasize a single homogenous periphery. What was peripheral was always relative to a particular level of hierarchy of centers” (Donham 1986, 24-25). In any case, at least before Menelik, the “center” and the “periphery” changed, depending on which hereditary ruler was in power. Nevertheless, in the late 19th century, the introduction of firearms changed the situation radically. The balance of forces fell in favor of the northern Abyssinian kingdoms. Eventually, under Menelik, Shoa emerged as the victor and proceeded to assimilate--often through force or intermarriages--various cultural groups, creating in the process a multi- ethnic nation. Thus, by the time the Emperor Haile Selassie arrived on the scene, cultural categories had jelled, more or less, and the empire had been centralized.

Political and Economic Centralization

The foundation of the political power of Haile Selassie was the ancient Ethiopian class system and was rural. Power was based on the Ethiopian aristocracy and landed gentry. However, this foundation, although firm, was by no means solid and varied over time as hereditary rulers in various regions overtly or covertly contested the emperor’s rule. Therefore, soon after his coronation, in 1930, the monarch began to consolidate state power by strengthening central rule and expanding an independent source of revenue. Increased centralization was achieved through the 1931 Ethiopian constitution, which provided the legal and ideological framework for countering several centrifugal regional forces. These forces’ rule over the regions, with minimal state interference, was supported by armies financed through levies on the masses. Also during this era the quasi- representative structures of Senate and the Chamber of Deputies were introduced, mostly staffed by princes, nobles, and judges holding negligible powers.

The constitution, aimed at eliminating the personal power base of the nobles by tightening the legal reins on hereditary rule, was designed in centralization. It provided a statutory basis for what was to become a de facto situation: All power emanated from the center in the form of temporary and revocable delegation. Thus the constitution served to facilitate increased centralization of political power. In addition, the implementation of the 1934-1935 Provincial Administration and Ministerial Powers and Duties Proclamations effectively established the beginnings of a modern bureaucracy and division of the country into thirty-two ghizats, or provinces (Asmelash 1985, 130). The centralization process necessitated revenues. The state obtained the necessary money by increasing taxation on agricultural products, converting land into a commodity, and raising commodity production to meet the demands of the world economy. This fiscal reorganization resulted in an independent source of income for the central government, which, in turn, facilitated the establishment of a modern army and consolidation of power (Eshete 1993). The emperor's political and economic policy was interrupted by the Italian occupation (1935-41), which was to prove somewhat beneficial to the state as it weakened regional bosses. Moreover, it laid the groundwork for communication and transport in the regions. Nevertheless, Haile Selassie's linking of Ethiopia with the global economy had two consequences. First, as a result of the Addis-Djibuti railway, built in the 1920s, the highland region experienced a boom in development at the expense of other regions and ethnic groups. Second, whereas connection with the world economy helped to modernize the state apparatus and had an influence on social formation--i.e., the evolution of a nascent bourgeoisie--regional disparities in endowments began to emerge, which were exacerbated by the discrimination of the state against some regions. Thus the total result of fiscal reorganization and taxation was "considerable rural strife, punctuated by peasant revolt […] in the 1930s" (Gebru 1991, 46-47).

Regional Resistance

However, after the war, resistance to central authority was stiff, as the Italian occupation had rekindled ethnic group identities and sentiments while at the same time weakened regional forces. Taking advantage of the fact that the state was in transition, several regional groups, particularly the Tigrayans in 1943, rebelled against centralism. As Gebru Tareke noted (1991, 48-49), "Southern peasants [too] fearful of the resurrection of northern domination and religious oppression, resisted the reestablishment of Ethiopian administration […] in Bale Harar and Sidamo." The grievances of Tigray had long precedent. Tigray was not only a center of the ancient Abyssinian kingdom of Axum, but also was, early in its modern history, an important region. Yohannis the IV, who hailed from Tigray, was emperor of Ethiopia and fell in battle at Mettama in defense of the nation. After the death of Yohannis, Tigray's "sensibilities were […] hurt when the heir of Emperor Yohannis was dispossessed by Menelik of Shoa in 1889 [and] a permanent grievance against Amhara domination became the hallmark of Tigrayan provincialism" (Markakis 1987, 248-49). The posting of Amhara governors and troops by the state did not help matters.

Ever since 1889, the relationship between the state and Tigray had been antagonistic, with the former attempting social control and the latter seeking autonomy. Markakis quoted a nationalist pamphlet (1987, 249-50): "From that time onwards the national contradiction between the Amhara oppressor nation and the oppressed nations in Ethiopia, including Tigray, came onto the scene." The outcome of this strong opposition to the state, under the Shoan monarchy, was the Woyane Rebellion of 1943, led by the aristocracy, which was crushed by a coalition of the central government and British forces. An outcome of the rebellion was the punitive redrawing of Tigray's boundaries "involving the loss of two districts in the west" (Markakis 1987, 250). The Tigray and other revolts of the period resulted from the abuse of state power by the central authority. Most regions were ruled by loyal appointees who could be counted on to bring law and order and collect taxes. Thus most regional administrations were staffed by "outsiders," largely but not entirely from Shoa, who exercised independent and relatively autonomous behavior that flourished unchecked and was tolerated by the state. Gebru Tareke noted (1991, 48) that, in the Southern part of the country, "Abyssinian settlers holding large estates relied heavily on the armed strength of the state to keep a restive peasantry under control."

Regional administration was thus characterized by formally centralized political control with a direct relationship between the crown and provincial appointees. In practice, however, there was little centralizing effect on the internal administration of the regions since the governors were given full discretion to manage their regions along traditional lines and according to existing customs. The state disregard for internal regional politics was later to prove fatal.

The Constitutional Revisions of 1955

In 1955, the center revised the Ethiopian constitution. It proclaimed several civil rights, instituted elections, established a parliament, and made other reforms. But the constitution had no teeth. It was hobbled by several procedures and appeared to preserve the initiative and absolute authority of the emperor. For example, an important element of the constitution was the establishment of a modern judiciary that replaced the traditional chilot by which past Ethiopian emperors adjudicated disputes. Article 10 of the constitution provided that judicial power be vested in the courts established by the law. However, since the constitution also established the supreme imperial court at the apex of the judicial system, in reality ultimate power to adjudicate matters rested in the imperial court. Moreover, the constitution contained no provision for separation of powers. The emperor was head of the executive and presided like a judge at chilot. The judges were appointed by the emperor, independent of parliament, and organized under the Ministry of Justice. But more importantly the provincial governors and awraja and woreda administrators presided over courts and were presidents of the judiciary at each level of regional government. Clearly these concurrent powers were not conducive to judicious decisions.

In addition, the entire judicial system was managed by the Imperial Ministry of Justice, an old establishment founded by Menelik II in 1908 and reorganized in 1943. The Ministry had power to ensure the nominations, re- appointments, promotions, removals and retirements of judges. The system was ancient and had no clear discernible patterns of promotions and transfers. Girma Amare noted (1973, 34) that, in some "instances judges have been transferred five or six times within a year. The situation contributed to protracted hearings." The tenure of judges was not fixed either. The Ministry could remove judges swiftly. Thus, according to Girma (1973, 51), "Without tenure, decent remuneration and strong constitutional and statutory safeguards against removal, the concept of judicial independence was a mockery."

The reality was that ultimate power rested in the hands of the emperor, resulting in centralization or lack of democracy. Elected bodies had no real power. Also, the composition of parliament was uneven in terms of articulation of class interests. The upper house of parliament was staffed by the landed nobility. The Chamber of Deputies was a mixed bag, with some either self- chosen or privately promoted. The criterion for membership was financial. In some cases, candidates were well known persons of integrity. In other cases, they were sons of the nobility who insisted on exercising their "right" to be the spokesmen for "their" community. Thus "democratization" during the period of Haile Selassie's rule proved to be a chimera.

The 1955 constitution, in many aspects, was more centralizing as it vested all power in the empire in the hands of the emperor. James Paul and Christopher Clapham (1967) suggested that the constitution was prepared to ameliorate the coming federalism with Eritrea, which, as a protectorate of Britain, was enjoying a sort of emerging democracy. However, the revised constitution and Ethio-Eritrean Federation of 1952 were failures because consolidation of power under Haile Selassie and Eritrean social formation were incompatible. Eritrean resistance began in 1961 because of the abrogation of the federal principle; it was to last some thirty years, triggering rebellions among other regional group.

Further Resistance and Ethnic Nationalisms

The Gojjam rebellion had its antecedents in the postwar years when the province was rocked by agitation, partly due to strong group identity and partly because the province had produced strong resistance leaders during the Italo-Ethiopian War. The introduction of a system of land taxation proved to be the last straw. The taxation was "universally perceived as a dangerous infringement upon the kinship-based landholding system, which granted control over subsistence

(Gebru 1991, 166-67). Thus the spark that ignited the rebellion in the region was the 1968 Agriculture Income Tax, whose collection was to be implemented by a ruthless law-and-order fanatic and Shoan governor (Nega 1970). The state's response to the rebellion was to send in the army. When this did not work, the governor was removed, ringleaders of the rebellion were co-opted, and finally the income tax was indefinitely postponed.

Another incipient movement during this period was the rise of Oromo nationalism. The Oromos, one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, populated a large region producing most of the nation's commercial crops and containing most of the industrial establishments. At the turn of the century, Oromo traditional leaders held power under the Abyssinian system of indirect rule. Some had become the ablest Ethiopian generals under Menelik, helping expand the empire. Eventual intermarriage between prominent Oromo families and Abyssinian aristocracy and royalty began a trend toward assimilation among the leaders.

However, for the majority of the Oromo, the situation was different. Land belonging to peasants and pastoralists was appropriated by political elites. As a result, the Oromo were relegated to positions as wage earners in the industrial belt of the highlands. In addition, Oromo representation in the educational establishments was minimal and thus upward mobility was curtailed. Thus proletariatization and discrimination contributed to class as well as ethnic consciousness among the Oromo (Markakis 1987). Although actual Oromo nationalism emerged when the intelligentsia of the 1960s formed the Metcha and Tulama Association, which was permitted by the government, the nationalism may have had its roots in the Italo-Ethiopian War. According to Markakis (1987, 259), during the war the Raya and Azebo Oromo in the north rebelled against the state and Oromo traditional leaders in Wollegga and Jimma in the west and made an attempt "to forestall Italian occupation by detaching the predominantly Oromo region from the wreckage of the Ethiopian Empire and placing it under British Protection" without much success.

In any case, the Metcha and Tulama Association, which had social and welfare functions and consisted of leading Oromo intelligentsia, was banned by the state because the association had allegedly raised the issue of land. Its leaders were imprisoned, exiled, or killed. However, the brief life of the Metcha and Tulama Association was to prove an important experience as it sowed the seeds of increased Oromo nationalism and laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

In 1963 the southern region of Bale was in open rebellion. This region, ethnically composed of Somalis and Oromos, was mostly Muslim, bordered on the East by Harar province and on the south by the Somali Republic and the contested region of the Ogaden. Incipient nationalism, religion and the gabbar system of land ownership proved to be galvanizing forces for discontent against centralizing Christian highland rule. Gebru Tareke (1991, 125) noted that the revolt was ignited by “a combination of grievances stemming from maldistribution of political and administrative powers, land alienation, taxation, ethnic hostility, religious discrimination and ecological imbalance.”

Centralization had been achieved and maintained through imperial land grants, which created an enlarged bureaucracy and changes in the method of collecting taxes. The system of land ownership favored the state and the nobility at the expense of other groups, producing land alienation and, at times, outright confiscation by highland settlers. In addition, the rise of towns and commercial farming removed various groups from their plots, affecting pastoralists and their livestock along the Awash River. The result was marginalization as these groups were pushed more and more into unproductive areas. These were the general causes of the Bale rebellion, but the revolt also involved Somali irredentism and the Ogaden question. The rebellion progressed through a myriad of intricate ethnic alliances and long periods of unrest continuing well into the 1970s until it was finally quelled by the state through a combination of co-optation and force. In 1966 the Ethiopian state began tentative steps towards decentralizing the government. The motive was not to permit group autonomy, but to allow limited local administration in order to promote and facilitate development (Ethiopia, Imperial Government 1966, 8-11). The Local Self-Administration Decree was supported by some political elites and rejected by others. The Decree recognized “that the excessively centralized state administration was unable to cope with modern technological changes and increasing social pressures (Tegegne 1986, 138).” The idea of decentralization was first expressed by the Ministry of the Interior and later supported by a number of provincial governors for two conflicting reasons. The former wanted a more responsive and development oriented administrative structure and control over the provincial governors and local authorities. The latter aspired to greater local autonomy from the central government. In other words, decentralization was seen by local officials as a way of consolidating control over local resources.

The Local Self-Administration Decree, proved to be ineffectual. In retrospect, regional self-government with some degree of autonomy would have gone a long way towards ameliorating regional conflict. However, the intent of the legislation was rural development and not self-government. At the village level, implementation of the decree was considerably watered down. In theory, awraja (sub-province) councils were to be elected in some regions and “powers” given to the people. In practice, the councils were advisory bodies without legislative powers. The awraja administrator, who was appointed by the central government, chaired the council and at the same time was the head of the local administration. In this manner, the center both supervised and controlled all activities at the local level (Asmerom 1967, 62).

The decree also called for the transfer of land and other taxes from the central government treasury to the awraja so that the awraja could finance development of infrastructure. The transfer, however, was never implemented because it was perceived by the aristocracy in parliament as a threat to its class interests. The center, too, had second thoughts, fearing the reform might encourage parochial views and strengthen separatist tendencies (Tegegne 1986, 141). Thus while serious structural difficulties existed in regional administration, two additional problems were present. The first was the fact that strategy of ruling through autonomous provincial governors contributed to regional remoteness and precipitated conflict. In the past, power was balanced between the center, representing the emperor, and regional governors. However, in time, the balance of power shifted in favor of the emperor. The effect was increased centralization and decreased regional influence on the state.

Second, indirect rule, for the most part, was not exercised. Exceptions were in Tigray, Jimma, and Afar, where hereditary rule prevailed, and to an extent Wollega (Western Oromo), where leading families had intermarried with the Crown. As Christopher Clapham (1975, 74-75) noted, “In striving to create a strong central power, the government has liberated itself from dependence on regional support, and in so doing has largely cut itself off from the political forces being generated at the periphery.” The view from the center was basically administrative, weakening any nascent regional autonomy as much as possible. The regions must be pacified, controlled, and, with any luck, developed. In time, the isolation of the center from the regions was to prove fatal to the ancien regime and, later on, to democratization prospects in the nation.

The Military Regime and Garrison Socialism

The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 was essentially an urban breakthrough and a reaction by the masses to the ancient class system. The immediate causes were both internal and external. Externally, the oil crisis of the early 1970s raised gasoline prices in urban centers and precipitated strikes by Addis Ababa taxi drivers. The discontent spread to involve students, trade unionists, and the military. Internally, the realities of the Great Famine of 1973 were exposed. The government’s inability to cope with the famine and attempt to hide the truth sealed the government’s fate. However, even before the oil crisis and the famine, discontent among the urban middle class and petit bourgeoisie was rife, particularly among the latter, as it could no longer be absorbed in the backward economy.

The Ethiopian Revolution

The Ethiopian Revolution was swift and, at the same time, a slow process. It was swift in that the mass uprising caught the ancien regime, the military, and the various clandestine revolutionary organizations at home and abroad by surprise. At the same time, the revolution took a long time: Although it erupted in 1974, the actual seizure of power by the military did not occur until about 1977. The Ethiopian Revolution began with a creeping coup to dispose Haile Selassie, then went through a series of alliances with a variety of civilian revolutionary organizations resulting in subterfuges and competition for power. Dessalegn Rahmato (1987) divided the revolution into three major periods.

The first period (1974-75) was populist, characterized by euphoria. The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) courted the general public by touting Ethiopia Tikdem (Ethiopia First) and Hibbrettesebawint (communalism), which it described as “involving equality, self-reliance, the dignity of labor, the supremacy of the common good and the indivisibility of the nation” (Dessalegn 1987, 157). This period was a time of political experimentation, with the establishment of a shengo, or parliament, the initiation of land reform, and the nationalization of urban land and rental houses. Some of these reforms were designed to eliminate the opposition, mainly the landed element, gain legitimacy, consolidate power, and placate and win the support of the politically active elements in the urban areas.

The second period (1975-1977), was characterized by political confrontations and struggles for power. In this period, the country descended into total chaos as the military regime, the Derg, threatened by internal as well as external enemies, fought for its own survival. The end result, in which the Derg came out victorious, was a deep rupture in state-society relations. Thus in this crucial period the course of future events was determined. The urban left, mainly the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (known by the Amharic acronym MESON) entered into a protracted struggle for power. These two sectarian groups were opposed not only to the military regime, but to each other as well, and the hostility led to massive repression by the Derg, culminating in the Red Terror and the eventual elimination of both groups.

The third period (1978-89) was a time of consolidation and institutionalization of power. The military became the supreme authority in the land. The Derg adopted Marxism-Leninism as a guiding principle under the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam and established the Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE).

Government Structures

In 1987, the PDRE drafted a constitution that established a supreme court (article 7) and declared the independence of the judiciary (article 104) (Ethiopia, Provisional Military Government 1987). In theory, the supreme court of the PDRE was separate from the executive branch and accorded autonomy. The power of the Ministry of Justice was limited to administrative matters. Judges were elected by the national shengo or (parliament) and appointed for life but could be removed by the head of state or the shengo. The supreme court was vested with the authority to supervise the judicial functions of all courts in the country. In terms of regions, judicial authority was vested in courts of “administrative and autonomous” units in order to “safeguard the legally guaranteed rights, interests, freedoms of the state, mass organizations [and] other associations and individuals” (Ethiopia, Provisional Military Government 1987, Article 100, 106). Moreover, the judges of the supreme courts were elected by the shengo and regional judges by respective regional shengo.

In addition, Article 7 recognized the independence of judges to adjudicate free from any interference by any authority. Judges were also guaranteed immunity, while in office, from removal by anyone except the national shengo. However, the president and vice president of the supreme courts were elected by the shengo upon presentation by the president of the republic. Thus, while the PDRE did away with the archaic judicial system of the imperial era, the Derg was in power for seventeen years and its rule was characterized by dictatorship and absolute control.

After the Derg consolidated power and created the Peoples Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), decision making was overcentralized in order to transform the country into a socialist state. As Clapham observed (1991, 244- 45), the Derg created entities that served as

> intermediary between central power and social economic base […]. [It] establish[ed] a new institutional control, the drastic reorganization of the economic base of state power and a selective widening of political representation.

These entities provided “directive linkage” between the center and local areas. A centralized party apparatus emanated from the center and spread web-like to the village level, maintaining coercive control over the population. It was used to control production as well as restrict political freedoms, movement, and access to resources. The first of these linkages was the Urban Dwellers Association Kebelles, the All-Ethiopia Peasant Associations (AEPA), and producers' cooperatives. The Urban Dwellers Association, a variant of local self-administration, was designed to manage urban dwellings and the AEPA to implement land reforms. The Derg also created the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA) and the Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA), mobilizing the majority of Ethiopia's population.

Renewed Ethnic and Regional Nationalisms

In short, the increased monopoly of state power and the selective political representation based solely on ideology shut out a variety of groups. In addition, the pan-Ethiopian ideology of the regime was not accepted by Eritrea, which was seeking independence, and it came into conflict with other group nationalisms that were in formation. The dominant ones were those espoused by the Tigray, the Oromo, and the Afar. A critical bone of contention, besides power, among these groups was the "national question." This issue, which had its genesis in the student movement at Addis Ababa University and abroad in the 1960s, produced factions and cleavages around application to Ethiopia. Many groups adopted the Marxist interpretation: acceptance of self-determination rights up to and including secession of Ethiopia's nationalities. This conviction, coupled with the Ethiopian Revolution, exposed the vulnerability of previous ethnic arrangements, led to democratic aspirations among ethnic elites, and provided the stimulus to organize along ethno-regional lines.

Group nationalisms were strengthened by brutal state repression. Although the regime adopted the Soviet model of the state, it did not adhere to the principle of self-determination for Ethiopia's ethnic regions. During the heyday of Ethiopian Marxism, the Derg established the Institute of Nationalities, which was entrusted with the responsibility of formulating administrative structures that would fit the country's nationality configuration. The recommendation of the institute was that administrative divisions based on ethnic groups would not serve the objectives of administrative efficiency and economic development. Thus the 1987 constitution of the military regime "provided for the division of the country into administrative and autonomous regions and left the determination of their size to be governed through bylaws" (Andargachew 1993, 281). The result was five autonomous regions and twenty-two administrative areas. As to the question of self-determination for these ethnic communities, the regime concluded that no ethnic or language group had reached the stage of development that would qualify it to be called a nation or to exercise an unrestricted right of self-determination, including the right to establish its own independent state.

Reflecting this decision, Ethiopia's Marxist-Leninst constitution, while affirming the principles of equality of nationalities under a unitary state, foreclosed the right of secession (Ethiopia, Peoples' Democratic Republic 1987). However, this official decision did not prevent any regional or ethnic group in Ethiopia from defining itself as a nation.

The most important regional movement was that of Eritrea. The Eritrean independence movement started under Haile Selassie, with Eritrea claiming to be an independent country based on historical grounds. In the 1960s the Eritrean resistance to the central government produced two groups: the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF). The factional struggle between the two fronts was long and bitter, involving many issues and lasting for years until the EPLF emerged in the 1970s as the most important and formidable movement. Its source of strength lay in its organizational skills, discipline, and self-reliance. It was able to offer stiff resistance to the regime and to overcome two huge campaigns, directed by Soviet and Cuban advisors, launched to destroy it. The stalemate between Eritrea and the central power was broken when the Tigray region entered the war.

Tigray was a quiet region in the early 1970s, until educated Tigrayans began to organize in order to resist the central government. The region, under both the ancien and military regimes, was simply a forgotten zone. It was famine- prone due to thousands of years of agricultural practices that degraded the ecology. It had little industry even by Ethiopian standards and no investments to speak of. It was an impoverished region, so Tigrayans migrated to other places in search of livelihood. As Markakis noted (1987, 251), the combination of famine and poverty together with the imposition of the Amharic language in the 1940s "in a province where, even in the mid-1970s, only 12.3 per cent of the males claimed to speak the former [Amharic] language and only 7.7 per cent could read it […] resulted in serious difficulty and greater resentment."

The result of the above on the evolution of the Tigrayan elite was that very few qualified for the university and those that at the "top of the education ladder felt pessimistic about their future prospects in the service of the state where most of the senior officials were from Shoa.[…] It was within this miniscule Tigrai intelligentsia that dissident nationalism took root" (Markakis 1987, 252). Thus, when political upheaval overthrew the old regime, in 1974- 75, Tigrayan nationalists were already constructing the beginnings of a regional movement, later to be known as the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), and subsequently linked up with the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, a military solidarity that sealed the fate of the military regime at the center.

Meanwhile, in the southern half of the country, Oromo nationalism was stirring again, organized by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF viewed the Oromo issue as colonial. The objective of the group was to gain independence for Oromia. However, the Oromos lived dispersed throughout most regions of the country, and a unified resistance to authoritarian rule was to prove elusive for some time. Some Oromo scholars maintain that the dispersion may have been a deliberate policy of past Abyssinian rulers. Asafa Jalata wrote (1993, 160-61):

> In order to create cultural and perceptional differences among the Oromo, the colonial government divided them in to ten regions: Wallo, Shoa, Hararge, Bale, Arsi, Sidamo, Gamu Gofa, Ilubabor, Wallaga and Kaffa. Furthermore it incorporated some Oromos into Gojjam and Tigray to destroy their identity by isolating them from their own people.

In the case of Eritrea, for example, the seeds for the independence movement were sown in the late 1950s by lowland Muslims who hailed from Karen and Sahel (Markakis 1987, 105-106). These groups had been emasculated politically and had no economic stake in the Ethiopian state. Later on, because of increased repression by the state, the movement was able to attract highland Christians, among whom were workers and students. Moreover, in later years, increased nationalism and tenacity coupled with demographic concentration seem to have prevented state consolidation. Eritrea for a long time was administered tenuously by various military governors sent from Addis Ababa.

Tigray, too, shared a peculiar history of nationalism along with a deep memory of the failed Woyane Rebellion. Moreover, its close proximity to Eritrea not only made it a target, but also led to increased solidarity with Eritrea. In time, the TPLF created an umbrella organization, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was mainly composed of the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Forces (EPDM) operating in Gondar and Wollo and included the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Afar Liberation Front (ALF). Eventually, the EPRDF managed to defeat the military regime in Addis Ababa.

The decline and collapse of the state at the hands of regional forces may be explained as follows: First, the state's abysmal record of human rights had alienated it from the population and weakened it. Second, although the regime had built structures for consolidating political power, the structures rested on a weak economic base. The result was economic crisis brought on by the colossal cost of the war and the regime's economic policy of "villagization," which undermined agricultural production. This policy led to the famine of 1984-85 and was used in the north as an instrument of counterinsurgency. Third, the results of the land reform were mixed as the peasantry ended up by paying various taxes and fees to state functionaries and organizations. Fourth, a crisis occurred within the regime as evidenced by the aborted coup of 1989. The crisis was partly created by the increased conscription and mobilization into the military and tenacity of the Eritrean, Tigrayan and Oromo groups and the resultant military defeats. Finally, international alliances crumbled. The demise of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which had supported the regime ideologically and militarily, bankrupted the regime's legitimacy.

Emergence of the Transitional State

In May 1991, the combined forces of the EPRDF and the EPLF overthrew the government of the People's Republic of Ethiopia. The EPLF immediately established a provisional government in Eritrea, ending decades of incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia. In July 1991, twenty-eight political organizations plus a representative of Addis Ababa University met in Addis Ababa to draft a new national charter. Marxist and other groups mostly "opposed to the EPRDF's leadership role" were not included (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs 1992, 14).

The participants in the "Democratic and Peaceful Transitional Conference" unanimously approved the Transitional Period Charter, which became the supreme law of the land. The charter created the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, which in turn mandated the Council of Representatives to prepare a new constitution and schedule national elections within two and a half years (Ethiopian Herald 1991, 1-2). The Transitional Period Charter is important. Its emphasis on ethnic group rights as a solution to past repression ushered into the country both democratization/decentralization and two types of nationalisms: ethnic and pan-Ethiopian. The first is the assertion of ethnic group rights and identification based on cultural manifestations. The second is the older Ethiopian identity adhered to by various groups. An overview of the process of the conference is critical in comprehending the emerging state and contending conceptions of the nation.

The National Conference

The July 1991 national conference convened in Addis Ababa by the EPRDF was composed of many political groups that had contributed to the demise of the former regime. It included, as an observer, a member of Addis Ababa University. The Ethiopian national conference was typical of conferences held throughout Africa during the 1990s but was also different because it was organized by regional groups that overthrew an authoritarian regime through armed struggle with the intention of forming a government through a peaceful process.

The Transitional Period Charter established a transitional government, made up of a president, a prime minister, and an ethnically mixed eighty-seven- member Council of Representatives, the supreme legislative and executive authority during the transition period. The head of the state chaired the Council of Representatives and the Council approved the prime minister’s nomination of members of the Council of Ministers and the cabinet, which were to work under its direction. The charter established a transitional government with only two arms-- legislative and executive--which were fused under the head of the state. Article 8 of the charter mandated the Transitional Government to 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” (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1991a, 3). The Council of Representatives was composed of national liberation movements, political organizations, and eminent individuals and workers. The seats in the council were distributed among the EPRDF and other organizations that accepted the charter and acknowledged the central role of the EPRDF in running the country.

Table 1
Ethiopian Peace and Democracy Conference Participants

Afar Liberation Front (ALF)
All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO)
Benishangul Peoples Liberation Front (BLF) Burji
Peoples Democratic Organization (BPDO)
Ethiopian Democratic Action Group (EDAG)
Ethiopian Democratic Coalition (EDC)
Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM)
Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU)
Ethiopian National Democratic Organization (ENDO)
Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM)
Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)
Gambella Peoples Democratic Front (GPDF)
Guraghe Peoples Democratic Front
Hadiya National Democratic Organization (HNDO)
Harari National League (HNL) Horiyal
Democratic Front (HDF)
Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromo (IFLO)
Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front (IGLF)
Kaffa Peoples Democratic Union (KPDU)

Kembatta Peoples Congress (KPC) Oromo
Abo Liberation Front (OALF) Oromo
Liberation Front (OLF)
Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) Sidamo
Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) Tigray Peoples
Liberation Front (TPLF)
United Oromo People's Liberation Front (UOPLF)
Wolayita Peoples Democratic Front (WPDF) Workers
Representatives (WR)
Addis Ababa University

Source: Compiled from Olaf Neubner, 1992, Ethiopian Political Organizations, Addis Ababa: n.p., mimeo, pp. 1-35.

The Transitional Government

The Council of Representatives started off with twenty-four liberation, political, and other organizations as its members. At the end of August 1991, its membership increased to twenty-nine with the allocation of the remaining six seats fixed by the charter to new political organizations. Eligibility requirements and allocation of seats in the Council of Representatives seem to have been based on two criteria: participation in the struggle to overthrow the military regime and commitment to a peaceful and democratic method of resolving differences. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of seats in the transitional government (TGE) after several organizations, such the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)--which had twelve seats--the All-Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO), the Ethiopian Democratic Action Group (EDAG), groups from the Southern Peoples region, a representative of Addis Ababa University, and others departed.

Of the remaining sixty-six seats, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which helped found the EPRDF, and its partners--the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM), and the Ethiopia Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement-- took thirty-two. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which later withdrew, took twelve seats. The Afar Liberation Front (ALF), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromo (ALF), and the Workers' Representatives, each received three seats. Each of the three pan-Ethiopian groups and many other smaller ethnic groups received one seat.

The Council of Representatives was mandated the task of fleshing out the principles enshrined in the National Charter, including the guarantee of individual rights as well as the rights of nations and nationalities to self-determination

(Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1991a, Article 2).

Table 2

Distribution of Seats in TGE Council of Representatives

Group	No. Seats
Afar Liberation Front	3
Agew Peoples Democratic Front	1
Benishangul Peoples Liberation Front	2
Burji Peoples Democratic Organization	1
Ethiopian Democratic Coalition	1
Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU)	1
Ethiopian National Democratic Organization	1
*Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF)	10
*Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM)	10
*Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO)	10
*Ethiopia Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement	2
Gamebella Peoples Democratic Front	2
Guraghe Peoples Democratic Front	2
Harari National League	1
Horyal Democratic Front	1
Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromo	3
Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front	1
Kembatta Peoples Congress	2
Kaffa Administrative Region Peoples Democratic Union	2
Oromo Abo Liberation Front	1
United Oromo People’s Liberation Front	1
Wolayita People’s Democratic Front	2
Workers Representative	3
Western Somali Liberation Front	2
Yem Peoples Movement	1
Total	66

**Part of* EPRDF *coalition*

Source: Ethiopia, Transitional Government, 1994, *Council of Representatives*, Addis Ababa, mimeo, pp. 1-5.

Article 13 of the National Charter provided for

> establishing local and regional councils for local administrative purposes defined on the basis of nationality. Elections for such local and regional councils shall be held within three months of the establishment of the Transitional Government, wherever local conditions allow. (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1991a, Article 13)

The charter envisioned the establishment of a new democratic order at the end of the transition period. During the transition, the rights of nations were realized through the establishment of regional councils defined on the basis of ethnicity and constituted through regional elections. A number of measures were undertaken to establish democratic institutions that would flesh out the spirit of the charter and prepare the groundwork for new democratic state structures. Preparations were made for regional elections and adoption of a new economic policy. However, prior to regional elections, in November 1991, the Council of Representatives deliberated on a report from the Regional Boundary Affairs Committee and restructured the regions on language criteria.

The charter legalized self-determination for all of Ethiopia's ethnic communities, preserved national identities within a federated format, and established national/regional self-governments (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992c, 4-10). Further legislation set up fourteen regions. Five of the regions subsequently merged to become the Southern Region, thus creating ten regions for the country in all. Those self-governing regions, including the two chartered cities, were vested with powers over all matters except defense, foreign affairs, economic policy, conferring of citizenship, state of emergency, currency, and major development projects and infrastructure. The regions constituted fifty- six zones and 676 districts, or woredas.

The Transitional Government and Regional Elections

Pursuant to the above, the Transitional Government established an election commission and criteria for regional elections (Ethiopia, Transitional Government. 1992d, 28-37). Armed units maintained by different liberation fronts were disbanded and kebelle (grass-root unit) and woreda (sub-district) provisional administrations were selected for "snap" elections. However, these elections did not go smoothly but were contentious for many reasons. To begin with, they were not traditional elections with conventional campaigns and secret ballots. Rather, kebelles organized meetings for the purpose of electing leaders, who would then serve on kebelle election commissions and manage polling sites in regions. According to the Joint International Observers Group (JIOG), the meetings in several regions were organized with little difficulty. However, the actual elections encountered immense challenge, resulting in "problems of control over candidate nominations. and nullification of a number of election results" (National Democratic Institute 1992, 24). The view from Addis Ababa on irregularities was mixed. Some officials claimed the elections were vital exercises; others considered them learning experiences whose results needed to be evaluated and corrected (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992a, 3). In time the OLF claimed that "its offices have been closed, its members detained and its candidates imprisoned." The group withdrew to seek autonomy for Oromia (Oromo Liberation Front1992, 2-3). Nearly a year later, in April 1993, the Ethiopian Democratic Action Group (EDAG) also withdrew. Four other political organizations that were members of the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Coalition also departed because they committed themselves to stand by the decision of the Paris Conference on Peace and Reconciliation, which called for the dissolution and replacement of the Transitional Government. After the regional elections, the Transitional Government defined the powers and duties of regional governments as well as a mechanism for the sharing of revenue between center and regions, in effect mapping out a federal future for the country (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992e, 1993).

The regional elections in Ethiopia took place in the presence of international observers, who gave mixed reports. The elections were plagued by problems associated with organization, logistics, and inter-ethnic tensions. Furthermore, the elections were conducted in a country with no tradition of elections, no civic education, no political parties, and no parliamentary training. Some observers suggested that, even with the difficulties and flaws, the regional elections marked a step forward (National Democratic Institute 1992, 74- 75). Others were very critical and commented that the elections were flawed by intimidation by the ruling party and its supporters. They claimed that the problem "was not lack of civic education but lack of political will at the top" (National Democratic Institute 1992, 75).

The Making of the New Ethiopian Constitution

A major highlight of Ethiopia's transitional process was the making of a new constitution. The Council of Representatives was mandated to establish a constitutional commission (see Table 3.3) whose duty was to draw up a draft constitution. The commission was to submit a draft to the Council of Representatives for approval and discussion by the people. The draft was to be presented to the Constituent Assembly, elected pursuant to the final draft, for adoption. According to the charter, elections for the National Assembly, to which the Transitional Government would hand over power, had to be held within two years of the formation of the transitional government in July 1991. In practice, national elections did not occur until June 1995.

The drafting of the constitution was a protracted process that took three years. It revealed cleavages between pan-Ethiopian and ethnic nationalists within the commission. Although the country was already regionalized and a federal form of governance inevitable, the commission prepared an issue paper that entertained several systems and forms of governance. The paper contained several precepts of constitutional government: the structure of the state, the composition of parliament, rights of nationalities, languages, human rights, private property, and so forth. The intention was to present choices to the people after which, through a polling mechanism, decisions would be included in the draft constitution.

The commission concentrated on the need for and principles of a democratic constitution, the fundamental principles of human rights, the right of nations to self-determination, the state structure, and implications of the constitution for economic conditions of the country (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1991c, 8. The basic provisions of the constitution did not pose much difficulty and several caveats were agreed upon. First, the constitution was seen as a contract between government and the people and rule by law was considered necessary.

Table 3

Drafters of the New Ethiopian Constitution

Group	Representation
Ethiopian National Democratic Organization	Chairman (1)
Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement	Secretary (1)
Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization	1
Kaffa Peoples Democratic Union	1
Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front	2
Southern Ethiopia Peoples Coalition	2
Harari National League	2
Labor	2
Forum 84	1

Ethiopian Democratic Union (Monarchist)	1
Ethiopian Lawyers Association	2
Ethiopian Medical Association	2
Ethiopian Teachers Association*	2
Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce	1
Ethiopian Women's Association	1
Ethiopian Union Party	2
Ethiopian Moslem League	1

Source: Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1993, Constitutional Commission, Addis Ababa, n.p., mimeo.

* *There were two Ethiopian Teachers Associations. The other was in the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy (CAFPD). Both claimed to legitimately represent teachers.*

Second, although the commission recognized that a democratic constitution was no panacea for the nation's economic woes, it believed that a constitution could promote eventual economic development by providing stability. Third, the commission felt that the constitution should be flexible enough to cope with future difficulties (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992f, 1). Fourth, in discussions of basic concepts for inclusion in an issue paper to be presented for nation-wide debate, the chairman insisted that agreements be made by consensus rather than votes.

Although space does not permit the discussion of all issues the commission addressed, the highlights of the deliberations are presented below. The basic premise underlying the deliberations was the need to establish a constitution that emphasized democratic principles such as election of leaders by the people, accountability, transparency, limits on government, special attention to minority groups, and the rights of political parties. A second item was the electoral system. The commission entertained several ideas: simple plurality, majority, proportional representation, the conduct of elections by secret ballot, and frequency of elections. A third issue was the delineation of human, social, and economic rights. A fourth was the form of government—unitary or federal— and the structures that would support it. Finally, the commission debated the appropriate government organs and division of powers. It endorsed ideas of ideas of unicameralism, regional representation, and an independent judiciary (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1992g, 1-5.

Of all the issues discussed, group rights was the most contentious. In particular, members of the Ethiopian Unity and Monarchist parties, who later quit the commission, were of the view that "ethnic group self-determination up to secession," should not be granted. They believed, in light of centrifugal tendencies, that using the term "secession" was a dangerous precedent (Ethiopia, Transitional Government 1994, 2). However, others, particularly those from ethnic groups, argued that constitutions of other countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia included such provisions and language. They felt that the recognition of ethnic group rights, including the right of secession was a key to peace and stability in the country.

Equally divisive was the question of economic rights, particularly concerning land and urban housing, which were still in limbo after being nationalized by the previous regime. The conservatives in the commission, the Chamber of Commerce, and pan-Ethiopianists viewed privatization of property as an economic right and wanted it emphasized in the issue paper. However, others, such as the Ethiopian Democratic Movement and Labor, which seemed to favor socialist views, and members of ethnic groups, took an opposing position. In the end, all agreed to leave the question to a future referendum by the people. Table 3.4 shows the results of that referendum. In the referendum, the people of Ethiopia voted on seventy-three issues pertaining to the future constitution. According to polls taken by the government, the overwhelming consensus, based on the kebelle and woreda voting, supported a federal form of government based on ethnic regions. In 1994/95, the draft constitution, which adhered to the principles of concurrent powers and referendum, was approved by the Council of Representatives. Eventually, after modification, it was also approved by a newly elected constituent assembly, which instructed the transitional government to start the process of the election of a new government.

Conclusion

The relationship between state and society in Ethiopia has undergone three transformations: from the imperial era to military rule to the beginning of a democratic state. Each stage involved unique state-society struggles. However, all stages shared a basic common denominator: an attempt to solve the crisis in state-society relations. The basis of political power under the ancien regime was rural and political power was centralized. A half-hearted imperial attempt at decentralization and, later, representative government failed, ushering in an urban breakthrough that became known as the Ethiopian Revolution. The regime that followed proved to be even more authoritarian and sought to solve its crisis by more centralization, which led to increased societal resistance. Both regimes dealt with societal problems through centralization and undemocratic rule. They shared a pan-Ethiopian conception of the state and failed to address regional aspirations.

This overview of the road to democratization in Ethiopia has demonstrated the following: First, the transition from the emperorship of Menelik II to the later period of consolidated centralized rule under Haile Selassie may be characterized as a transition from patrimonialism to bureaucratic autocracy. In other words, the modern political history of Ethiopia is the story of a transition from a decentralized form of patrimonial rule to bureaucratic centralism, with the emperor Haile Selassie constituting an “elite of one” (Levine, 152). The bureaucratic centralism was followed by the military regime, which monopolized political power through a tightly centralized party apparatus and instituted authoritarian rule. The new state leaders of the transition undertook to solve the state-society crisis through, or territorial decentralization that would allow ethnic groups to choose how they are governed and represented ushering a federal republic.

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