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Federalism and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. A comparative study of the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz regions

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3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented theoretical and conceptual approaches on federalism, ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. It also reviewed some contending views on the impact of federalism on ethnic conflicts. This chapter aims at providing a general background about the politics of federalism in Ethiopia – from two specific angles.

First, it examines the historical and ideological basis of federalism. In particular, it discusses the two historical factors that influenced the ideology of Ethiopian federalism – the expansion of Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th century and the emergence of Marxism-Leninism as the dominant ideology of opposition since the end of the 1960s. The expansion that led to the current geographic shape and ethnic makeup of the country was intertwined with the emergence of unequal ethnic relations that prevailed in the country. Ethnic inequality was articulated at least since the end of the 1960s in terms of the 'national 'question' that was defined through the teachings of the Marxist-Leninist (ML) ideology. Indeed, the popularity of the ML approach to this problem helps explain the usage of ethnicity as the central instrument of Ethiopia's federal restructuring and the adoption of Stalinist principles of ethnic self-determination up to and including secession. The chapter also seeks to elucidate some of the similarities that exist between Ethiopian federalism and the former Soviet Union.

Second, the chapter discusses the impacts of the revolutionary democracy ideology of the ruling party and the concomitant emergence of a dominant one party system on the development of federalism. EPRDF's revolutionary democracy depends on ML principles of party organisation and mobilisation. As a result, the ruling party not only promotes the centralisation of power around itself, but also follows

policies that contradict the very nature of federalism, 'a democratic polity...built upon a matrix of constituent institutions that together share power' (Elazar 1996: 2).

3.2 From Multi-ethnic Empire to Ethnic Federation

Ethiopia is one of the ancient countries of the world with a long history of independent statehood. The modern Ethiopian state emerged at the second half of the 19th century with the ascension of Tewodros (1855-1868) in 1855 to the throne. This heralded the emergence of the country out of two centuries of decline and endless squabble between provisional rulers (Bahru 1991: 11; Teshale 1995: 30). Tewodros initiated the erstwhile twin imperial policies of modernisation and centralisation (Teshale 1995). Almost all of his successors followed these policies, albeit with different levels of enthusiasm and vigour. After Tewodros's death in 1868, Kassa Mircha of Temben came to the throne following his coronation as Yohannes IV (1872-1889) in 1872. He pursued his predecessor's policy of unification, although in a different fashion. In contrast to Tewodros, he was less centralist and satisfied insofar as the regional nobility were ready to recognise his authority and pay their tribute regularly (Bahru 1991: 44).

Menelik (1889-1913) who managed to control the imperial throne after Yohannes's death at the battle of Metema in 1889 followed the twin imperial policies of modernisation and centralisation. He in particular undertook a series of military conquests expanding the frontiers of the country to the south, west and east (Bahru 1991: 60). Indeed, his lasting legacy has been the emergence of Ethiopia with its present geographic shape, capital and ethnic makeup. The battle of Adwa (1896) in which Ethiopian forces defeated the Italians led to international recognition of the boundaries of the country (Ibid).

Emperor Haile Selassie who took the throne after the somewhat brief reign of *Lij*¹ Iyasu, the grandson of Menelik who ruled the country from 1911-1916 dominated much of the 20th century history of the country. Indeed, he ruled Ethiopia first as a regent for 14 years (1916-1930) and later as emperor for 44 years (1930-1974). He followed the policies of centralisation and modernisation of his predecessors with a renewed vigour and tenacity. In 1931, he introduced the first written constitution of the country. The main purpose of this constitution was to consolidate his power. The constitution neither included provisions on

civil liberties nor established a representative legislature (Bahru 1991: 141; Clapham 1969: 34).

The Italians occupied the country from 1936-1941. In 1941, after the defeat of the Italians, the Emperor recovered his throne and rekindled his twin policies of centralisation and modernisation. To this end, one of the first decrees he introduced right after the restoration of the country's independence, was Decree 1 of 1942. This decree brought unprecedented levels of centralisation in the history of the country (Clapham 1992a: 103; Markakis 1974: 290; Perham 1948: 348).

Amid the intensification of the emperor's resolve for centralisation of power, Eritrea joined with Ethiopia in 1952 under a United Nations (UN) sanctioned federal arrangement. The Ethio-Eritrea federation (1952-1962) was more of an autonomous arrangement than a federation, as Eritrea that had a liberal constitution that recognised limited rights of freedom of association and speech became part of a highly centralised state under an absolutist monarch with guarantees of self-rule. In the end, the constitutional asymmetry between the two contributed to the demise of the federation in 1962 (Markakis 1974: 362).

Since the beginning of the 1960s, the imperial government began to face opposition from increasingly radicalised students who rallied behind 'land to the tiller', 'the nationalities question' and armed insurgency in Eritrea. The abrogation of the Ethio-Eritrea federation in 1962 led to a civil war between different Eritrean separatist movements such as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and successive Ethiopian regimes. The 1970s saw many changes that would shape the history and politics of contemporary Ethiopia.

In 1974, revolutionary upheavals rocked the country. The imperial regime, whose structures failed to handle the increasing demands for change coming from the various corners of the country, was overthrown by a popular revolution in September 1974 (Clapham 1988: 32). In the same period, several ML political movements mushroomed throughout the country. After its rise to state power, the military regime took several radical measures that destroyed the material and ideological basis of the imperial regime. The most important decision in this respect was the nationalisation of land in 1975 that automatically ended tenancy. In 1976, the Derg officially issued its programme of the National Democratic Revolution Programme (NDRP). The NDRP officially defined 'scientific-socialism' as the main guiding principle of the revolution. It also declared the equality of the country's ethnic groups and promised

self-administration through regional autonomy. However, these pledges were not translated into practice.

Thus, the EPRDF that assumed power in May 1991 after its protracted 17 year armed insurgency undertaken the reconstruction of the Ethiopian state. The July 1991 Peace and Democracy Conference, convened by the ERPDP brought together 25 political organisations. This conference adopted a Transitional Charter that incorporated the 1948 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR); promised multiparty democracy, freedom of association and speech; legalised EPRDF's positions on Eritrea's secession and incorporated the right of ethnic self-determination up to and including secession. Following the conference, an interim administration, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was established. The TGE had an unelected legislative assembly known as the Council of Representatives (CoR), which had 87 seats. This council consisted of 32 political organisations. From among the 87 seats at the CoR, the EPRDF allocated 32 seats for itself, while the OLF, which emerged as a junior partner of the former, was given 12 seats. The other organisations received seats ranging from one to three. The EPRDF took key executive positions within the TGE. Meles Zenawi became interim president. In 1992, the country's internal administration underwent restructuring with the creation of 14 regional administrations along ethno-linguistic lines (TGE 1992).

EPRDF's promise regarding the development of an inclusive and democratic political order has not materialised. It, for instance, inhibited the participation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement, better known by its Amharic acronym (MEISON) in the July 1991 conference on the alleged ground that they failed to renounce violence. Even those ethnic organisations which were allowed to participate in the July conference and became members of the TGE, like the OLF left the transitional government due to what they regarded as the absence of a levelled playing field for all political parties in the country. The withdrawal of the OLF from the TGE followed the deeply flawed 1992 regional elections in which the EPRDF instituted its allies as regional governing parties (NDIIA 1992).

It was in this charged atmosphere, a Constituent Assembly completely dominated by the EPRDF approved the federal constitution without substantive debates and compromise in 1994. The new constitution, like the charter provided: ethnic self-determination up to and including secession; democratic and human rights and recognised nine ethnically constituted regions. Yet there is a significant gap between promise and praxis. In this respect, even if elections were held regularly

since the inauguration of the federal government in 1995, the opposition parties largely boycotted them due to the absence of open political space (Pausewang et al. 2002; Tronvoll 2001). Hence, there is political polarisation in the country. Two interrelated incidents that occurred in the country since 1998 have aggravated this problem.

First, from 1998-2000, Ethiopia and Eritrea went into a full-blown 'border' war. The war had economic and geo-strategic aspects (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000). In addition to the loss of tens of thousands of people, this conflict influenced political developments in both countries. In the wake of the war, internal splits emerged within the two insurgent turned governments in Addis Ababa and Asmara. In the case of Ethiopia, the central committee of the TPLF, which was still the dominant force within the EPRDF, splintered into two in 2001. The leadership crisis, in addition to bringing the first real threat to the power of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, brought to the purview of the public the asymmetrical features of intra-party relationships within the EPRDF. Hence, after defeating his TPLF opponents, the PM reconstituted the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) whose leaderships flirted with TPLF dissidents (Medhane and Young 2003: 391). The PM also introduced what he called a 'renewal' (*tehadso* in Amharic). Officially, the purpose of this programme was to cleanse the TPLF of what the PM considered 'decadent parasitism' (Meles 2001: 3). However, the programme was intended to consolidate his power.

Second, the EPRDF four years after the launch of the *tehadso* programme promised 'free and fair' elections for the 2005 third parliamentary and regional elections. The likely reason that motivated the PM to relatively open the political space for competition was his desire regaining international confidence after relations between Ethiopia and western donors thawed during the Ethio-Eritrean war. To this end, the EPRDF and the opposition parties held a dialogue, which led to the reforming of the electoral law. The campaign period (2004-05) was remarkably different from the previous elections. Indeed, the two major opposition coalitions, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and other opposition parties received access to government monopolised electronic media. Election Day (15 May 2005) passed peacefully and a record number of voters turned out to the polls. However, things began to take a wrong turn after some of the initial electoral results indicated massive EPRDF losses. In the evening of Election Day, PM Meles Zenawi came on TV and decreed an 'unofficial' state of emergency temporarily banning

public meetings and demonstrations in Addis Ababa and its surroundings. He also put the police and the security forces under his personal command. The next day (16 May 2005), the EPRDF decreed on TV and radio that it won both the parliamentary and regional elections. What followed, after many delays was the official affirmation of this victory by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE).

Not surprisingly, the elections that started with much hope ended in a post-electoral crisis (see Abbink 2005; Aalen 2006). This led to street protests that resulted in deaths of hundreds of people at the hands of security forces and the boycotting of parliament by the CUD leadership. The government also undertook a massive crackdown on political opposition, the critical press and civil society organisations. It also put the leaders of the CUD, some civil society activists and journalists on trial with serious charges that ranged from genocide to outrage against the constitution. More worryingly, in the wake of the electoral crisis the little space available for political opposition has been curtailed and the government has been engaged in a multi-pronged activity of tightening its grip on power. It has enacted restrictive new laws on political parties, the press and civil society organisations.

3.3 Ideology of Ethiopian Federalism: Ethnic Self-determination

Every federation has its corresponding ideological inspiration (King 1982). The question is then what are the ideological bases of the Ethiopian federation? One way of examining this is by looking at two interrelated developments in the modern history of the country – southward expansion of the Ethiopian state and the emergence of a radical ML opposition since the 1960s.

The southward expansion of the Ethiopian state, completed at the end of the 19th century under Emperor Menelik, led to a dramatic increase in the geographic size and ethnic heterogeneity of the country. It also led to the emergence of distinct systems of administration in the historic north and the newly conquered south. Students of Ethiopian political history who critically examine the multifaceted impacts of these processes use the north and the south as organising concepts. They refer to the historic north that has been predominantly inhabited by the Christian Amhara-Tigrayan populations and from where the centre of Ethiopian statehood over several centuries came to the geographic south

as the 'Abyssinian north' and the territories that were incorporated at the end of the 19th century to the Ethiopian state as the 'south'. The north is termed 'Abyssinia' despite the fact that Ethiopian emperors and their subjects for centuries called their country Ethiopia and themselves Ethiopians well before Menelik's expansion to the south (Bahru 1991: 1). Although these categories have some limitations, they are useful to examine the emergence of distinct systems of rule and land tenure in the south after its incorporation (Clapham 1975: 73; Perham 1948: 293).

Ethnic inequality and economic exploitation characterised the multi-ethnic Ethiopian empire that emerged after the expansion (Alem 2004: 100). This particularly refers to the imposition of the Amhara elite, Orthodox Christianity and the Amharic language as embodiments of the Ethiopian state (Merera 2003: 62). The chief instrument the imperial government used to bring some form of unity among the ethnically diverse peoples of the country was assimilation to the culture, language and religion of the dominant Amhara rulers (Clapham 1988: 195). This was successful to a certain extent as the Ethiopian state gave 'relatively little weight to issues of ethnic origin' and as a result, 'individuals from peripheral areas as well as from humble social backgrounds could reach' not only 'positions of power' but also 'authority and prestige' once they passed through the 'assimilation' process (Ibid). However, this did not bring the desired 'unity' because of a number of interrelated reasons. First, there will always be people who would oppose the requirement that they need to assimilate to the dominant culture in order to find accommodation in the structures of power. Second, like anywhere else in the world, failure to accommodate individuals who 'passed' through the assimilation process in the political and economic structures of a multi-ethnic state rekindles ethnic consciousness and perhaps lead to rebellion (Smith 1982: 31).

On top of assimilation, political institutions that were used to administer the south were distinctly different from the Northern provinces. The pattern of administration that emerged in the south followed two broad trends – those southern rulers who peacefully submitted to Menelik such as the rulers of Jimma, Wollega, Bela Shangul and Assosa, were allowed to rule their territories by paying a fixed amount of tribute (Perham 1948: 295-6; Bahru 1991: 87; Markakis 1974: 104). In contrast, the administration of the majority of the southern territories fell to Menelik's military chiefs and the nobility (Markakis 1974: 106).

Additionally, there came the introduction of a new system of land tenure that served as a key instrument of surplus extraction in the south.

Accordingly, the imperial government used land grants to compensate three groups of clients that were instrumental in the imposition and perpetuation of its rule over the new territories. These included the northern soldiers (*neftegna*),² priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), and the *balabat*³ (Caulk 1978: 469; Markakis 1974: 109). The alienation of the southern peasantry from its land was such that during the 1970s, in some five southern provinces, absentee landlords held 28 to 45 per cent of all of the measured land (Balsvik 2005: 149). The southern peasants who became tenants of the new landholders were required to 'surrender a sizeable portion of [their] produce to the landholder- ranging from one-third to one-half' (Markakis 1987: 39). In addition to economic exploitation, there were also linguistic and cultural domination. The imperial government in this respect prohibited publication in the Oromo and Tigrayan languages (Markakis 2003b; Mekuria 1997a; Tubiana 1983). In contrast, since 1941, the Amharic language was used as a medium of instruction in elementary schools in addition to its traditional function as the language of government (Markakis 2003b: 12-13). Moreover, the Orthodox Church was declared as state religion, while Islam, which has a wide following in the country, was not recognised by the State.⁴

The political marginalisation and economic exploitation of the conquered south and Haile Selassie's project of building a highly centralised state faced diverse challenges ranging from peasant rebellions in Tigray, Bale, Gojam, secessionist war in Eritrea to militant opposition from university students (Bahru 1991: 220). The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), as the concerted and organised opposition of university students to imperial rule came to be known, passed through several stages before it reached climax at the end of the 1960s (Bahru 1991: 222; Balsvik 2005: 71-8; Kiflu 1993: 35-40; Mulatu and Abate 1988: 36).

At the initial stage of their activism, the concerns of students were parochial in character and largely focused on campus issues (Kiflu 1993: 35). However, towards the end of the 1950s, they began to be assertive and raise political issues. For instance, they demonstrated supporting the aborted *coup d'etat* against the Emperor in December 1960. Soon afterwards, they challenged the massively inequitable distribution of land. In this respect, since 1965 they began to demonstrate under the slogan of 'land to the tiller' and positioned the end of tenancy as one of their key objectives (Kiflu 1993: 39).

The end of the 1960s signalled the radicalisation of the ESM and the emergence of leftist ideologies of Marxism-Leninism (ML) and Maoism

among the students. Indeed, in this period, ML emerged as the uncontested ideology of the students and provided the ideological framework for any group that claimed to be progressive for the ‘diagnosis of the malaise of Ethiopian society and the prescription for its remedy’ (Bahru 2003: 3). The ideological militancy of the students in this period was such that when sworn into offices of their unions, they used to commit themselves to the goals of ML and Maoism (Balsvik 2005: 294). The radicalisation of the students took a new turn towards the beginning of the 1970s when they began to tackle the problem of ethnic relations in the country. In November 1969, Walleligne Makonnen published in the student magazine, *The Struggle*, an article entitled ‘On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia’. In this article, he challenged the very idea of Ethiopian unity by saying ‘Ethiopia was not yet a nation but an Amhara-ruled collection of a dozen nationalities with their own language, ways of dressing, history, social organization and territorial entity’ (cited Balsvik 2005: 276-7). Since the beginning of the 1970s, the national question emerged as a key slogan for the students.

3.3.1 Stalinist theory of nationality and reconstruction of the Ethiopian state

Marxism as developed by Marx and Engels was based on the analysis of class contradiction. Hence, it gave little attention to issues of ethnicity and nationalism. But Russian revolutionaries who were forced to confront the plight of subordinate national groups and minorities in Tsarist Russia developed what came to be known a Stalinist theory on nationalities. Soviet nationalities policy grew incrementally and was on the main characterized by political expediency than ideological consistency. Initially, Russian revolutionarily leaders like Lenin were dismissive of the role of nationalism in the Russian Empire (Hirsch 2005: 23). In 1905, Lenin even opposed the idea that was proposed by the social democrats to provide territorial and extra-territorial autonomy to the nationalities in a post-Tsarist Russia (Ibid.). But when the revolutionary upheavals began to gain momentum, he reversed his earlier position and came to embrace the concept of national self-determination. This reversal of position was necessitated by the desire to gain the support of non-Russian ethnic groups in the struggle against the Tsarist regime and during the civil war that followed the 1917 revolution which brought the Bolsheviks to power. Principles of self determination

and federalism were also used to build the soviet state (Duchacek 1970: 137-138).

The Soviet nationalities policy which was on the main developed by Joseph Stalin incorporated Marxist Leninist ideas and sought to legitimize the vanguard role of the communist party. Hence, by borrowing ideas from Marx/Engels's theory on historical materialism – stages of the development in human society – the Soviets classified their ethnic groups into nations and peoples. On this basis, Joseph V. Stalin 'arranged the numerous Soviet nationalities according to hierarchy of recognition' (Allworth 1990: 35). This hierarchy determined the location of the ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union's multilevel ethnic federation. The process that led to the creation of the Soviet Union as a multitiered ethnic federation was not, however, based on 'ideals of equality or democracy, but upon an order of preferences dictated by factors such as location, size, stability and the dominance in its area by the nationality group' (Ibid.)

Besides, the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union was imbued with many other contradictions. First, the right of self determination up to and including secession was incorporated in the Soviet constitution. This was, however, a mere lip service as the Soviets never allowed administrative autonomy let alone secession. Second, though the Soviet state was organized on the basis of an ethnic federation, power was monopolized by the unitary communist party.

In Ethiopia, the Stalinist theory of nationalities heavily influenced the position of the students and the political movements that emerged out of the ESM. Many of the concepts used to discuss problems of ethnic relations in Ethiopia were copied from Russian revolutionaries. The students, therefore, not only considered Ethiopia akin to Tsarist Russia as a 'prison house of nationalities' but also sought to 'resolve' the problem through Stalinist principles of self-determination, which profess the right of a 'nation' to 'arrange its life in the way it wishes' either 'on the basis of autonomy', 'federal relations with other nations' or 'complete secession'. The theory, moreover, recognised the sovereignty and equality of 'nations' (Stalin 1954: 321). Hence, almost all of the leftist political movements that emerged after the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia accepted the ML ideology and Stalin's theory of nationalities. However, differences remained on a number of issues such as strategy of mobilisation and the extent to which the ethnic groups would exercise self-determination (Markakis 1987: 254-7; Young 1997: 154). Hence, multi-ethnic revolutionary movements like the EPRP and the MEISON gave primacy to 'class contradiction' in their political discourses and

organised themselves crossing the ethnic divide. In contrast, ethno-nationalist movements like the TPLF and the OLF put their emphasis on 'national contradiction' and sought to mobilise members of their presumed ethnic constituencies. These organisations had crucial differences on the question of secession. While the EPRP and MEISON were reluctant to endorse secession, the TPLF, OLF and other ethnic movements advocated ethnic self-determination up to and including secession (Markakis 1987: 254-7).

As Marxism Leninism was so popular among the politically active sections of society, the soldiers who managed to control power in 1974 quickly adopted this ideology (Bahru 2003: 4). In spite of the popularity of ML amongst almost all of the contending political forces, the country saw a protracted and violent power struggle during the 1970s and 80s. The Derg not only claimed to take guidance from ML ideology but also received valuable support from the Soviets. Consequently, it sought to implement Stalin's theory on nationalities. In 1976, it adopted the NDRP that among other things declared equality among the ethnic groups of the country and promised self-administration (PMAC 1976). Later in 1983, the military regime established the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN). ISEN had two key mandates – study and document the distribution, social and economic conditions of ethnic groups in the country; and recommend a new state structure that would provide regional autonomy for the various ethnic groups of the country based on experiences of the Eastern Bloc (Hailu 2003).

The Derg introduced its version of regional autonomy after the adoption of the constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in 1987. This constitution established an asymmetrical regime of regional autonomy in which some of the provinces affected by ethnic/regional insurgency were organised into five autonomous regions – Eritrea, Tigray, Dire Dawa, Ogaden and Assab. Eritrea was provided with more autonomy than the other autonomous regions. In contrast, the military government divided the rest of the country into 24 administrative regions. It is, however, important to note these measures were not intended to provide administrative and political autonomy as the military regime and its vanguard party, the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) continued to centralise power. Additionally, these reforms did not include linguistic autonomy. Amharic remained the working language of the government at all levels. This experiment ended in 1991 after the defeat of the Derg.

Right after its assumption of state power in 1991, the EPRDF began its project of reconstituting the country into an ethnic federation. This

process was highly influenced by Stalin's theory of nationality. Indeed, there are striking similarities between the theory and practice of Soviet and Ethiopian federalism.

First, Ethiopia adopted the Soviet practice of hierarchically categorising its ethnic groups into 'nations, national groups and peoples.'⁵ More interestingly, the 1994 Ethiopian constitution adopted Joseph Stalin's definition of the 'nation.'⁶ In this respect, Ethiopia's 'nations, nationalities and peoples' were defined by art. 20/5 of the federal constitution as:

A group of people who have or share a large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

Even with a single definition, the three terms – 'nations, nationalities and people' – implicitly indicate a hierarchy among the ethnic groups.⁷ This will be more explicit when one considers the territorial organisation of the federation. Indeed, the Soviet experience of 'multi-tiered' ethnic federalism seemed to have influenced the territorial organisation of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. In the Soviet practice as Slocum noted:

Territorial autonomy was implemented by a multi-tiered territorial-administrative structure, which divided the Soviet Union into a hierarchy of so-called "state" forms ranging from union republics (Soviet Socialist Republics or SSRs) down through autonomous republics (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics or ASSRs), autonomous oblasts (regions), and autonomous okrugs (districts). Each national-territorial unit corresponded to one "titular" nationality group—the nationality after which the territory was named. Each category of statehood was associated with a specific degree of organizational, administrative and cultural privileges, which gave certain local advantages to a given territory's titular nationality. The fortunes of a given nationality might rise or fall in terms of moving to a higher or lower form of statehood, but the power to determine the political status of a given nationality group rested with the Kremlin (1995: 6-7).

In a similar fashion, Ethiopia pursued a multi-tiered approach to territorial autonomy in which apparently the bigger ethnic groups (the 'nations') such as Tigray, Amhara, Oromo and Somali have been given their own regions in which they constitute the majority and the regions were named following their own ethnonyms. In contrast, several dozens

of smaller ethnic groups ('nationalities and peoples') were put together to create 'multi-ethnic' regions such as the SNNPR, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz. Even in such multiethnic regions like the SNNPR many ethnic groups were given their own sub-regional administrative structures such as *zones*, *woreda* or special-*woreda*.

Like the practice of the Soviet Union, the decision to give a certain level of administrative status to ethnic groups solely rests upon the 'vanguard' party, the EPRDF. As a result, there are some paradoxes, which are still difficult to explain. For instance, the Harari whose overall population does not extend beyond ten thousand and constitute about 7 per cent of the total population of the historic Harar city were allowed their own regional state, while the Sidama whose population is more than two and half million were given a *zonal* status within the Southern region.

Second, one of the core principles of Soviet federalism that in theory provided ethnic self-determination up to secession, but in practice never allowed autonomy beyond culture and language (Towster 1951: 442, 445) were transplanted in federal Ethiopia. Put another way, even if Ethiopia's federal constitution recognises 'unlimited' self-determination, it is clear from the experience of the last 17 years that the ethnic regions are not allowed to exercise administrative autonomy let alone secession.

Third, there is a strong similarity between the federalism of the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia in terms of the centralisation of power by a vanguardist political party. Like the Communist Party of the ex-Soviet Union, the EPRDF provides political leadership to all of the ethnic regions either through its member organisations or affiliates. This may warrant characterising Ethiopian federalism as 'national in form' and 'revolutionary democracy in content' by borrowing one of the well-known adages of Soviet federalism – 'national in form' but 'socialist in content'.

Fourth, Ethiopian federalism like the ex-Soviet Union brought new roles to the State regarding the codification and regulation of territorial and personal ethnicity (Brubaker 1994; Gleason 1990; Slezkine 1996). For instance, like the Soviet Union, where 'there was not an inch of ... territory that did not have an ethnic landlord...' (Slezkine 1996: 96), federalism in Ethiopia led to ethnicisation of territory⁸ in which there is a tendency for exclusive control of territory by the titular ethnic groups. This partly contributed to the transformation and generation of conflicts in post-federal Ethiopia. Additionally, like the former Soviet Union, the Ethiopian state is now involved in the regulation and codification of ethnic identity. This is due to the use of ethnic otherness as a key

instrument of organising the Ethiopian federation. Hence, the federal constitution and other legislations provide several provisions on ethnic self-determination, the resolution of disputes over ethnic identity, boundaries of ethnically constituted regions and others. For instance, article 39/1 of the constitution provides that 'every nation, nationality, and people in Ethiopia has unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.' The constitution also specified the procedures to follow when ethnic communities exercise this right (art. 39/4). Likewise, article 46/2 outlines the criteria for forming regional states, which include 'settlement patterns, language, identity, and the consent of the people concerned.' The federal constitution even contains a provision, which allows 'internal secession' (art. 47/2). Thus, ethnic groups in multi-ethnic regions could form their own federating units through a plebiscite. The constitution also provides principles and procedures about the resolution of intra-federal boundary conflicts between ethnically constituted regions (art. 48). The next section discusses how the ML inspired revolutionary democracy ideology of the ruling regime influences federal development.

3.4 EPRDF's Revolutionary Democracy and Federalism

The stated ideology of the Ethiopian ruling party is revolutionary democracy. The ruling party has not so far made the essence of this ideology clear (Merera 2003: 120). Nonetheless, this ideology intertwines ML principles of party organisation and mobilisation with ethnic nationalism. Of course, ML not only promotes the centralisation of power around the 'vanguard' party but also conspicuously antithetical to any division of political power. That is why many scholars named the ex-Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as sham federations (McGarry and O'Leary 1993; O'Leary 2001; Stepan 1999). The forthcoming sub-sections briefly discuss the historical development of vanguardist political parties in the Ethiopian context, the essence the revolutionary democracy ideology of the EPRDF and EPRDF's reinvention into a dominant party in the wake of its rise to state power in 1991.

3.4.1 Political parties and the vanguardist tradition

One of the key factors that explain the discrepancy between the officially professed multipartyism and the prevailing *de facto* single party rule under the EPRDF is the vanguardist tradition of political parties in Ethiopia. In fact, radical intellectuals who were convinced that they were able to provide the 'correct' analysis of the domestic and international situations and lead the 'oppressed masses' in accordance with the teachings of 'scientific socialism' constituted almost all of the political parties that emerged out of the ESM during the 1970s. For instance, the EPRP and the MEISON, which emerged during the same period, did not cooperate between themselves and each sought unilateral assumption of the illusive role of vanguarding the Ethiopian revolution.

In a similar fashion, ethnic/regional liberation movements like the EPLF, TPLF and OLF declared themselves the vanguard liberation movements of their supposed ethnic constituencies/regions. The failure of these political groups to recognise political pluralism contributed to the violent and mutually destructive nature of their relationships. Like communist parties elsewhere, leftist political movements in Ethiopia not only framed their differences in terms of 'irreconcilable differences,' but also were synonymous about the legitimacy of using violence for the sake of either promoting or defending the 'revolution.' Thus, the deep rivalry that prevailed between the EPRP and the MEISON led to a bloody and violent showdown that in the end undermined both of these organisations and consolidated the power of the military regime (Hagos 1980).

Likewise, because of their failure to recognise each other, the relationship between the EPRP and the TPLF remained strained. The former that was planning to launch an armed struggle against the military regime from Tigray was not ready to recognise the latter as a political movement. It rather wanted it to operate as a 'mass' organisation under its guidance. The latter in its part did not want any party other than itself to operate in its home province, Tigray. This dispute led to a war between the two organisations in which the TPLF prevailed over the EPRP and forced it out of Tigray (Markakis 1987: 255).

The Derg after consolidating its power by wiping out the opposition it faced from the pan-ethnic parties such as the EPRP was engaged in building the organs of a socialist state. It established what it called the vanguard party, the WPE under the chairmanship of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1984. Later, in 1987, after the creation of a new socialist

constitution (PDRE), the task of leading the country rested with the single party (WPE). Even after the downfall of the Derg and the declaration of multiparty democracy in 1991, the vanguardist tradition of political parties continued in a different fashion in the guise of a dominant party under the EPRDF.

3.4.2 Making sense of EPRDF's revolutionary democracy

The TPLF was originally a parochial ML organisation, which 'did not clearly define the "Tigrayan Question"' (Alemseged 1998: 199). In 1976, when it issued its Manifesto, the TPLF declared that it stands for the formation of the 'People's Democratic Republic of Tigray' by seceding from Ethiopia (Young 1997: 99). Soon after, the secessionist goal was renounced because of internal and external opposition (Aregawi 2004: 591). However, this does not mean that the TPLF abandoned the idea of secession altogether, it instead made the question subject to political changes in Ethiopia (Alemseged 1998: 199).

In terms of political orientation, the TPLF up until the end of the 1980s was committed to the Albanian model of socialism. This was partly because of its aversion to Soviet Union's support to the Derg and its relative isolation from other Marxist movements (Clapham 1992b: 112). In terms of ideology, during its initial years, the TPLF espoused Mao's principle of 'new democracy' that essentially provides the leadership role of the revolution to 'the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and...sections of the petty bourgeoisie...' (Mao Tse-tung 1965: 350). Nonetheless, Mao's principle of 'new democracy' was dropped in 1981 after it was criticised as 'revisionist' by radical members of the TPLF (EPOU 1990: 276). In 1985, what Aregawi (2004: 592) called the 'ultra leftists' within the TPLF established the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT).

Dramatic changes that took place within Ethiopia and internationally at the end of the 1980s required the TPLF to make several adjustments in terms of mobilisation and political orientation. At the domestic level, successive military victories by the EPLF and the TPLF made the prospect of military victory over the Derg more certain. This necessitated the TPLF to think about its future role in the national politics of Ethiopia. To play a national role, the TPLF that has had a narrow constituency, needed to either re-brand itself as a pan-Ethiopian organisation by opening membership to people of different ethnic origins or create a coalition of ethnic organisations under its tutelage in

order to match its projection of military power with a politico-administrative structure.

TPLF strategists opted for the second choice, which meant the establishment of a front of ethnic organisations under their control (Young 1997: 62, 166). Accordingly, in 1989 the TPLF created the EPRDF with the membership of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM).⁹ This accompanied the formation of Marxist-Leninist parties that would constitute the core of the nationwide ML party that the TPLF was contemplating to establish. In 1989, to form the MLLT's counterpart for the EPDM, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force (EMLF) was established. Following the formation of the EPRDF in 1990, the short-lived, Ethiopian Proletariat Organisations Unity (EPOU) emerged by bringing together the MLLT and the EMLF. The effort of building a nationwide Marxist-Leninist party that would provide a vanguard leadership to the EPRDF abruptly ended in 1990 because of the collapse of the socialist system after the end of the Cold War. Following EPRDF's ascent to state power, the ML parties around the TPLF quickly disappeared at least from the view of the public.

After ceasing to the effort of forming a nationwide ML party, the TPLF gave its full attention to consolidating the EPRDF for its impending national role. In 1990, it formed the OPDO from prisoners of war captured from the Ethiopian army. In 1994, the EPRDF established a new coalition of ethnic parties for the southern region, the SEPDF.¹⁰ In the same year, the EPDM changed from a multi-ethnic organisation into an ethnic political movement to 'represent' the previously dominant Amhara ethnic group with a new name, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) under the TPLF/EPRDF. Similarly, the TPLF/EPRDF created several subordinate parties, which would be put in charge of the newly created peripheral regions of the country on its behalf (see chapter 10).

Even after it came to power and declared multiparty democracy, the revolutionary democracy ideology of the EPRDF was not substantially changed. Closer examination of party documents reveals that ML ideology influences EPRDF positions on federalism, political pluralism and economics (EPRDF 2005; EPRDF 1991; EPOU 1990; MLLT 1985; TPLF 1976). For instance, the 1991 inaugural political programme of the EPRDF stated that in the event of elections in the post-Derg period, it should be incumbent upon the EPRDF to make sure that the 'people would not be forced to "elect" the oppressors' (EPRDF 1991: 20). Moreover, the 1990 study document of the EPOU underlined that the ideology of revolutionary democracy stands for the provision of 'full'

democracy for the oppressed classes and democratic forces, while it imposes limitations on the rights of 'imperialists', 'feudalists' and 'bureaucratic-capitalists' (1990: 280). Revolutionary democracy also advocated a class approach on such key democratic rights as freedom of association and speech. Hence, the same document reiterated that such rights be allowed for the progressive forces of revolutionary democracy, and the 'enemies' of the people should be restricted from them (Ibid 348).

The post-Cold War atmosphere required some modifications to political and economic programmes of the EPRDF. Accordingly, it allowed limited economic liberalisation by abolishing price control and privatising some government owned public enterprises (Dercon 2006: 3-4). The EPRDF nonetheless maintained state ownership of land and government monopoly over such crucial economic sectors as telecommunication and electricity. In the realm of politics, it officially accepted multipartyism and incorporated key international instruments of human and democratic rights in both the 1991 charter and the 1994 constitution.

The endorsement of multipartyism seemed mainly motivated to ease the suspicions of western governments and the Ethiopian public about the commitment of a previously hard-line ML group to political pluralism. This could explain the conflicting signals from the EPRDF regarding political pluralism from the early days of the transition. On the one hand, it solemnly declared its commitment to 'democracy, peace and development.' On the other hand, it meticulously worked to translate its hard won military victory into political dominance. Thus, both the 1991 charter and the 1994 constitution helped translate its political programmes into constitutional principles without any meaningful bargaining and compromise (Merera 2007: 92). It also effectively used its governmental roles to advance its partisan objectives. For instance, the temporary assignment of its troops during the transitional period (1991-1995) to serve as national army and police was effectively used to consolidate EPRDF's political and military powers throughout the country by firmly stamping out whatever opposition the new order encountered (Lyons 1996; Ottaway 1993).

Along with these, the EPRDF had to change its rhetoric about its role of providing vanguard leadership to the people of the country. In the parlance of ML parties, the TPLF/EPRDF before the collapse of the socialist system defined its role as one of providing guidance in the transition from a pre-capitalist mode of production to the mythical classless society. In a smart move, after the collapse of the socialist

system, it presented itself as a vanguard party, which still gives guidance to Ethiopia's transition. This time, however, the destination of the illusive transition changed from the Marxist Garden of Eden to a developed capitalist economy and liberal democracy (EPRDF 2005: 82). According to a booklet circulated by the EPRDF after the electoral crisis of 2005, the main reason for the continuation of its vanguard role and the ideology of revolutionary democracy is the lack of an advanced economy and a middle class that could sustain a capitalist economy and a liberal democracy in the country (Ibid). Moreover, the booklet stated that revolutionary democracy is transient and gives way to liberal democracy when the majority of Ethiopia's peasantry that today constitutes more than 80 per cent of the country's population joins the ranks of the middle class. Until such time, according to the EPRDF it is incumbent upon itself to provide leadership to the Ethiopian peasantry and other 'revolutionary' forces (Ibid). This partly explains the reason why the EPRDF styled itself as a peasant-based dominant party after the 1990s.

3.4.3 Reinvention of the EPRDF as a dominant party

After its official adoption of a multiparty system in 1991, the EPRDF reinvented itself as a dominant party. Interestingly, Samuel Huntington, who came in 1993 to Addis Ababa to advise the leaders of the EPRDF on the writing of the 1994 federal constitution, contributed to the development of the theoretical basis for a dominant party system in the Ethiopian context. According to him, under a dominant party system, there will be 'one broad based party that has a wide appeal to a number of groups', regularly wins elections and more or less continuously controls government (Huntington 1993: 271). Such a system also allows 'smaller parties which may reflect particular ethnic, regional, or ideological interests' (Ibid). Nevertheless, opposition parties could neither control the legislature nor the executive (Ibid). Put differently, the key feature of this system is 'semi-permanent' ruling party and opposition parties.

Huntington suggested that in the Ethiopian situation, where there is no a large middle class, the EPRDF that he assumed had broad appeal and a peasant base could play the role of the dominant party (Ibid 271-2). He, moreover, underscored that building a dominant party system under the EPRDF serve two key purposes. First, it would provide political stability needed for economic development and attracting

foreign investment. Second, the presence of smaller opposition political parties that compete in elections but can never form a government either individually or collectively provide 'democratic legitimacy' for EPRDF's rule and facilitate the flow of foreign aid (Ibid). The reasons behind Huntington's promotion of these ideas could be because of his belief that poor countries like Ethiopia cannot maintain multiparty democracy (Huntington 1991:60). He nonetheless did not explain how a dominant party is going to maintain power without coercion and authoritarianism. In fact, in order to appreciate the emergence of the EPRDF as a dominant party one must pay attention to its authoritarian practices.

In this respect, the EPRDF reinvented itself as a vanguard party of the Ethiopian peasantry through authoritarian tactics. In spite of the often-repeated rhetoric about historic bondages that prevail between the EPRDF and the peasantry, the former maintains vanguardship of the latter through the imposition of a strict regime of control. For instance, the EPRDF maintained state ownership of land and established new sub-*kebele* structures to strengthen its control over the rural areas.¹¹ Thus, during elections peasants will be coerced to register on time and vote for the EPRDF. Local officials threaten those who would not follow the official line with land redistribution, denial of food aid and fertilisers (Poluha 2002: 124; Tronvoll 2001: 700-2).

Regarding multiparty elections, there is no levelled playing field for all the political parties. In other words, as competitive elections are antithetical to the idea of a dominant party, the EPRDF does not allow free and fair elections. It tightly controls such institutions as the electoral board, the courts and the electronic media whose independence is crucially important for holding free and fair elections. Hence, political parties with different shades of ideology could not compete in an equal footing and elections remain neither free nor fair (NDIIA 1992; Pausewang et al. 2002: 32).

The civil society organisations cannot counterbalance the glaring deficit in political pluralism. Generally, the EPRDF does not tolerate civil society organisations, which are critical of its policies and practices. Thus since the beginning of the 1990s, two veteran civil society organisations, the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) and the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) were not allowed to function independently of the government (Paulos 2006: 19-21; Sisay 2002: 14). Likewise, nongovernmental organisations that voice criticism on government policies and actions are also routinely intimidated (Scherrer 2003: 21).

In the same way, the government tightly controls the media which could have immensely contributed to the development of democratic federalism. This is despite the incorporation of freedom of speech and the press in the 1994 constitution. The electronic media is still 100 per cent controlled by the government; while the privately owned print press has had troubled relations with the government ever since its emergence in 1991. Some of the private newspapers lacked professionalism and tended to be inflammatory. The government in its part used a draconian press law to punish dozens of journalists accused of defamation and incitement against the government (CPJ 2006). Unfortunately, on more than one occasion this brought the government the unenviable reputation of being one of the top enemies of the press in the world (CPJ 1998, 2007).

The independent print media that had been struggling since its emergence was effectively neutralised after the controversial May 2005 elections. Many of the newspapers that were critical of the government remain closed. After clamping down on the print press, the government is now vigorously trying to control the flow of information into the country. It has thus started to censor the Internet and jam the shortwave local language radio programmes beamed to the country from international broadcasters such as the American Voice of America (VOA) and the German Deutsche Welle (BBC Monitoring 2007; Reporters without Borders 2007).

When it comes to intra-party relationships, the maintenance of the EPRDF as a cohesive and dominant party requires the use of ML authoritarian methods, democratic centralism and *gimegema*.¹² Palmiro Togialiatti explained democratic centralism in the context of the former socialist bloc as:

A simple and new type relationship of the citizens, the Party and the State. Both the Party and the state maintain basic units in the work places. They constitute the foundation of both the Soviet organs and organizations of the Communist Party. It is the task of the Party, the organizations of the Communist Party. It is the task of the Party, the vanguard of the working class, to direct the economic, administrative, etc. activities of the state. The leading function of the Party originates in the fact that it plays a leading role in the Soviet organizations and mass organizations, and that it is the Party, which elaborates the main course of the development of the society and struggles for the realization of its plans. The resultant system of democratic centralism is the system of proletarian dictatorship. In it leadership and consensus are inseparably one (cited in Kiss 1982: 283-4).

Like the Soviet and other communist parties, democratic centralism provides the top leadership of the EPRDF uncontested authority to decide both the ideological and organisational affairs of the organisation. The lower echelon of EPRDF's leadership and the rank-and-file members are to implement the decisions made by the higher officials. As a result, there is only one-way channel of accountability within the organization that comes from the higher leadership to the lower. In addition to centralisation of power, the leadership style of the EPRDF is characterized by secrecy in which a select few top leaders without the participation of the wider membership make key decisions that affect the goals of the organisation. The TPLF conceded the prevalence of this problem when it evaluated its ten-year experience in 1985 and noted that:

Evaluations and debates within the TPLF were concentrated within the narrow circle of the vanguard communist force. If differences emerge, they will be considered as big secrets and are maintained within the top leadership. It is only after a decision has been reached within the narrow circle on the division, the news of the division and the action to be taken will be forwarded to the communist force and the rank-and-file members of the TPLF (MLLT 1985: 7).

Additionally, relationships between the TPLF, which remains the dominant force within the EPRDF and the other members of the ERPFD are still characterised by asymmetry in which the former continues to enjoy disproportionate power. Many scholars consider this as one of the key factors that thwarted the realisation of genuine federalism (Aalen 2002: 82; Merera 2003: 141; Scherrer 2003: 14). The continued existence of asymmetrical relationships between the TPLF and the other members of the EPRDF was made abundantly clear during the TPLF leadership crisis in 2001 (Alem 2004: 112; Alemseged 2004: 610; Medhane and Young 2003: 389).

The theory of a dominant party carefully choreographed since 1991 faced a crisis by the 2005 elections. Contrary to the teachings of the dominant party philosophy, the opposition parties nearly unseated the EPRDF government. Following this, the dominant party that decided to make the election freer than before as a way of a calculated risk has been working to tighten its grip on power by using several authoritarian instruments.¹⁵ One of the new instruments is the slogan of

‘developmentalism’. The PM who came up with the idea argued, as the neo-liberal economic reform prescriptions that were forwarded by the IMF and the World Bank failed to bring the desired changes, it would be necessary to consider the role of strong developmental state, which would intervene in the market to address pervasive market failures (Wallis 2007).

Considering the fact that the EPRDF has not undertaken what Berhanu Abegaz called, ‘deep economic reforms’ in such areas as land ownership and finance (2005: 21-2), one may doubt that the theory of the developmental state was necessitated to prevent market failures. The main reason behind the sudden promotion of developmentalism appears to be the need to provide a new legitimacy for a regime that failed to translate its promises of democracy, peace and development into practice. This becomes evident when one looks at the manner in which the ERPFD overplayed the recent economic growth in the country to justify its tight grip over political power. It even coined an illusory developmental objective of bringing Ethiopia into the group of middle-income countries of the world in a matter of two or three decades (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007). The mantra of developmetnalism that is played day and night in Ethiopia resonates what has been preached by authoritarian regimes from Latin America to East Asia. Almost all of these regimes like Ethiopia today appealed:

[to the]...masses of the poor by presenting themselves as forces for progress, as agents of development, as shortcuts to modernity. Their claim to legitimacy, their appeals to loyalty, were that they were uniquely capable of mobilising resources, and energies to break the chains of poverty, to build a better future, to lead their respective countries to affluence, power and prestige. Whatever their particular ideological stripes, such regimes plastered their walls and minds with images that pictured how everything, homes- schools- hospitals-would grow in the radiant future (Przeworski et al. 2000: 2).

In sum, as observed by Marina Ottaway as far back as 1995, EPRDF’s practices are characterised by mere emphasis on democratisation and federalism as purely formal processes without contents (1995: 68). Hence, under the prevailing conditions in Ethiopia, one cannot talk about federalist decentralisation of power.

3.5 Conclusion

Can there be genuine federalism without democracy. The answer is negative if we are talking about modern or republican form of federalism. Moreover, it is hard to envisage alternative non-democratic bases to federalism that would be sufficient to anchor both spheres of government. If this is the case, successful federalism requires robust democracy in which citizens share membership of two political communities and participate politically in both (Galligan 2006: 264).

After the collapse of the communist federations of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, there has been a renewed interest in examining under what political framework federalism may genuinely operate (Burgess 2006; McGarry and O'Leary 2007; O'Leary 2001; Stepan 1999, 2001). These examinations, as reviewed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, hint that federations in order to operate genuinely require a liberal democratic system, open and competitive elections, the rule of law and others. With this backdrop, this chapter examined the historical, ideological and political basis in which federalism has been operating in Ethiopia.

As reviewed in this chapter, historically, Ethiopian regimes responded to the deep ethno-linguistic diversity that prevails in the country through different 'social engineering' instruments (Alem 2005: 320-1). Haile Selassie's regime sought the assimilation of the elites of the different ethnic groups into the cultures and languages of the Amhara ruling class. However, this did not bring about the desired results. Hence, the post-1974 regimes of the country (both the Derg and the EPRDF) sought to restructure the Ethiopian state using some of the teachings of Joseph Stalin's theory of nationality. As discussed in this chapter, while the military recognised the equality of the nationalities and their right to self-determination through regional autonomy, its delivery on these promises was too late and too little.

Indeed, Stalin's theory of nationality deeply influenced the EPRDF's reconstitution of Ethiopia into an ethnic federation. Moreover, the ruling party uses ML principles of party organisation and mobilisation. This explains why Ethiopia, even after its adoption of a multiparty system for the last 17 years is a *de facto* single party state. Because of the ubiquitous role of the EPRDF and the massive gulf that prevails between the theory and practice of multiparty democracy and federalism, it is clear that Ethiopian federalism is not operating under a democratic framework.

This has an adverse impact on the ability of the ethnic federation to emerge as a sustainable system that would balance unity and diversity in the country.

Having examined the historical, ideological and institutional aspects of Ethiopian federalism, the next chapter examines the impact of Ethiopian federalism on ethnic conflicts at a general level. The chapter also seeks to provide the contending debates on the reconstitution of the country into an ethnic federation and present some of the most important trends of conflicts. This will be done in order to provide a crucial link between what is happening at the country level with that of the several case studies examined from the two study regions.

Notes

¹ *Lijj*, which literally means a 'son', refers to a male descendant a noble, generally of a prince.

² The Amharic word *neftegna* literally refers to rifleman or soldier. The *neftegna* were given land and tenants in lieu of salary.

³ *Balabat* refers to individuals who used to serve as intermediaries between the northern officials and the various conquered ethnic groups in the south. Some of the *balabat* were recruited from the existing traditional indigenous structure whereas others were given the position due to their service (Markakis 1987: 106).

⁴ In 1974, the Orthodox Church was disestablished from its status as a state church. To ensure religious equality, the military government recognised the most important Islamic holidays as national holidays.

⁵ According to Gleason, the Soviets used to categorise the different ethnic groups within the ex-Soviet union as 'nations, national groups and peoples.' The nations were at the top of the hierarchy, had their own union republics and even the right of secession, while nationalities and peoples were in 'autonomous republics' and 'autonomous districts' without the theoretical rights enjoyed by the union republics (1990: 140).

⁶ Joseph Stalin defined the nation as '...a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture' (Stalin 1954: 307).

⁷ According to Haile Halefom, former General Secretary of the Ethiopian parliament, 'nations' refer to those ethnic groups with large population size, developed literary languages and boundaries, while 'nationalities and peoples' refer to smaller ethnic groups of the country (Haile 1998).

⁸ Ethnicisation of territory, according to Oren Yiftachel and As'ad Ghanem refers to 'a collective project of exerting ethno-national control over a territory perceived as the nations (exclusive) homeland. The regime is thus propelled by a sense of collective entitlements among the majority group to control its state and homeland, as part and parcel of what is conceived as a 'national' right for self determination' (2004: 647-76).

⁹ The EPDM was initially established by a splinter group from the EPRP. Since its formation in 1980, it worked closely with the TPLF as a junior partner (Young 1997: 11).

¹⁰ The SEPDM was renamed the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) after it was purged in the wake of the TPLF leadership crisis in 2001.

¹¹ More importantly, two new sub-*kebele* units were created. These are named differently from one region to the other. For instance, in the Oromia region, they are called *Gott* and *Garre*. In terms of hierarchy, each *kebele* is divided into several *gott* that usually contain 60-90 households. The *gott* are in turn divided into several *garre*, which include close to 30 households together. The new structures have consolidated the function of the *kebele* particularly regarding the mobilisation and control of the peasantry (HRW 2005: 17).

¹² *Gimegema* is an Amharic word literally translated into English as evaluations. It refers to the practice of criticism and self-criticism within the EPRDF and its affiliate organisations. The EPRDF like other ML parties uses evaluations and the principle of democratic centralism to maintain control within the party organisation.

¹³ In his interview with BBC's Stephan Sacker, when Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was asked about the reasons for the post-electoral crisis— he plainly said that by organising a relatively open election, his government went to a calculated risk. Implicit in this assertion was the fact that his party was not ready to see electoral defeat (Sacker 2000).