

7 The Organization and Observation of Elections in Federal Ethiopia: Retrospect and Prospect

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INTRODUCTION¹

In several strands of political theory, multi-party elections are considered as a prerequisite for real and effective democracy: in order to let the people exercise choice between programmes and candidates without the outcome being a foregone conclusion. In Africa, multi-party elections are seen by the Western donor community and the UN as one of the most important ingredients of the political democratization process in Africa, and international election observers have been a familiar part of the political landscape in countries perceived as carrying a promise of democratization. Ethiopia has been one of these countries. Both for economic and political reasons, it has been, and still is, a popular country with the Western donor community (the EU, the USA, and also the World Bank) on a continent which has seen the so-called 'third wave' of democratization run into the sands of neo-autocracy and economic stagnation (cf. Lemarchand 1993; Ihonvbere 1996).

In this chapter I examine the nature of Ethiopia's recent process of post-1991 political change and its institutional underpinnings, in the light of questions of representativeness, legitimacy, and sustainability of democratization. The focus will be on the electoral processes that have taken place, while the role of (especially international) election observers in possibly enhancing liberalization and democracy in the country will also be discussed. The *economic* aspects of political liberalization will only be marginally dealt with here, although they are very important in the case of Ethiopia.

Since the fall of the communist Mengistu regime in May 1991, Ethiopia, one of the poorest² and most populous³ countries in Africa, has been experimenting with a political model based on ethnicity as an organizing principle. The country has now entered a phase of 'consolidation' of new political structures (see Lyons 1996) after a 'transitional period' of some three and a half years initiated by a 'National Conference of Peace and Reconciliation' in June 1991. The processes of both transition and consolidation were led by the victor in the long civil war in the north, the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front, allied with three other groups, largely its own creation,⁴ with which it forms the 'Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front' (EPRDF).

In any study of the contemporary Ethiopian political scene it is necessary to remember the adjective 'revolutionary' in the above party name: firstly because the democratic tradition as now espoused by this dominant party was shaped by its past allegiance to Marxism and to hegemonic vanguard-thinking as they emerged as elements of all revolutionary parties and liberation movements in Ethiopia in the 1970s, and secondly because the second adjective is qualified by the first in many important respects. The EPRDF differs, however, from the classic Marxist-inspired revolutionary movements in that it has emphasized ethnic relations (the 'nationalities question') as the main historical problem of Ethiopia, over and above questions of class and economic oppression.⁵

In 1994, after a transition period led by the EPRDF-dominated TGE (Transitional Government of Ethiopia), Ethiopia became a 'democratic federation', composed of nine 'regional states', and a 'city state' (Addis Ababa, which has its own separate charter since mid-1997).⁶ An anomaly is Dire Dawa, detached from the Somali Regional State in 1995 and directly ruled by the federal government after ethnic clashes and internal disorder. The regional states all bear the name of their majority ethnic group,⁷ except Gambela and the Southern Region (where more than 40 ethnic groups live).

Since 1991 there have been several rounds of elections in Ethiopia: the 1992 regional elections for local authorities, the 1994 Constituent Assembly elections, in 1995 the federal elections for the House of Peoples' Representatives, and in 1996 again elections on the local level for the *woredas* (districts) and

k'ebelles (local authorities). In all elections, the ruling EPRDF was victorious by a very wide margin and was never threatened in its power position at any level. These elections, though perceived to mark the advent of a new, more open political process, were in several respects peculiar. Before looking at the nature and function of the elections in federal Ethiopia, a brief survey of the country's political structure, institutions and party organization is needed.

DEMOCRACY AND ETHNICITY: THE ETHIOPIAN APPROACH

Ethiopia's political system, and by implication that of the elections, is based on an interesting but controversial assumption. Democratization is primarily seen as equalling the recognition and realization of 'nationality' rights, meaning of ethnic group rights. These include not only use of the 'indigenous' language, cultural expression, and regional self-administration, but also the 'unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession', as the new 1995 Constitution says in art. 39.1.⁸ While all kinds of individual rights are also generously recognized in the Constitution and the country is claimed to have the rule of law, the status and impact of the collective ethnic (nationality) rights tends to override all others. In the ideological view of the present Ethiopian regime, all previously suppressed ethnic groups⁹ in Ethiopia should realize their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity, preferably in their own region, and not be dominated by any other group, as was claimed to be the case in the empire state under Haile Sellassie and Mengistu. Ethnicity thus has made its entry in the *official* political discourse of Ethiopia and perhaps indeed of Africa.¹⁰

Part of the new democratized order is also the recognition of a private, independent press,¹¹ a definite improvement compared to the *Derg* period. Nevertheless, it is frequently harassed and lives in insecurity, with some ten to fifteen journalists in jail and independent papers and magazines feeling the threat of closure over their heads. These papers are neither freely available nor tolerated everywhere outside Addis Ababa.

Democratic thinking and institution-building was never well-developed in Ethiopia, which was, until 1974, an autocratic

monarchy allowing no organized opposition, and (after a three-year transitional period) from 1977 to 1991 a totalitarian communist republic. Even the revolutionary underground opposition movements of the latter period, like the EPRP,¹² had no clear idea of how democracy should institutionally be installed in a country without a sufficiently literate rural population, with substantial linguistic and regional diversity, and which lacked a more or less integrated, nation-wide middle class. The 'national question' (a Marxist-Leninist preoccupation popular in the Ethiopian student movement and the later liberation movements) was – next to the land question – declared to be the main socio-political problem of Ethiopia. The TPLF (started as an ethno-regional movement of young people, sidetracked by the new revolutionary regime in 1975 when it turned to oppressive violence to quell the struggle for democratic rights) came to power in the name of this nationalities issue (later phrased in terms of regional autonomy for Tigray, against centralist 'Shewan-Amhara'¹³ oppression), although the revolt was not started because of 'ethnic oppression' (compare Gebru 1991: 221). When the TPLF came to power, in combination with the EPLF in Eritrea, it imposed this model of ethnic rights and ethno-federation on the rest of the country.¹⁴ This is not the place to further discuss the history and the constitutional shaping¹⁵ of this issue (which, however, has great relevance for many other African countries). Suffice it to say that ethnic group identity has been declared the basis for the entire political process: for party formation, for the delineation of regions and electoral districts (gerrymandering), for registration of voters (ethnic group membership should be stated here), for eligibility of a candidate to one of the two chambers of parliament, and for the administration of local and regional governments (including appointments of administrators and civil servants). This is quite far-reaching but it is not easily imagined by Western observers what the implications are of this organizational model both in the political process and in everyday social relations between people. A region-based ethnic identity is both a resource and a label which all Ethiopians now have to work with, often overriding criteria like professional achievements or experience.¹⁶

Among the many African multi-ethnic polities, Ethiopia is the only one which recognizes ethnicity in such an explicit

manner as an organizing principle and goes to such an extent of de-emphasizing the idea of a unitary state and national identity.¹⁷ This is perhaps understandable in view of the recent history of ethno-regional violence in the country, but all the more ironic in one of the most ancient and strong central states that the continent has known.

THE POST-1991 POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The emergence of the post-*Derg*¹⁸ political structure has been conditioned largely by the blueprints of the TPLF, prepared before its entrance in Addis Ababa in May 1991. At this juncture there was little organized political life in Ethiopia: no active political parties, no strong civil society organizations, and no free press, everything having been either co-opted or eliminated by the Mengistu regime. The National Defence Forces had melted away in the final months of the civil war, and the EPRDF armed forces took over the role of national army. The EPRDF took the initiative in calling the National Conference mentioned above, the members of whom were invited – not elected – from a selection of ethnic and liberation organizations, and thus initiated the transitional period.

The stated aims of the EPRDF regime are a democratization of centralist structures of the old unitary state, decentralization of decision-making to the regions through devolution and federalization along ethnic lines (to prevent dominance of one group over others), a liberalized, more market-oriented economic development led by the agricultural sector, and a quest for economic self-sufficiency, for example in food production.

The new Constitution of federal Ethiopia, adopted in December 1994 by the House of Peoples' Representatives on 8 December 1994, and coming into effect on 21 August 1995, outlines the political structure of federal Ethiopia, to the effect that power of the federal government under the prime minister appointed from the dominant party is still the core element of the state, despite decentralization efforts. The upper house of parliament is the Federal Council, the 108 members of which are elected on the basis of ethnic representation by the regional parliaments. It is a body with little power, holding only two sessions annually. The second chamber, the 548-member House of

Peoples' Representatives, is formally the main legislative body, and is elected by the people through an intricate system of district elections with ethnic parties as the main contenders (see below). The House does not have the right of initiative and is in practice not a sufficient countervailing power *vis-à-vis* the executive.

The prime minister (the head of the EPRDF) is the most important political figure and is supported by a circle of advisers in the Prime Minister's Office and in the Ministries (under the Ministers themselves). Ministers and advisers are primarily accountable to the prime minister and not to the parliament. This in effect means that the EPRDF as a party is very powerful in shaping and executing national policy without meaningful debate or opposition. The President of the republic is a largely ceremonial figure.

It is also notable – but nothing surprising in the context of African politics – that not only key political positions but also numerous economic positions in Ethiopia have been occupied by newly appointed loyalists with a certain (Tigrawi) background. The privatization policy of the government (sale of state building companies, hotels, insurance companies, and book publishers) tends to reinforce this tendency. Opposition groups claim that members from other ethnic groups were massively replaced by loyalists regardless of their professional qualifications and experience. Neo-patrimonial traits on a seemingly ethnic basis are thus being retained in the Ethiopian political system – though this statement must be seen as a hypothesis which needs further substantiation.

POLITICAL PARTIES

In the wake of the democratization process started in 1991, numerous parties have been emerging in Ethiopia, with most of them having also been officially registered with the National Electoral Commission. Whether this is an index of a sustainable democratic process, however, remains to be seen. This point holds generally in Africa: compare the example of Kenya after president Moi's bow to 'multi-partyism', where the inter-group ethnic violence and unabashed 'divide-and-rule' politics of the reigning elite have led to more instability in the political

system and to a downturn in the national economy. In Ethiopia there are three problems with the parties: 1) Most of them have – by the clear admission of the EPRDF itself – been created from above as satellite parties of the ruling party for an ethnic constituency (and as there are about 80 recognized ethnic groups or nationalities, the number of parties can reach that number). We saw that the EPRDF itself was composed of groups claiming to represent the Tigrawi, the Oromo, the Amhara and the numerous southern peoples of Ethiopia. 2) Most parties are too recent and too poor in resources to have a significant constituency. They have no firm roots in the past, partly because of the systematic suppression of parties under previous regimes and the absence of a civic democratic tradition in a country where politics is regarded with deep suspicion by the population, especially after the 1976–8 ‘Red Terror’ period.¹⁹ The number of parties is also confusing to the wider public. Some of them emerged in response to harassment and persecution of certain populations (for example, the All-Amhara People’s Organization in 1992). 3) The government, and especially the EPRDF, are ambivalent in their attitude towards parties not associated with the regime, and also to the idea of political opposition as such. Scathing remarks and veiled threats are often heard, even by the Prime Minister.²⁰ There is no effort to cultivate the idea of issue politics and compromise. The EPRDF model of ethnic political organization may indeed also pre-empt the need for trans-ethnic issue parties, because, in its view the first condition for real democracy, next to the recognition of basic human rights, is the right to express and realize ethnic identity, through regional organization, ‘indigenous’ language use in education, and development of their respective cultural traditions.²¹

Be that as it may, there are many parties, and some of them have a vocal opposition to the government and the dominant party. None are so well organized as the EPRDF, the core of which (TPLF) was forged in seventeen years of guerrilla warfare. Under the present regime, the fact that these political parties have been emerging and recognized is less important than the fact that they virtually all have been formed on an ethnic basis, especially the EPRDF-supported ones (recognizable under their name of ‘democratic organization’ or ‘democratic movement’). Among almost all officially recognized ethnic

groups in Ethiopia there was a political party, sometimes two. (This proliferation of groups is presently being reduced by lumping together small groups adjacent to each other.)²²

The opposition parties also partly have an ethno-regional constituency: for example, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF, now outlawed because of its armed resistance to the government), the AAPO, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Union (SEPDU), the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF), or the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).²³ But one of the most important groups, the CAFPDE,²⁴ is not based on ethnicity, despite a predominance of Southern groups.

Although some parties (AAPO and CAFPDE) have been able to stage huge mass rallies, they have not had the opportunity to become a significant counter-force. They have no influence in the political process, also due to their past boycott of the electoral process. Government threats and harassment (arbitrary arrests, frequent confiscation of their papers and accounts, prevention of campaigning and, according to human rights groups, extra-judicial killings and kidnapping of party members) are reported to have contributed to this low profile. Especially in the rural areas, opposition party activity is not possible.

Hence, most opposition parties have felt marginalized from the start (since 1991). A case in point is the Oromo Liberation Front, which (despite its uncertain constituency and controversial political programme) has support among Oromo-speaking people: it was removed from the Transitional Government at the time of the first elections in June 1992. The same fate befell members of the Southern Coalition. As a result of this marginalization, most opposition parties boycotted the electoral process thereafter, not only because they were being harassed and downplayed, but also because they disagreed fundamentally on the ethnicized political structures put in place by the EPRDF as the very context and precondition for the electoral process.

ELECTIONS IN ETHIOPIA: THE HAILE SELASSIE AND MENGISTU YEARS

Present-day Uganda under Museveni has a non-party political system whereby individuals stand as political candidates for a

district and are judged by the voters on their programme and performance. The system has innovative aspects and does fulfil certain criteria for 'direct democracy', despite the fact that the position of the President and his party remains predominant. Few people know that a somewhat similar system was in force in the later years of Emperor Haile Sellassie's reign, with the exception that the Ethiopian system was more elitist and that the emperor's position was unassailable. The 1957 elections for the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) were the first elections which created the beginning of some kind of independent power bloc next to the emperor (Clapham 1969: 142). The members of the Chamber were elected under universal adult suffrage. Two candidates for each constituency were chosen. The number of deputies grew with the population and with the number of constituencies delineated. According to Clapham (1969: 143), each candidate stood 'on the strength of his personal connections in the district'. This meant in practice that candidates with social standing, wealth and a good network were most likely to stand and to win. It was not yet democracy. But there was genuine competition at least on the constituency level, and thus some measure of choice for the voters.

In the *Derg* period, there were also some sort of elections, but only between alternate candidates on the list of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, the single party. There was no real choice and no way to influence political decisions, and elections had the character of a mass mobilization to give the incumbent regime some stamp of approval (Dawit 1990: 68-9). The organizational work necessary for this was called in Amharic *dirigataw sera*, 'organizational operation', a euphemism for election engineering by political cadres on all levels to get the desired result. While in 1987 (year of the new Constitution and of the proclamation of the People's Democratic Republic) an effort was made to have representatives of all ethnic groups in the *Shengo* (the parliament), the real exercise of choice was never in the cards.

The *Derg* electoral system was thus a step backwards in the slow evolution of democratic elections that was begun under Emperor Haile Sellassie,²⁵ and it was of course utterly subverted by the systematic abuse of both the idea and practice of the rule of law in that period. Finally, neither under Haile Sellassie nor under the *Derg* were any international election observers ever present.

However, in assessing these previous episodes of elections in Ethiopia, one has to keep in mind an enduring characteristic of Ethiopian 'political culture': the lack of the idea of political neutrality and of equal competition of political groups. The 'taking of sides' was – and is – seen as inevitable in a political tradition where power emanates from above, either of a divine (up to Emperor Haile Sellassie) or of a secular-ideological (*Derg* and present regime) nature. Political power is also held to be indivisible and is grounded in ideas of a zero-sum game. This *a fortiori* also holds for the 'observation' of the political process, for example elections, either by domestic or foreign observers.

ELECTIONS UNDER EPRDF RULE: THE ORGANIZATION OF VICTORY (1992–6)

Background

Elections are only one of the aspects of the process of political reform in post-*Derg* Ethiopia, and perhaps not the most important one. They have, however, opened up a promise of democratic choice which might eventually lead to substantial representative democracy in the future, especially when combined with a reorientation of the political process away from confrontation politics, and a respecting of the free press and of the rule of law. In present conditions the EPRDF has a hegemonic position in determining the conditions and climate of politics and is creating interests which tie persons and elite groups to its power structure. It is out of the question that they would lose power, or would permit this to happen. EPRDF members, some in the parliament, to which I put the question of what would happen after possible electoral loss in the 1995 elections, did not understand what I was talking about: it was unthinkable that they would lose. The claim of course was that they had come to power with immense sacrifice for the whole of Ethiopia and had 'the mandate of the rural masses', but the subtext was that they just would not allow electoral loss. Indeed, the institutional and other resources of the EPRDF, as the governing party controlling the state apparatus and with its army as the ultimate pillar of support, were obvious (see Lyons 1996: 126–7).

Nevertheless, a good organization of the electoral victory was deemed necessary. The old term 'organizational operation' (see above) to describe the process is still applicable here, and the role of well-placed political activists or cadres was indispensable. This aspect indicates some of the continuity in Ethiopian political culture.

In assessing the elections, it is therefore essential to recognize the wider context and background of the power relations, the nature of regime politics and the political culture which shape the electoral process itself. In almost any African country, state power is deeply contested, and scarcity of resources and access to them evoke patron-client politics and elite rule. Combined with the gap between traditions of local democracy and law on the one hand and state politics on the other, this leads to persistent problems of legitimacy and accountability, which elections and multi-party activity cannot mitigate. This also means that *between* elections, a government resorts to other means to further its aims and assert its hegemony.

For instance, in Ethiopia the reform of public administration in the context of the 'democratization process' has brought some other, non-electoral, ways to replace administrators and political dignitaries. The most important one is the *gumgema*. This is a critical group evaluation session, in the presence of a candidate who has to defend his/her record and/or admit mistakes. If one fails to justify one's performance one is dismissed forthwith. This was a method already used by the EPRDF in a milder form in the guerrilla struggle, and its origins are not difficult to see. In the context of these 'evaluation sessions' there is room for manipulation, and also, the procedure is recognized neither in the Constitution nor in law. The *gumgema* is now the most widespread method to remove people from their job, and explains the extraordinarily rapid turnover of administrators and officials in the country in the last few years. Whether it can be considered as an asset to democracy and furthers good governance stands to be seen.²⁶

Elections: the First Round

The first elections under the EPRDF were those of 21 June 1992, for local governments (zones, districts (*woredas*), and local councils or *k'ebeles*). For the EPRDF they were a first experience

with nation-wide election,²⁷ but purposely not for national institutions. In the large majority of constituencies EPRDF candidates were chosen, often by default, because in many areas no political groups, parties or individuals had been forthcoming (all WPE personnel were removed and forbidden to stand). In most rural areas, local candidates had associated themselves quickly with the EPRDF and were thus elected or nominated. The EPRDF won with 96.6 per cent of the vote (1,108 of the 1,147 regional seats).

The preparations for these elections had been less than perfect in terms of voter education and campaigning. The aim of the EPRDF was to quickly gain a kind of mandate to consolidate its rule in the name of peace and stability (the local councils were called 'peace and stability' – committees) and go on with its transitional policy.

Due to alleged pressure and intimidation, groups like the OLF (which had a request for delay of the elections turned down) boycotted the elections and left the Transitional Government. A subsequent military conflict between forces of the OLF and the government was won by the latter. Mediation efforts between the EPRDF government and the opposition groups, with or without the support of Western intermediaries, failed, largely due to EPRDF refusal to budge (Lyons 1996: 129). Renewed secret negotiations between the two in 1997 have not yet led to a *rapprochement*.

The Second Round

In the course of 1993–4, a new Constitution was drafted, and elections for a *Constituent Assembly* (CA) were prepared by the Transitional Government, whose basis had been further narrowed by a forced exodus of 11 groups (including OLF in 1992 and the Southern Coalition in 1993) that disagreed with EPRDF policy.

The elections took place on 5 June 1994 and were the first on the national level after 1991. The political structure of new regions and ethnic districts had in the meantime been extended, and a complex procedure of voting on the basis of these districts was prepared. It implied that in regions predominantly inhabited by a certain ethnic group, a representative of other, 'non-ethnic' parties could not stand. This meant in effect that,

for instance in the Oromiya region, no 'Tigrawi' or 'Amhara' party could put up candidates. In the Tigray region, no party except the TPLF was allowed to run: on the 'obvious assumptions' that another ethnic party would have no support, and that a non-ethnic party could not represent the interests of the Tigrawi population. (The few trans-ethnic national parties which existed had few chances to make themselves known, and were often actively barred from campaigning in the regions. The first of these, the National Democratic Union, was denied free operation already in 1992 (though not officially banned), when it became successful in mobilizing mass support in Addis Ababa.)²⁸

In the nine regions and in Addis Ababa 548 candidates had to be chosen for the CA. Both the delineation of electoral districts, the selection and screening of candidates, and the technical aspects of the electoral procedure were well-planned, although again there was no serious multi-party campaigning or information dissemination for opposition candidates. The dominant position of the EPRDF, as the party organizing the process and as the authorities, needs no comment. The Norwegian team was the only serious observer group at these elections, and while they agreed that the procedures on election day itself were 'without violence and major flaws', they noted all kinds of small problems suggesting the underlying problem of EPRDF dominance prohibiting the free expression of choice (Pausewang 1994: 27-8). A domestic observer noted that the EPRDF had resorted 'to political gimmick and patronage' (Kassahun 1995: 133).

The opposition parties had been dissatisfied with the non-negotiated extension of the two-and-a-half-year transitional period by the EPRDF after the deadline of January 1994 (five months before the finalizing of the draft Constitution). They did not agree to the unilateral course of action taken by the EPRDF in imposing its new political order, its regionalization and its Constitution without national dialogue. Neither did they acquiesce in the creating of the ethnicized, compartmentalized framework for the elections. Hence they proclaimed a boycott, saying it was better not to participate at all than to win a few seats here and there in an unfair competition. In the actual election campaign, there were also repeated cases of intimidation and pressure by EPRDF soldiers and sympathizers.

Of the total of 1,471 candidates for the 548 seats, 534 were party candidates, while 936 were 'independents'. In fact there were only elections for 526 seats, because 22 candidates from officially recognized 'nationalities' with less than a 100,000 people (that is, the size of a constituency) automatically received a seat in the Assembly. This was seen as democratic, because they would otherwise be represented by members of the 'ethnic majority' in their district or region. It is democratic in the minimal sense of having direct group representation, but remarkably here again is the assumption that people can or should only be represented by their 'own' ethnic candidates. It goes without saying that these 22 delegates are loyal supporters of the EPRDF, on which they are totally dependent.

According to official statistics, only some 57 per cent of all eligible voters in Ethiopia participated in the 1994 elections. This is not as bad as in the US national elections, but still, with the massive mobilization effort of the EPRDF in the countryside, it was a disappointing result;²⁹ also in view of the manifest psychological and other pressure on especially the poorer and rural electorate to come and vote correctly.

Results of the 1994 elections did not come as a surprise: a huge majority for the EPRDF candidates. The EPRDF and its affiliates won 484 of the total of 548 seats. In Addis Ababa, the EPRDF won 13 of the 23 seats, which was its lowest score country-wide. The independent candidates won 8 seats. Less than half of the eligible voters turned up in the capital.

Some details of the election were puzzling: many of the independent candidates (who had to submit 500 signatures beforehand to endorse their candidature) often did not get even 500 votes. The question arose who put them up, and had it been to artificially enhance the idea of 'choice'?³⁰ Puzzling also was that almost all seats in the two big regions of Amhara and Oromiya (where one would expect at least some real opposition to the EPRDF) were won by the EPRDF: 289 of the total of 294.

Before the elections, the opposition parties had manoeuvred themselves into a difficult position: to participate would mean to accord legitimacy to the, for them, dubious political structure and the orchestrated electoral process. To opt out would mean self-marginalization and the loss of any chance to make their voice heard in a national forum. The EPRDF counted on such a position, and knew that Western donor-countries would

disapprove of the attitude of the opposition. Consequently, the party could reap the benefits both ways: getting the large majority of seats – which they would have had in any case, also if the opposition would have gone along – and the approval of the donor community which reproached the opposition for not taking a chance.

The Third Round

After the approval of the new Constitution – with only token amendments – by the CA on 8 December 1994 after some nine weeks of discussion, preparations were made for the May 1995 parliamentary elections, which would finally ‘install a government with a real popular mandate’. The vote would be for the 548-seat House of People’s Representatives (HPR) and the Regional governments (1,368 posts). The organization and preparation of these elections built upon the experience of the CA elections. Candidates of the opposition parties were again not present due to the continued boycott; the more than 60 political parties were almost exclusively ethnic parties affiliated to EPRDF. There were also hundreds of independent candidates, who came both from some opposition groups and from the EPRDF. Voter registration was officially reported to be about 25 per cent higher.³¹

The elections on 5 May 1995 thus led to an even higher score of success for the EPRDF, reminiscent of communist voting percentages. The EPRDF won 502 of the 535 eligible seats in the HPR (the remaining 13 for the Afar and Somali regions remained empty for some time because of a delay of the elections there.)³² Again, 22 seats of the total of 548 were assigned to ethnic minorities. Only 7 independents won a seat.

In the preparations for these elections no risks were taken by the EPRDF, and it tried to mobilize more voters especially during the registration phase. As if the organizational and political context of the process itself would not have been enough, there were various subtle tricks – left largely to the liberty of the EPRDF-led local electoral committees – to enhance the vote for the party. For example, not only was the electoral emblem of the EPRDF the most known one, it was usually placed no.1 on the ballot paper. The fate of ballot boxes after closure of the polling station was not known, especially in the rural districts.

Some polling booths had a – for international observers, invisible – ballot paper in the booth itself, attached as an ‘example’ for the less literate voters, with the emblem of EPRDF already filled in.

This time in Addis Ababa all seats were won by the EPRDF, an in many ways surprising result. Even some loyal allies of the EPRDF like the Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP, the small party of Kifle Wodajo, ex-chairman of the Constitutional Commission, and of former TGE Vice-president Fecadu Gadamu), who surely counted on winning some seats, initially did not get even one.³³

Subsequent Rounds

A later round of elections, which passed virtually unnoticed by international observers, was the one in 1996 for the *k'ebeles*, the local authorities. They were swept by the EPRDF in a manner fairly reminiscent of the *Derg* system of elections, as very few alternative or opposition candidates were fielded or had a chance. Organization of the elections, voting itself (location, procedure) and vote-counting was controlled by the local administration, which was largely in the hands of the EPRDF. No foreign election-observer reports exist on these elections. It should be recalled that in the sphere of local administration the *gingema* system of evaluation (see above) is much more important than that of elections.

In addition, various regional states held district council elections in the course of 1997; for instance in December in the Southern Regional State, partly because of a relatively high ‘rate of attrition’ of council members voted in two years before. Again no local or foreign observers were present here. Reports from local voters and from one of the main opposition parties that tried to participate, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) (in a press statement of 13 January 1998, issued from Addis Ababa) about these elections suggest that these elections could not be considered free and fair. There were reliable reports of intimidation of the opposition groupings and of acts of preventing them from campaigning and even registering their candidates. House-to-house visits were even made by EPRDF party cadres to the people who had submitted their name as a supporter of an opposition

candidate in order to pressurize them to retract their support (the electoral law requires a minimum number of such supporters when candidates register).

ELECTION OBSERVATION

The first three rounds of the elections in post-*Derg* Ethiopia saw the presence of international observers. But interest declined with every round. For the CA and parliamentary elections of 1995, the Ethiopian government also refused to give accreditation to several proposed observers (as, for example, in the case of the Netherlands).

Important, however, was the fact that more *local* observers and monitors became active. Their gradual emergence has been one positive aspect of the presence of international election observers: under their aegis the idea of local observers gained some acceptance. Nevertheless they were limited in number and in experience. The local observers (often members of recently founded NGOs supported by Western donor money, both those regime-friendly and some of the more critical) may in principle (but not always) be more reliable and critical than the foreign observers. Nevertheless, a problem with the domestic observer groups is that they tend to be more partisan, or are identified as partisan, by the government. They are often not recognized as observers. It might be best if they worked in close conjunction with external observers.

In the 1995 elections, foreign observers had to submit to stricter operational guidelines and conditions set by the Ethiopian government. But their judgement on the 1994 and 1995 elections in general was moderately optimistic.

The international observers in Ethiopia were all short-term observers. Embassies of the Western countries were supposed to be monitoring, also in order to develop a more long-term perspective on the political process. However, staff of the various embassies also tended to concentrate on short-term observation – spot checks – in the capital and in some major towns. They did not delve deeply in the preparation and organization of the elections in the months preceding polling day. Some embassy personnel neither knew the correct number of parties, what their names stood for, nor their presumed constituency or

affiliation. Their briefing of short-term observers was also superficial and casual. The effect was that both resident personnel and observer missions chiefly looked at the technical aspects of the voting process on polling day itself.

In general it can be said that international observers had little understanding of local political culture, and little contact with the average Ethiopian citizen in normal social interaction (partly due to the language problem). On polling day itself and afterwards, the presence of foreign observers could have had a mitigating effect on all-too-obvious vote-rigging, and in that sense was positive. But their numbers were insignificant in view of the thousands of polling stations, and the ultimate normative impact of observers was very limited. They cannot prevent election engineering. It is remarkable how many incidents or 'mistakes' were noticed by the international and domestic observers, which gives one cause to think about the polling stations where no observer ever set foot. This is not to say that in the Ethiopian elections of 1994 and 1995 vote-rigging of the obvious kind was predominant: the procedures spelled out were generally observed (cf. Pausewang 1994: 28), and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia has to be commended for having done a remarkable job in the logistical and technical aspects of the enterprise. Critical issues, however, were the general atmosphere of the electoral process, marked by heavy psychological and material domination if not intimidation of the government and party in power. Indeed, one wonders how it could have been otherwise in a country emerging from civil war where the new elites 'cannot afford to lose elections'. In close relation to this point, the preparation phase was critical, because here one saw the problems of an ethnic district system, of lack of transparency, screening of candidates, a lack of campaigning and information dissemination, and subtle or sometimes outright intimidation, especially in the rural areas. A general feature of Ethiopian political culture – which has great difficulty in accepting the idea of the legitimacy of political opposition – is that people when called to vote are expected to vote for the incumbent party or government. There is hidden fear and insecurity among the electorate (half of whom are not literate and have no access to information) that the government can find out whether one has voted for the adversary, and therefore it is deemed safer just to vote for the ruling party.

These factors are difficult for short-term observers to measure, but are relevant nevertheless. The above aspects are quite common in other African countries as well, and remind us not to expect too much from election observation by foreigners, even though their presence may be appreciated by locals.

1992

According to most international observers who were present at the 1992 elections (cooperating in the Joint International Observer Group), there was no way that these could be called 'free and fair', not even in their procedural aspects (see NDI 1992, NIHR 1992, Gamst 1995), and this did not only depend on poor logistics. True, there was a lack of campaigning, a lack of information among voters on the stakes and on candidates, and a shortage of ballot papers. But according to Lyons (1996: 127), before and during election day 'intimidation, violence and fraud' were widespread (for a vivid case study, see Gamst 1995). This was substantiated in many field reports. The observers were also critical of the attitude of the TGE toward their own activities. A positive point was that due to serious criticism of the international observers, the Ethiopian public was informed of the problems with the elections and the TGE was forced to respond to some of the charges made.

However, the rules of the game were not changed nor could they prevent EPRDF dominance on virtually all fronts. On the basis of these faulty elections Lyons concludes: 'Instead of working to sustain the initial broad coalition and implicit pact behind the July 1991 National Conference, the EPRDF backed its ethnic affiliates and created a single-party dominant political system' (1996: 128).

1994

Compared to the 1992 round, there were fewer international observers present at the CA elections: 148 (Kassahun 1995: 133). There were also local Ethiopian observers, those appointed by the government and other from local NGOs like A-Bu-Gi-Da, a civil organization formed by intellectuals and teachers (funded by some Western NGOs committed to civic education). This organization took the challenge of democrati-

zation and civic political education seriously, and set up courses on political reform, democracy and civic rights in Addis Ababa and various provincial capitals. Observers from this group – and local observers in general – were more perceptive than the foreign observers (Kassahun 1995: 133–4; A-Bu-Gi-Da 1994: 3–4) of flaws like poor voter education and guidance, disrespect of secret voting, veiled threats to voters, occasional obstruction of local observers, and obscurities in the counting phase.³⁴

The foreign observers were mostly recruited from resident Western embassy staff of seven donor-countries, which formed a Donor Election Unit (DEU) in March 1995. They were assisted by four external advisers (experts on elections) and the members of the DEU made many observational field missions. But it is important to recognize that such diplomatic observers are – bound by diplomatic convention itself – usually not willing to compromise in any serious way their relations to the host-country government. They cannot and will not report in a critical or sometimes even in a balanced manner.³⁵ In the 1994 Ethiopian elections, they gave substantially more positive reports than in 1992. Though they regretted the lack of meaningful choice, ascribed largely to the 'opposition boycott', they mentioned the improved technical aspects and the peaceful proceedings (cf. Lyons 1996: 130; Pausewang 1994: 27). Structural constraints on the political process, the election system, the campaigning, and on obtrusive and unobtrusive methods of intimidation, though in many respects the same as in 1992, were suddenly no longer seriously commented upon. This reflects the lack of independent foreign observer teams present (except for the Norwegians): embassy diplomats are interested in maintaining good relations with the host country.

The major background reason for a lenient attitude is probably that the Ethiopian regime showed itself serious about economic reforms, was open to World Bank and IMF suggestions, and had largely maintained law and order in the country, certainly as compared to the notorious cases on the rest of the African continent, including neighbouring Somalia. These two features – willingness to open up and marketize the economy, and keeping law and order from a relatively strong centre – have proved to be decisive in donor-country perception ever since, and led these donors to continue to give Ethiopia the benefit of the doubt, whatever problems there may be with the

furthering of a culture of democracy, the implementation of representative democratic institutions, the observation of human rights, and building of a rule of law.

After the CA had done its job – approving the Draft Constitution – the ‘Donors Group’ of 18 Western countries felt the need to congratulate the CA for the result, saying that it was an important milestone on the path towards the establishment of democracy in Ethiopia (see Lyons 1996: 131). This superfluous statement glossed easily over the lack of substantial debate and virtually complete EPRDF domination in the CA meetings.

1995

According to June Rock (1996: 98) there were 220 accredited international observers (including embassy staff), and 60 local observers during the parliamentary elections. There were no organized foreign NGO teams, and the observers were mainly from the countries wishing to remain friendly with the regime, like the US and some EU countries.

Observers noted a lack of privacy in polling booths, insistence by election officials that the public vote for certain candidates, and lack of clear differentiation of electoral symbols of contending parties or individuals on the ballot paper (cf. Rock 1996), problems remedied by the officials after they were criticized on these points. What happened in polling stations not observed can only be guessed. Some observers (the Norwegian group) registered a similar atmosphere of forced participation, apathy and intimidation to that which had characterized earlier rounds. While some of these general charges may be debatable, there were certainly cases of pre-election disappearances and even killings of (lesser-known, often local) political opposition figures, arrests of campaigners, and the prohibition of holding party rallies or opening branch offices of opposition parties (see Lyons 1996: 135–6, 139), which may show that these elections simply were not conducted in the proper atmosphere. There were also disturbances in the eastern cities of Dire Dawa and Harar, where grenades were thrown in public places a few days before election day. The tricks mentioned above were usually noted by local not international observers. Their extent is not known.

Neither hindered by the critical sounds from observers nor bothered by the highly skewed and problematic context of the electoral process in Ethiopia, the US Embassy released a press statement praising the elections in terms like 'free and fair; ... important milestone along Ethiopia's road to greater democracy ...' (cited in Lyons 1996: 141). Such facile statements (remarkably similar to those issued in 1994), bypassing long-term and contextual factors in evaluating democratization, undermine the critical function of election observation.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that from a Western point of view, Ethiopia is going through an interesting experimental phase of national redefinition and reconstruction. In 1991 a regime assumed power that offered a significant opening for a more democratic political order as well as for an economic fresh start, released from the burden of civil war. While Ethiopia effected a historic break with a violent and authoritarian regime in 1991 and still has a possibility to realize important democratic gains, the incumbent government seems much less committed to democratization than in 1991. Reasons may be: a) its institutional difficulties and insecurity as an elite regime based on an ethno-regional minority; b) a deadlock over the road it has to follow after having taken an, in several respects, uncontrollable ethnic regionalization policy as its political strategy; and c) the tendency to subsume erstwhile democratic commitments to its economic policies and its wish to retain power.

In comparing the reports of international and local observers on the election rounds held so far in Ethiopia, one notes an interesting paradox: with every round of elections, the reports of field observers seem to lose their relevance for the political opinion of donor-countries of the democratic credentials of the incumbent regime: a paradox, because it becomes obvious that Western governments' and donors' assessments of the Ethiopian experiment are not made on the basis of intrinsic values related to democracy and to public opinion in the country itself, but on strategic geo-political motives, on pragmatism and on comparisons with the worst cases of social breakdown and violent disorder, as in Liberia, Sierra Leone,

Rwanda or Sudan. Ethiopia is thus always seen as 'better off than in the Mengistu era' (this criterion is easily met) and as far more promising than its neighbours Somalia or Sudan. This is their good right, and of course a predictable, realistic position in international politics. However, what counts in the final instance is not only the attitude of Western donor-countries, but that of the larger population of the country in question. It is difficult to hold massive opinion-survey research on the political attitudes and aspirations of the Ethiopian population. It can certainly be said that they appreciate the end of the civil war, the period of relative peace and the opening up of political and economic life. But what seems clear also (especially among large sections of the rising middle classes) is a serious lack of political confidence in the government, not assuaged by the four rounds of elections. Neither does the ethnic interpretation of democracy (even apart from the huge additional costs of having to finance an extra layer of fully-fledged regional state administrations) have the *a priori* sympathy of Ethiopians. Historically, ethnicity as such has rarely if ever been a legal, let alone constitutional, value among Ethiopian populations.

There also seems to emerge a lack of *trust* not only between large parts of the population and the government but also increasingly between the sections of the population itself. The heightened awareness of 'ethnicity' as a result of government regionalization and education policy may be playing a role here. A far-reaching ethnicization may sharpen competition, inequality, negatively affect mobility and social interaction, and evoke violent protests. Ethiopia has always been characterized by a balance between regional (not ethnic) and central affirmations of political authority (Clapham 1995: 39), and the politicization of ethnic identities may lead to divisions where there were none before. It has reshaped voting constituencies in ethnic terms, away from material issues which may be shared on a regional basis.

In retrospect, it is difficult to say what the elections in Ethiopia have accomplished, except to solidify a rather autocratic dominant-party system. For the EPRDF regime, going through the motions of elections has been a means to formally ground its legitimacy. Whether these have indeed been representative – that is, have been measuring the real political preferences and choices of the wider population – is doubtful (Cayla

1997: 123; Lyons 1996: 142). They might have been a beginning of possible democratization, but appeared as a ritual or a game of self-affirmation of a regime comfortably holding the reigns of power acquired by other means.

The Western donor-countries do not see (or have ceased to see) their own universalist assumptions on democracy and the rule of law as applicable to non-Western countries with different cultural and historical traditions (compare Huntington's influential concept of the 'clash of civilizations').³⁶ This perhaps explains the non-committed, easy-going response of many observer missions on African elections, in Ethiopia and elsewhere, as well as the equally frequent response of Western governments to simply shelve critical reports from the field.

New elections in Ethiopia will be held in the year 2000. In prospect it can easily be said that the preconditions for meaningful democratization and establishing of a sound justice system should at least be: growth and better organization of the legal opposition parties and of the independent civil society organizations; government toleration of these opposition forces – for example, as parties which can campaign, offer plans for the future, engage in debate, make propositions and the like, and the government's acceptance of the idea of opposition as a normal part of an open political system; making the electoral process accessible from the start to all contesting forces; enhancing the quality of the legal system as an independent – and as much as possible depoliticized – domain. The law can give body to the realization of democratic political and social rights. There is probably room for the improvement of the legal training of Ethiopian judges, for more respect toward their independent decisions, and for a formal reorganization of the system so as to give the common people engaged in legal cases transparent decisions within a reasonable period of time. This latter point is not the case at present, but is crucial. Public trust in a government is corroded most seriously by perceptions of systematic injustice and unfairness and lack of timely procedure.³⁷

While any judgement on political reform in Ethiopia cannot be given here, one could say that there is little doubt that the ethnicized character of Ethiopian politics will continue to pose new practical and personal problems for many Ethiopians. Political shaping of ethnicity will also remain a sort of theoretical challenge to 'democratic politics'. For instance, how will

individual rights to personal identity, to political choice (for example on non-ethnic parties and candidates) and to social and economic mobility reconcile with collective, ethnic identity, especially when the latter tends to be stimulated by state discourse and policy? Can ethnic groups always be expected to be united in their interests and their stands on policy if they are made up of a plurality of regional and clan groups? Must voting go according to the ethnic district system and is proportional representation on the basis of country-wide issue politics not feasible? Democracy entails institutionalized respect for minorities in a system where majorities make decisions, but there are unresolved difficulties in the effort to realize democracy within the bounds of ethnic or ethno-regional groups. These factors still await resolution. They might be tackled within a framework which, more than is the case now, demands compromise politics and a firmer approach to the consolidation of a rule-of-law regime, which should build on the rich legal traditions of Ethiopia.

In the specific case of Ethiopia, the challenges to their group and national identity (or the idea of nationhood) are also relevant. While ethnic diversity has been a fact of life for two millennia, boundaries between 'ethnic groups' were never fixed nor even very clear. Intermingling, intermarriage and cooperation between 'ethnic group' members was a continuous process, and did not diminish in the era of modernization after 1941. A common Ethiopian identity, though situational, has been emerging in the shadow of the national polity, and contrasted Ethiopia with most African countries. Historically, indigenous traditions of customary law of the various ethno-regional groups tended to blend and assimilate in the border regions and yielded common core values. It is in this sphere, of reconciling customary law traditions with modern ideas of rule of law, as initiated by the six law codes promulgated under Emperor Haile Sellassie (in 1957-65), that lies one of the enduring challenges for the grounding of a new political order of Ethiopia. Here much remains to be done, and it seems that the contribution of Western experts and democracy observers has been less than helpful.

A theoretical point is that if elections are held under a regime which is negligent in the observation of the rule of law and in respecting an independent judiciary, they do not signify a

democratic breakthrough. The construction of a regime of rule of law, while a Western concept in its theoretical formulation, has its antecedents in African societies and must stand central in the assessment of whether a country is on the road to sustainable democracy. An independent judiciary which can efficiently, within a reasonable time limit and without harassment from the executive, let the law run its course is the most powerful constitutional check on undemocratic rule. In principle, the new Ethiopian constitution has created the framework for it (arts. 14 to 32, except that art. 39.1 is anomalous, see note 8). The judiciary may thus gradually enhance legitimacy and accountability in a political system on purely judicial, not political, grounds. An improved historical and cultural understanding of the local society in this light will help to redefine the mission of observers and monitors and to stimulate critical dialogue with governments and public opinion in the country observed.³⁸

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor Christopher Clapham (Lancaster University) for critical comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. Per capita cash income is *c.* US\$120 per year.
3. *c.* 58 million people, excluding the 2.8 million in Eritrea.
4. The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), set up in 1990, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Union (SEPDU), and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), before 1994 called the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement, which emerged from a splinter group of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party which was defeated in a rural battle by the TPLF in Tigray region in 1981.
A study of the Ethiopian political scene demands an interest in and mastery of abbreviations: there are dozens of parties, mostly on an ethnic basis (foreigners are not good in remembering or recognizing them). Most of them were created or stimulated by the TPLF/EPRDF, the party which has set the political agenda of post-Mengistu Ethiopia (see below).
5. An excellent overview of rural rebellion in post-1941 Ethiopia is given in Gebru 1991, a study of the ideas of the student movement is Balsvik 1985, and an analysis of the 1974 revolution and its aftermath is found in Andargatchew 1993.
6. Harar Regional State is in effect also a city state, comprising only the city of Harar, with some 134,000 inhabitants.
7. Oromiya, Amhara, Tigray, Afar, Harar, Beni Shangul-Gumuz, and Somali. In actual fact all these states are multi-ethnic, as the recent National Census reports have shown.

8. An in constitutional law very exceptional article, which no constitution has ever included in this form. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 (art. 17) had the 'right of secession' for the various republics (although not according clear potential sovereignty to ethnic units), but this was ambiguous because it was said to be 'limited' in art. 15. In addition, other Soviet laws prohibited 'agitation for secession'. In Western theory, of course, the notion of secession is incompatible with federalism.
9. I will continue to speak of ethnic groups – the more neutral term used by social scientists – instead of nationalities – a basically Stalinist term which *a priori* accords a potentially political character to all such groups.
10. In most other African countries ethnicity is the *unofficial* discourse of political relations, as for instance in Kenya: rhetorical denial of the political relevance of ethnic organization and ethnic (or what is called there 'tribal') power blocks but a neo-patrimonial political practice of divide-and-rule. See Dietz and Foeken in this volume.
11. Radio and television remain a government monopoly, although the ruling party has its own radio station, Radio FANA.
12. The leftist-Marxist Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party.
13. Shewa: the region around Addis Ababa, and the area of origin of many members of the dominant elite in the Haile Sellassie era.
14. It should be remembered that the Tigrigna-speaking population (or Tigrawi) only form *c.* 8 per cent of the total population, not counting those in Eritrea.
15. See my 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia', in *Journal of African Law* 1997.
16. See Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's statements in an interview with the Amharic news magazine *Reporter* (25 *Ginbot* 1989 E.C., which is 2 June 1997): 'There are two types of placements, namely political and civil service placements. Political placements apply to appointments, while recruitment based on civil service criteria is aimed purely at ensuring proficiency and professionalism. In the case of political appointments, we take ethnic representation as a major criterion. Competent advisers are assigned to political appointees who may not be professionally competent' (which might, he suggested, go so far as not being literate). It should be added that the civil service placements are graduates from the newly founded Civil Service College, where candidates from one ethnic group are trained in different programme-tracks, to be sent back to their ethnic region of origin. Hence, also here the ethnic criterion is becoming stronger.
17. Dawit Yohannis, the current Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives and a close adviser to the prime minister, is reported to have said in 1995: 'We say there is no country called Ethiopia, no state that defends the interests of this multi-ethnic community grouped under the name Ethiopia.' Cited in Lyons 1996: 124.
18. *Derg* is the Amharic term for the Armed Forces Committee that ruled Ethiopia after 1974, led by Lt.-Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam as dictator. The entire 1974–91 period has thus come to be known as the *Derg* period, although since 1987 Ethiopia was nominally governed by the Workers' Party of Ethiopia and was a People's Democratic Republic.

19. See also Abbink 1995.
20. For example, in the interview mentioned in note 16, where he stated that 'there is no opposition political party in Ethiopia in the true sense of the word'. Also in a press statement after a bomb attack by Somali Islamist groups in Ethiopia in May 1997, the prime minister tried to associate the terrorists with legal opposition groups, which 'would be smashed if they give safe haven to terrorist individuals or organisations' (Reuters news message, 27 May 1997).
21. In addition, political figures and members of the former regime's political party as well as members of the former army are barred from participating in political life. Until the 1995 elections, they could not vote either.
22. For instance, in August 1997 four ethnic organizations (the Ethiopian Berta Democratic Organization, the Gumuz People Democratic Organization, the Mao-Komo Democratic Organization and the Boro-Shinasha Democratic Movement) in the small Beni Shangul-Gumuz state were united in one party (Ethiopian News Agency, 1 Sept. 1997).
23. Since 1996 split in at least two factions, one of them now cooperating with the EPRDF.
24. Coalition of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia.
25. The aborted 1974 constitution commissioned by Haile Sellassie and offered to the *Derg* in August that year, would have made Ethiopia more like a constitutional monarchy, with parties, proportional representation and a sharply reduced political role for the monarch. It was swept aside by the *Derg*, which soon thereafter assumed dictatorial power.
26. Dr John Young, a Canadian political scientist until recently at Addis Ababa University and with profound knowledge of the TPLF and its history, has been doing research on the *gimgema* system.
27. Although they were preceded by 'snap elections' in the form of public meetings, not secret voting, in January–April, to clear the ground and to install local '*k'ebete* election commissions' to prepare the June event. The members elected were almost all EPRDF candidates.
28. According to Vestal 1996.
29. At least 10 per cent of the potential electorate (some 2 million ex-members of the Armed Forces, security services and of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia) could not vote.
30. Lyons (1996: 133) mentions the case of a TPLF (EPRDF) member in Tigray who had been put up as an 'independent' candidate. See also Kassahun 1995: 132.
31. The measure of excluding armed forces members and WPE members (see note 21 above) was allegedly lifted for the parliamentary elections of 1995; see Rock 1996: 97.
32. Due to logistic and security problems.
33. There was genuine shock in the head office of the party after the results were made public, and some top men said the EPRDF had shown 'its real autocratic face': 'We were just used. They want to have it all. They did not even grant us *one* seat, after all our close co-operation!' Interview, 14 May 1995. In the end, the ENDP won one candidate in Dessie town for the House of People's Representatives .

34. A-Bu-Gi-Da has since had internal troubles, but still functions as a relatively successful independent civic educational organization, with branch offices in various larger towns (e.g., Dessie, Jimma and Awasa). Its funds and reach are limited but their activities are popular.
35. External foreign observers are often more critical but they are as a rule handicapped by their brief stay and lack of familiarity with local conditions and non-elite perceptions in the country observed.
36. See Huntington 1997.
37. It is doubtful whether the 1996 government programme of upgrading the judicial system has been a success from the legal-judicial point of view. The majority of practising judges was then dismissed on unclear and sometimes faulty grounds to make way for a new batch of judges who had been trained in a crash course of only six months. These new candidates were young and inexperienced persons, often with only secondary school education. It is unclear why they were nominated as judges without making the usual gradual climb through the court system to gain knowledge and experience in a legal and human sense. Apart from having led to a long closure of the courts in 1996 and 1997, the programme also affected the quality and independence of the judicial system.
38. Western observers and political scientists are perhaps ill-equipped to research the nature of the 'political process' in African settings (unless they have long experience, good social and historical knowledge, and know something of the relevant language). It is not difficult to recognize the external trappings of a democratic process in such settings, but whether this means that a country is 'democratizing' is unclear. There is a need to better understand what 'democracy' and related political values of dialogue, openness, and respect for lawful procedure mean in their historical and cultural setting, and how they relate to economic and cultural values.

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