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Political discourses and the securitization of democracy in post-1991 Ethiopia

Tessema, Y.N.

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Author: Tessema, Y.N.

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Chapter Five: Discourses of Ethiopian Opposition Politics

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is one of the three dealing with the major political discourses of post-1991 Ethiopia: Those of the ruling EPRDF, the Ethiopianists and the ethno-nationalists. These discourses underpin the debate on the present and future development of the Ethiopian state, and oscillate between those who reject the EPRDF doctrine, particularly ethnic federalism, the Ethiopianists who advocate a unitary democratic federalist state, and the ethno-nationalists vying to challenge the *raison d'être* of the imperial current makeup of the Ethiopian state. In explaining the political discourses of the Ethiopianist opposition political parties, fronts and movements, this chapter argues that discursive narratives express the contestation of power between the dominant and dominated political forces. These discourses also change in relation to shifts in the political context, in which discourse is produced and reproduced as in the case of opposition political forces/ parties that have maintained their political presence from the 1960s to the present. The chapter also shows how discursive narratives on democracy and development have become major contested arenas leading to their securitization, whereby the opposition also actively engages in securitizing politics.

5.2. The Antecedents of the Ethiopianists' Political Discourses

The politics of opposition, understood as organized practices associated with a certain political agency, is traceable to the political activities of the late 1960s, which, at their peak, led to the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution,³³ which saw the fall of the government of

³³ For details and alternative versions of the political events/history, see Zewde, B. (2014). *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960-1974* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer Ltd.); Tareke, G. (2009). *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); Tiruneh, A. and Andargachew, T. (1993). *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Clapham, C. (1988). *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Markakis, J. and Ayele, N. (1986). *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press); Ottaway, M. and Ottaway, D. (1978). *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York:

Emperor Haile Selassie I. Emperor Haile Selassie I was the country's last monarch, who ruled from 1930 until his dethronement in 1974. Despite the emperor's modernizing efforts, the fundamentals underpinning the *ancien régime* remain largely problematic and intact. Politically, the emperor had absolute power. For example, the *Zufan Chilot*, the highest appellate court, presided over by the emperor himself, had overruling power over the decisions of the judiciary as a whole. The prerogative power he had over the legislature included repealing any legislation he disapproved of. Above all, sovereign power resided in the person of the king, and the legitimacy offered was a divine one, i.e. that he was an 'elect of God' (Revised Constitution 1955). Economically, feudalism, which was the basis of the monarchical system, appeared more susceptible to opposition. In the feudal system that characterized the economic activities of the *ancien régime*, it was the gentry and nobility, just below the emperor, who were seen as undeservedly benefiting from, among others, the land tenure system. In the southern part of the country, peasants turned tenants, who had to serve/maintain the ruling class, while the peasants in the northern part of the country struggled with burdens related to inconsiderate taxes, levies and tributes to the ruling class. These and a plethora of other issues gave rise to a series of opposition actions that occurred in different forms and at different times throughout the emperor's reign, but more seriously since the early 1960s. The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was among those forces that challenged the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie and called for radical change³⁴.

The ESM was one of a several groups that opposed monarchical rule, but it was also different from the others in various ways, including the nature of its opposition, its role in the process that brought about the downfall of the emperor, and for the mark it left on the general politics of the country. Many other groups opposed to the monarchy can be characterized as sporadic, event-led and narrower in terms of the scope of their issues and/or the locus of the affected areas. However, the issues championed by university and high school students were more systematic and directed against the system itself. For instance,

Holmes and Meier); Hiwet, A. (1984). 'Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution', *Review of African Political Economy*, 11(30), 32-47; Lefort, R. (1983). *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* (London: Zed Books); Halliday, F. and Molyneux, M. (1982). *The Ethiopian Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: New Left Books).

³⁴ For more on the ESM see the reading list mentioned under footnote 30 above.

the peasants' revolts in the north of the country, such as the Gojjam Peasants Rebellion and the Bale Peasant's Rebellion, were related mainly to the injustices that resulted from a rise in taxes (in the former case) and the land tenure system (in the case of the Bale Peasants' Rebellion). Similarly, most other challenges to the system in the period before the 1974 revolutions were of the same category. The soldiers' mutinies in Negele Borena and other places were against harsh living conditions and motivated by a demand for salary increases. The taxi drivers' strike was against the rise in fuel prices, and Ethiopian teachers opposed the new education policy (the Sectorial Review Initiative³⁵). An exception to this, albeit incomparable to the ESM, was the abortive coup d'état in 1960. As unthinkable and 'heretical' as it was perceived to be at the time, its goal, however, was not to fundamentally change the monarchy but to modernize it by replacing the emperor with a more modern monarchy, with significantly curbed power. The coup aimed to depose the emperor and, as disclosed by the coup leaders, the Neway brothers, put his son on the throne.³⁶ In contrast, the Ethiopian Student Movement, both at home and abroad (in North America and Europe) was at the forefront of opposition to the imperial system as a whole. Addis Ababa University students were pioneers in raising systematic and far-reaching questions from the early 1960s onwards. They waged a more radical struggle too. They framed the opposition to monarchical rule and raised systematic questions aimed at unsettling the imperial system. They demanded '*Land for the Tiller*', a radical land policy that would put an end to the feudal system. They attempted to highlight all the problems they saw emanating from the imperial system and sided with all those whom they perceived as an exploited class, and echoed their grievances. They questioned the foundations of the *ancien régime* itself by historicizing and problematizing its evolution and

³⁵ For more on the subject see Paulos, M. (1982). The Political Spectrum of Western Education in Ethiopia. *Journal of African Studies*, 9(1), 22. Tekeste, N. (2006). *Education in Ethiopia: From crisis to the brink of collapse*. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. And, Bishaw, A., & Lasser, J. (2012). Education in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future Prospects. *African Nebula*, (5).

³⁶ The coup leaders were Brigadier General Mengistu Neway, the elder brother, who was in charge of the Imperial Palace Guards, and Girmame Neway, a Western-educated civilian who was appointed to govern the local provinces. It is widely believed the coup was plotted primarily by the latter. Both lost their lives, and their bodies were hung in public before being buried. See Clapham, C. (1968). 'The Ethiopian Coup d'état of December 1960'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6(4), 495-507. In addition, the reading materials cited under footnote 1 all focus on pre-revolution events in the Ethiopian revolution.

existence. Finally, espousing Marxist-Leninist ideology, they called for the monarchy to be overthrown and replaced by a socialist revolution. In doing so, the students took the lead in the framing, conceptualization and politicization of political, economic and social issues (Andargachew 1993; Kiflu 1993). Amidst the harsh government response, which included imprisonments, killings and politically motivated dismissals from the university, they persisted in their struggle and played a key role in the revolution that overthrew the emperor. As such, they were effectively conducting opposition politics not only in relation to the imperial regime, but also to the two subsequent regimes – Mengistu’s regime (1974-1991) and the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front regime (1991-present). This role of student movements in opposition politics warrants further discussion.

Many of the opposition political forces/organizations emerged out of the ESM. As their opposition against the imperial system intensified, the students’ movement became more radical and leftist in its ideological orientation. Different clandestine groups, which later emerged as major political forces, had their roots in the student movement. The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), better known by its Amharic acronym, Meison (yemela Etiyophiya Socialist Niqinaqe), were the two main political forces that sprang out of the movement. Other ethno-nationalist liberation fronts stemmed from the movement too. Whereas all of these political forces were ideologically Marxist-Leninist, they differed in their conceptualizations of political, economic and social issues. Additionally, their differences expanded to the tactical/strategic issues of their struggle against what they initially regarded as their ‘common enemy’ (the emperor regime) and on the end goals of their respective struggles. However, the alleged variations often become blurred as one zooms in on the political forces under consideration. That said, based on their conceptualization of the political and socio-economic issues (politicization of their grievances) and their visions for the country, one can broadly group the opposition forces as pan-Ethiopianist or ‘centripetal’ forces and ethno-nationalist liberation fronts or ‘centrifugal’ forces. Reference to their interpretation of societal contradictions in their conceptualization of monarchical rule makes this clustering more plausible. For instance, while the Pan-Ethiopianists understood the

major contradiction in Ethiopian society in terms of class exploitation, and conceived a nationwide struggle to radically change the system, the ethno-nationalists understood the major contradiction as ethnic domination/(internal colonialism, depending on the group in question and sought the liberation of their respective ethnic communities. Additionally, while the Pan-Ethiopianists envisaged an end goal more focused on the whole of Ethiopia and aimed at advancing the territorial integrity/inviolability of the country, the ethno-nationalist focus was on emancipatory ends for their ethnic communities, which also included secession for some groups. These variations in the conceptualization of societal problems have been evident for the past 24 years (1991-2015), defining the political spectrum of the country and serving as an important feature of opposition politics since the time of the ESM. Thus, dividing the opposition along Pan-Ethiopianist (centripetal) forces and ethno-nationalist (centrifugal) forces provides a good foundation for the following discussion on opposition discourses.

Accordingly, the first part of the discussion presents Pan-Ethiopianist opposition political discourses, and the second part presents ethno-nationalist opposition political discourses. The discussions are aimed at uncovering how Ethiopian opposition politics in both camps has manifested in its conceptualizations of societal problems (political, economic and social) and the characterization of struggles in relation to the ruling regimes these forces oppose or have opposed. To achieve the aim of the discussion, this study has aimed to sketch the trajectories of opposition politics in terms of the temporality issue, the relevance of the representations and the dynamics of the nature of the opposition *vis-à-vis* the ruling regimes. For instance, while the scope of this study is from 1991-2015, the discussion on Pan-Ethiopianist political discourse goes back to the opposition political discourses that began in the 1960s by analyzing the political discourse of the EPRP and AESM. Likewise, for the discussion of the ethno-nationalists, organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden Liberation Front, which were founded in the same period as the EPRP and AESM, are parts of the analysis. This has two major advantages. The first is that the discussion is enriched by acknowledging that opposition politics in Ethiopia has its roots in the politics of this era and, indeed, today's opposition is largely a continuation of the politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the analysis focuses on the more recent past, while it also considers the earlier developments. Second, it is

clear opposition politics is an intergenerational undertaking incorporating both convergent and divergent ways. This must be reflected in any discussion in order to remedy any gaps that might arise from the temporal focus of this study. An equally important point for consideration is the selection of the political forces included in this discussion.

Since 1991, there have been over 90 political parties legally registered to operate in Ethiopia (National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, 2017). This figure does not include those political forces that operate outside the legal realm of the incumbent government. In the pre-1991 period, too, there were different political forces, but they are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on the key opposition political forces between 1991 and 2015. The political opposition groups under discussion have been selected for the 'weight' of their contributions to political life in Ethiopia, a notion elaborated in the discussion below. Finally, the various objectives (democracy or secession), methods (peaceful or armed struggle) and the different relations these opposition political forces have had over time with the different ruling regimes are examined to reflect the dynamism and efforts to ensure representation in the opposition's political discourse.

5.3. Pan-Ethiopianists' Political Discourse

This section explores the political discourses of Pan-Ethiopianist political forces by focusing specifically on how they conceptualize issues of political and socio-economic importance. Furthermore, it briefly sheds light on the characteristics of their struggles by examining the nature and strategies of their opposition activities. The Pan-Ethiopianist forces discussed (in order) are: 1) EPRP; 2) AESM/MEISON; 3) Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU); 4) All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP); 5) Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP); 6) Ginbot 7: Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy; and 7) Blue Party (or *Semayawi* in Amharic). The first two are the 'giants' that emerged out of the Ethiopian Student Movement, and represent the leftist camp, while the EDU was a pro-monarchical party established after the 1974 revolution and the dethronement of the emperor. As such, it represents a non-leftist discourse from the 1970s. The remaining political forces in the

above list were established in the post-1991 era and currently represent the main opposition to the incumbent regime's rule, some acting peacefully and others, as discussed below, through armed struggle.

5.3.1. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP)

The EPRP was established as a clandestine group in April 1972, just two years before the 1974 revolution. Its existence, however, was not officially declared until August 1975. It was founded by students who played a key role in the Ethiopian Student Movement. Its party newsletter, *Democracia*, was published well before the official declaration of the party and was influential in shaping the discourses of the struggle and the course of the revolution. It is now over 45 years since the party was established, and to this day it continues its struggle, despite the heavy losses it suffered in wars with various regimes and the brutal repression it experienced mainly from the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam and the TPLF/EPRDF. It has lost many of its founding leaders and hundreds of its members and supporters. The EPRP was the most formidable force in the pre-revolution period, with solid foundations in student organizations, labour unions and in key urban areas. However, during and after the 1974 revolution it was almost annihilated by the campaign of 'Red Terror' (1976-1978) by the Derg military dictatorship regime. Its role as a political opposition and its struggle against the three successive regimes: the *ancien régime* of the Haile Selassie government, the Derg military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, and the incumbents must be highlighted in order to examine how the EPRP understands politics and the characteristics of its struggle over four decades.

As a party that emerged from the Ethiopian Student Movement, the EPRP regarded the *ancien régime* as a source of the problems confronting the country. Clearly, for a party that espoused a Marxist-Leninist ideology, monarchical rule was inconceivable, and the EPRP regarded it as the cause of societal contradictions. It was labelled an oppressive system that stood for a few elites imposing their rule over the masses, thereby negating the popular sovereignty principle. The EPRP saw it as an anti-democratic one-man dictatorship that divided and discriminated against the people of Ethiopia based on religion, class and ethnicity. They also blamed the feudal system upon which the monarchy was based as the major source of societal contradictions. The EPRP blamed the feudal class –

the nobility and the gentry, the clergy and the foreign investors – for exploiting the masses (the peasantry, workers, petty bourgeois, low-ranking military officers and soldiers). And they rejected the land tenure system because the nobility and the gentry benefited from it at the expense of the peasantry. In this regard, the ESM sympathized with the various peasants' rebellions in different parts of the country which echoed their 'Land for the Tiller' slogan. The EPRP also supported the peasants in the southern part of the country, who had become subject to oppression as tenants of the feudal class, and insisted that their democratic right to self-determination be restored. The EPRP believed the political and cultural dominance of the settler Amhara ruling elites was exacerbating the plight of the peasants in the south, and highlighted their claim that class was the (material) basis for the contradictions in society (Kiflu 1993). True to its Marxist-Leninist convictions, its support for secessionism was not in the form of an endorsement but a declaration that it would fully adhere to a Leninist resolution of the issue. Additionally, it believed that once the class contradiction was resolved, other contradictions in society would be addressed too. This was a further indication of the party's application of Marxist-Leninist tenets to the issue of the nationality question. The problems of monarchical rule were further externalized, and the country's relationship with the West became a political issue. Like any other leftist movements of the time, the EPRP also made imperialism part of its struggle against monarchical rule. In the context of the Cold War, the emperor's government sided with the US and other Western interests in the Horn of Africa region, making the regime a beneficiary of extensive support, including military aid, from the West – a critical factor in sustaining its rule. As a result of this support, the global socialist movement narrative about the U.S. (in a Cold War context) and the presence of foreign investment, which was seen as 'a tool to extract raw materials by global capitalists, U.S. imperialism was seen as inherent to the 'enemy class'. The party called for the entire imperial system, including monarchical rule and feudalism, to be abolished. It also sought an overhaul of the land policy (i.e., the enactment of a land redistribution policy in response to the Land for the Tiller campaign) and the establishment of a democratic republic government for the oppressed masses, which, of course, excluded the enemy class outright. Its list of enemy class included the 'reactionary' monarch, the nobility and gentry and the 'reactionaries' and 'imperialists.' The EPRP framed its struggle as being anti-feudal, anti-bureaucratic

capitalism, anti-reactionary, anti-imperialist, anti-democracy, anti-people and anti-exploitation. It subsequently launched an urban-based movement and promoted armed struggle.³⁷ In sum, the EPRP wanted a socialist revolution, and it believed this was possible with the party as the vanguard.

As the opposition to monarchical rule grew, so did the potential for revolution. This, coupled with ruptures within the regime itself, resulted in the emperor being overthrown on September 12, 1974. The absence of organized opposition politics following the downfall of the Haile Selassie I government created a leadership vacuum, a situation that led the Derg, a military committee of low- and middle-ranking officers, to take over state power. At the time, both leftist organizations that emerged out of the student movement, the EPRP and AESM, were operating underground as clandestine organizations but were actively engaged in the opposition movement and in the revolution by, among other things, issuing political newsletters. Following the military takeover, the existence of these organizations was officially declared. The Derg military committee, which initially stated that its intervention was provisional, turned into a dictatorship, with its leader, Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, consolidating his power by eliminating his contenders internally and establishing a military dictatorship. Mengistu ruled the country with an iron fist for 17 years (1974-1991). Ironically, Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime declared itself to be revolutionary and a vanguard of the people's struggle. In this new revolutionary role, it issued a land proclamation that aimed to end the feudal land tenure system, a move which was well received by peasants in the south and the revolutionary groups. Mengistu also took other revolutionary measures but these are beyond the scope of this discussion. The EPRP supported Derg's land proclamation despite its reservations about how it was to be implemented. That said, it remained a major opposition to the Derg. It called for the replacement of the military government by a provisional popular government to be formed by anti-feudal and anti-imperialist political parties, groups and mass organizations (*Democracia*, n.d:13, II). Its demands further included democratic rights such as free speech,

³⁷ The EPRP's analysis of the imperial regime and the characterization of its struggle against it can further be found in the selected *Democracia* Series referred to here. *Democracia*, n.1,v.1, *Democracia*, n.2,v.1, *Democracia*, n.3,v.1, *Democracia*, n.4,v.1, *Democracia*, n.5,v.1, *Democracia*, n.6,v.1, *Democracia*, n.7,v.1, *Democracia*, n.10,v.1, *Democracia*, n.11, and *Democracia*, n.12,v.1)

free press and right of assembly for the political groups/parties, and mass organizations opposed to feudalism and imperialism (Ibid., n.d:13, II). It also questioned Derg's policy towards Eritrea and demanded the revocation of those foreign treaties the party regarded as a mark of dependence on imperialism (Ibid., n.d:13, II). These questions, which the EPRP dubbed urgent, and its criticisms of the Derg did not appease the latter. The feuding and apparently irreconcilable competition for political power, which also involved the AESM, provoked political violence that not only claimed the lives of many Ethiopians, but also left its mark on the general politics of the country. What the EPRP started as 'self-defense' measures, unleashed the military dictatorship's campaign of Red Terror, which resulted in the death of thousands (Gebru 2008; Babile 1997; Tessema 2018). Of course, this resulted in the military regime being put on the EPRP's list of enemies and being called a 'chauvinist fascist dictatorship' with which it waged an armed struggle following its defeat in the urban areas. The military dictatorship was further described as anti-people, anti-struggle, anti-democracy, anti-nation, anti-worker, anti-revolutionary, pseudo-socialist, etc., which, according to the EPRP, justified its status as a legitimate object of the armed struggle that needed to be eliminated. Its list of enemies was also expanded to include Soviet socialist imperialism as a result of its relations and considerable support for the Derg military government after the latter proclaimed itself a socialist force committed to achieving a socialist revolution.³⁸

The EPRP's opposition continued into the post-1991 era. Following the downfall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in 1991, it called for the establishment of a provisional government that excluded the Derg. However, the TPLF/EPRDF regime, the ethno-nationalist force that won the war over the Derg, excluded the EPRP from the process of forming the transitional government that was being installed under the auspices of the incumbent TPLF/EPRDF government. The EPRP's exclusion from the post-1991 political process was not surprising, given the heightened animosity that existed between itself and the

³⁸ For the EPRP's characterization of the Derg military junta and the issues it was raising against it, see *Democracia*, n.13,v.1, *Democracia*, n.20,v.II, *Democracia*, n.23,v.II, *Democracia*, n.29,v.II, *Democracia*, n.2,v.III, *Democracia*, n.6,v.III., *Democracia*, n.7,v.III., *Democracia*, nd.9-10,v.III., *Democracia*, n.2,v.IV., *Democracia*, n.5,v.IV., *Democracia*, n.1,v.vi, *Democracia*, v.15, special edition September 1990, and *Democracia*, n.2,v.16

victorious TPLF. While the two groups attempted to organize themselves to wage an armed struggle against the Derg military, the two became engaged in a battle over political issues that the TPLF won. Consequently, the two groups became sworn enemies, hence the exclusion of the EPRP. This unfortunate animosity between the country's political forces remains a tragic feature of Ethiopian political life and had far-reaching repercussions that will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

On its part, the EPRP attempted to initiate a parallel process aimed at establishing a transitional government. It mobilized exiled opposition groups and formed a taskforce to operate the country. However, members of the taskforce who travelled to Addis Ababa were arrested and some were immediately deported upon their arrival at Bole International Airport. The party strongly condemned its exclusion from the TPLF/EPRDF-initiated process and the blocking of its alternative process. Since then, it had become part of the opposition group that operated outside the legal realms of the incumbent government up to the period 2018. The EPRP persists in its opposition against TPLF/EPRDF rule, in what it calls the struggle against *woyane* rule, a reference to it being a movement originating from a minority ethnic group. The EPRP has articulated its bitter opposition to TPLF/EPRDF rule by labelling it as an anti-Ethiopia force that has sold out the country to its historic enemies, including Egypt. It further described the TPLF/EPRDF as a non-Ethiopian government that serves as a Trojan horse for foreign interests that run contrary to the national interests of the country (*Democracia, n.d 4, 37: 2-3*). It has depicted the woyane leadership as being a racist dictatorship, narrow nationalist, anti-people, a traitor and a totalitarian government committed to destroying Ethiopia. It has also accused the TPLF of taking part in the campaign of Red Terror in Tigray during the Derg era. In fact, the EPRP believe the Red Terror is still active in Ethiopia under the incumbent government, although on a reduced scale (Babile 1997: i-iii). Finally, the EPRP believes that, under woyane rule, Ethiopia's existence is seriously threatened, and it has called for the dismantling woyane rule (*Democracia, special edition May 2002*).

“In today's Ethiopia, after 40 years of terror, agony, imprisonment, killings, fleeing, humiliation and oppressions, the country's existence itself has come under serious threat” (*Democracia, n.d 4, 37:2*).

Apparently, the EPRP's conceptualization of politics has remained a securitized one. Its vision to 'democratize' Ethiopia remains contingent upon first removing the regimes in power since 1974. It perceives them of as a 'threat' to be dismantled, and resorted to political violence to realize its vision of a 'New Democratic Revolution' against the imperial and Derg regimes. In its opposition to the incumbent regime, the EPRP has engaged in bloody urban and guerrilla warfare. More recently, however, its use of political violence has been minimal due to the weakening of the party. Nevertheless, it currently promotes itself as a 'social democracy' party (EPRP 2009: 5), a shift from its previous affiliation to Marxist-Leninist ideology. It is also noteworthy that the party has become a centrist advocate of Pan-Ethiopianism/union as it fiercely opposes the current ethnic-federalism arrangement, thereby silently toning down its Marxist-Leninist stand on the issue of nationality. Its political discourses nevertheless remain a manifestation of a securitized politics.

5.3.2. All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) or MESIONE

The All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) is another leftist political organization that emerged out of the Ethiopian Student Movement. It was founded in Hamburg, Germany, in 1968 by Ethiopian educated elites who were in Europe at that time to pursue their advanced studies. Its existence was, however, kept covert, for fear of political repression back home. It was only disclosed after the revolution erupted in 1974; however, the organization was politically active underground and used to circulate its newsletter, *the Voices of the Masses*, which was akin to the EPRP's *Democracia*. The AESM became a formidable political force, particularly in the formative years of the Derg period, during which its feuding and competition for power with the ERPR turned deadly and left them both prey to the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam. After the Derg regime fell, the AESM continued its opposition, now aimed at the current EPRDF regime. It is one of the political parties the TPLF/EPRDF did not invite into the transitional government formation process in 1991. Indeed, it was not only excluded from the transitional process, but it was also not recognized legally as a political force in the post-1991 politics of the country till 2018, and thus it operated in exile from the West. Its influence on, and

reach into, Ethiopia's political life has made it a relevant actor, and hence a brief discussion is warranted on its political discourses and the attributes of its struggle against successive regimes over four decades.

The AESM, one of the two organizations that stemmed from the student movement, shared political readings with the EPRP on the conditions that necessitated an immediate political struggle. To this end, it associated the country's problems with what it called the dark age of feudal reign (Meisone 2013). The feudal system that underpinned the imperial regime of Haile Selassie I was regarded as causing poverty, backwardness, exploitation, and as being an oppressive system that stood for a few, i.e., the gentry and nobility and, as such, was anti-people. It was an absolute monarchy that was perceived as inherently anti-democracy. The land tenure system was identified as a major problem, sustaining the feudal system at the expense of the peasantry. Moreover, the AESM believed the imperial regime system was oppressing the majority of nationalities living in the country. In other words, as an organization that espoused Marxist-Leninist ideology, the AESM understood the problems of the country as class contradictions arising from the material basis of the *ancien régime* – the feudal system coupled with national oppression and other injustices and discriminations based on religion, sex and culture. Its struggle was about dismantling the institutions of the *ancien régime*: the monarchical rule, feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. Moreover, its struggle was framed as being against these enemies of the Ethiopian people and the reactionary feudal and fascist Ethiopian government. It characterized its struggle as anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, anti-people, anti-bureaucratic capitalist, etc. (Meisone 2013; Asegid 2000). Consequently, it played an active role in the pre-revolutionary period by proactively advancing the rallying cry of the time, “Democracy, land for the tiller, equality for nationalities” and by calling for the establishment of a provisional popular government once the revolution toppled the imperial regime of Haile Selassie I. True to its Marxist-Leninist convictions, the aim of its struggle was to build a socialist system, to be realized by waging a national democratic revolution by all means, including protracted armed struggle, though this latter option was never carried out (Meisone 2013: 8). The party sought to lead the potential revolutionary forces in a systematic way in order to achieve the envisaged revolutionary goals,

including the ultimate goal of a socialist system. Accordingly, it pursued a different strategy, tactics and understandings of the nationality question, which brought it into direct conflict with the EPRP and, later, the Derg.

One key difference the AESM had with the EPRP and other leftist ethno-nationalist movements was its understanding of the nationality question. Initially, as a Pan-Ethiopianist movement, its understanding of the nationality question was similar to that of the EPRP. Both regarded it as a secondary issue that could be resolved once democracy had been achieved and the major class issues had been addressed (Assegid 2000). In short, while the AESM adopted a Leninist approach to the nationality question, and thus embraced the notion of self-determination rights including up to secession, it initially held back from endorsing the policy of 'secession' as a right for all, contrary to the EPRP's stance. Later, however, it upheld the Derg's regional autonomy approach to the nationality question, thereby confirming its difference on the issue from the EPRP and other ethno-nationalist movements. It also differed in its understanding of the existence of revolutionary conditions on the ground, on the timing of forming a revolutionary leftist political organization and on the timeliness of the methods of struggle employed by other leftist organizations, particularly the EPRP. It generally believed the time was ripe for revolutionary organizations to be formed in order to lead the struggle according to the EPRP's and other leftists' approaches. Instead, the AESM chose to operate clandestinely and organize revolutionary forces (the peasantry, workers, laborers). Accordingly, it regarded the struggle methods of the EPRP as a manifestation of 'left infantilism' 'adventurism' and 'anarchism' (Andargachew 2000: 49-73; Haile 1977). Amidst its growing feud with the EPRP, the AESM chose to collaborate with the Derg, adopting a policy of what it called 'providing critical support'. The earlier differences and this collaboration with the Derg heightened animosity between the two, which unfolded in tragic political violence (the White Terror, Red Terror, "Netsa irmija" – an Amharic phrase meaning counter self-defence attack on the EPRP). Those who survived the Derg's brutal attacks fled into exile. The surviving members of the AESM leadership continued their opposition to the incumbent EPRDF regime.

According to the AESM, the current TPLF/EPRDF regime is a narrow ethno-nationalist rebellion force that was imposed on the Ethiopian people by the Western powers and the regional reactionary Arab countries (Meisone 2013:1-4). The AESM argued that, due to their hatred of the Derg's self-proclaimed socialism, foreign supporters backed the establishment of the supremacy of the minority Tigrean Liberation Front over the rest of the country in 1991, also allowing Eritrean secession. Consequently, Ethiopia disintegrated, lost access to its port and became a tribalist federation under the guardianship of the *woyane* minority dictatorship rule (Ibid. 2013:1-4). The AESM believes the tribalist/ethnic federation was a façade that never realized the nationality question. The economic policy of the TPLF/EPRDF is seen as only working for a few, while the majority continue to suffer in poverty. The land policy is seen as a measure that reverses the 'land for the tiller' era, as under the EPRDF, the land has become government property. In sum, the AESM firmly believes Ethiopia is in a dark age, in the grip of an 'anti-democratic', 'anti-people' 'anti-peace', 'anti-Ethiopia' 'foreign agent – 'a traitorous, oppressive regime under the minority TPLF, which rules the country by force and has declared a Stalinist constitution (Negede 2004). Moreover, it accuses the TPLF/EPRDF of deliberately causing ethnic hatred, tribalist/ethnic conflicts and religious conflicts in a bid to divide and rule the country and thereby wreak havoc. The TPLF/EPRDF regime is also accused of disintegrating the country by including the right to secede in the constitution and by allowing the secession of Eritrea. In doing so, the AESM contends that the *woyane*/EPRDF leadership poses a serious threat to the country and people of Ethiopia. The AESM strongly believes a struggle against the *woyane* regime of the anti-Ethiopian 'lackey' is an obligation that can be justified nationally, humanly and morally (Negede 2004: 182) with the aim of attaining Freedom, Justice and Democracy (Meisone 1995: 1-2). To this end, it has repeatedly called for the uprooting of the *woyane* regime. Its struggle against the incumbent government started in 1991 when it attempted to initiate a parallel transitional process with other political forces. The TPLF/EPRDF rejected that attempt and excluded the AESM from the transitional process. Since then, it has been playing a key role in organizing an alliance of the opposition against the government in Addis Ababa. A notable instance is its role in establishing the Ethiopian Democratic Forces Union or in Am-

haric, *hibret*, later on *MEDREK*.³⁹ This coalition challenged the EPRDF in the 2005 election and won a significant number of seats in the federal parliament. The coalition's strategic document, which was prepared by a leading AESM member, called for the 'stirring' of a popular peaceful rebellion to remove the entire EPRDF "Stalinist constitutional regime", using the election as a pretext. This generated serious anger and a reaction from the EPRDF, which proved the AESM's influence and relevance in the ongoing political process.⁴⁰

Clearly, the AESM's political discourse is about dismantling/removing the current political order using all available means. The current order and the incumbent as a political agent are perceived as a threat, as were the past two regimes. Like the EPRP, they were also a generation of leftist parties that subscribed to the use of violence as a political means. As the AESM persisted in its opposition to the three regimes, its orientation began to shift to an emphasis on Ethiopian unity, thereby appearing less leftist, if leftist at all.

5.3.3. All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)

The AEUP is a successor organization to the All Amhara Peoples' Organization (AAPO), which was established in 1992 during the transition period. The AAPO was founded to present and defend the interests of the Amhara people, who had been the target of attacks since 1991, the party believed. The killing of ethnic Amhara people in places such as Arbagugu in the Hararghe and Oromia, and the proliferation of ethnic-based parties with

³⁹ The Ethiopian Democratic Forces Union is a coalition of over 15 different political forces that operate in the country and abroad. It was established just before the May 2005 election in a bid to form a united front against the ruling party in the subsequent election, when it successfully challenged the ruling EPRDF coalition especially in the Oromia region and in the Southern region. Later, in 2008, other political forces joined, and the name changed to *MEDREK* meaning "coalition" in Amharic. To date, the coalition is a key opposition force in the country.

⁴⁰ Prime Minister Meles mentioned this book (Negede's Book, mentioned above) and told Professor Beyene, President of the EDFU, that his government could have arrested him long ago for endorsing the book. He mentioned this in a meeting that took place during the post-2005 election crisis, when opposition party leaders were negotiating with the EPRDF in the presence of EU representatives. For more, see pages 435-436 in a book by Berhanu Nega, who was among those present at the meeting: Berhanu Nega (2006). *The Dawn of Freedom: An Attempted Reversal on Ethiopian Democracy* (M.M. Publishers: Kampala, Uganda).

anti-Amhara sentiments during the transitional period led to the establishment of the AAPO as an emergency response, the party claims (*Andinet*, 14 May 1994). However, the party later transformed into a multi-national Pan-Ethiopianist vanguard party in 2002 (AEUP 2003).⁴¹ It has an official newsletter called *Andinet*, an Amharic word meaning unity. A relevant background note about the AEUP states that it is a non-leftist opposition party that emerged after 1991, as part of a new political phenomena in the country's political process. As a legally registered political party it participated in the formation of the transitional government as a major dissenting voice. It later withdrew from the process entirely. Its opposition to the EPRDF regime continued in subsequent years, reaching a climax during the 2005 election when it formed a Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) with other opposition parties and successfully challenged the EPRDF government in the election, which resulted in a major win for the opposition parties. As its opposition to the EPRDF government continued, gaining momentum since the start of TPLF/EPRDF rule, it has become the main target of a crackdown by the ruling regime. Many of its leaders, members and supporters have been subjected to brutality and its leaders, including Professor Asrat Woldeyes and Engineer Hailu Shawul, arrested⁴². In its stance, however, the party has remained fiercely opposed to what it calls a dark period of divide-and-rule during which the ruling regime officially sponsored inter-ethnic conflicts that jeopardized the unity and sovereignty of the country (AEUP 2003).

⁴¹ It must be noted that the AAPO leadership splintered, and a breakaway group carried on as the AAPO. But generally, the AAPO is widely believed to have been succeeded by the AEUP, which was formed from the majority of the AAPO leadership, members and supporters. Another interesting development emerged as a movement called 'Dagmawi AAPO', a second AAPO was recently established in the diaspora. For more, see the movement's website: <http://www.aapo-mahd.org/>; last accessed 05/03/2019.

⁴² Just to mention two instances, Prof. Asrat Woldeyes, the feuding president of the AAPO, was arrested and kept in prison for 43 days. He made a total of over 55 court appearances in a three-year period. During his court appearances, hundreds of people were reportedly detained. The another instance of repression against the party leadership was after the 2005 election, when Hailu Shaul, the chairman of the party, was arrested and kept in solitary confinement in a dark prison cell for 28 days before he joined other prisoners. For more, see *Andinet* May 16, 1994, and Hailu (2013), *My Life and Political Participation* (an autobiography of the writer, written in Amharic).

The AEUP contends that all Ethiopia's current problems stem from the ERPDF's ideologies and practices. Politically, it believes the EPRDF's governance strategy is a one party, neo-Marxist, "apartheid" system that denies the exercise of civil liberties and has kept people "hostage" using state power (economic resources and the use of force). It is a regime that has carried out a sustained onslaught on the country's unity, history and national pride by adopting a divisive, ethnic-driven policy (Ibid. 2003). Economically, it regards the EPRDF's declared free market economy a verbal exercise. Moreover, it problematizes the government's land policy and sees it as being used for political purposes. Among other things, it singles out the business conglomerate of the ruling TPLF as being responsible for serious economic malpractices that need to be addressed. Moreover, under a continued EPRDF reign, it sees the country heading on a destructive path that poses a serious threat, one that requires immediate resolution (Ibid. 2003; Hailu 2013:151-154). To this end, it calls on all the people to stand up and combat what it calls organized evil against the Ethiopian state and Ethiopianism. On its part, the AEUP is committed to a full reversal of this "despicable" government policy, as stated below:

"to accept the evil and anti-democratic practice of the official ethnicization of Ethiopia – the only such country in the entire world with this detestable system as a government policy – and serve as an instrument of such evil designs is to condemn Ethiopia to perpetual backwardness and poverty. Our party is committed to a full reversal of this despicable government policy" (AEUP 2003: 3-4).

The AEUP not only plans to reverse the policy but it essentially sees all government institutions as an instrument of the institutionalization of the EPRDF's beliefs and tenets. Consequently, its overall aim is regime change, but through peaceful political struggle. This includes revising the constitution, thereby reconstituting the whole governmental system. It aims to achieve this by introducing liberal democracy, a free market economy and by bringing land under private ownership. On the issue of federalism, the AEUP

seeks to introduce an alternative to the current ethnic-based federalism; however, to date, its alternative lacks any detail as to what exactly its plans are, although it refers to geographic proximity, settlement patterns and suitability for socio-economic development. Given the divide in the country's political sphere on this issue, one can easily infer that the AEUP is pro-unity in its resolve, as opposed to the ethno-nationalist stance on the issue. This is particularly so given the emphasis it makes on national unity and the territorial integrity of the country (Ibid. 2003:3-4). Moreover, the party characterizes its struggle as one against 'narrow nationalism', 'ethno-centred egoism' and 'anti-unity forces'. It also sees its struggle as being against anti-democratic forces – a list which goes beyond the TPLF/EPRDF regime and includes other secessionist ethno-nationalist forces, which the party regards as enemies of Ethiopian unity and sovereignty. It calls for the dismantling of the 'enemy of Ethiopia', i.e. the TPLF/EPRDF regime.

Additionally, it is important to note the AEUP's radical stance towards the Transitional Government Charter, the constitution and its outright rejection of the TPLF/EPRDF regime. It sees the latter as an anti-Ethiopia force, usurping power backed by foreign forces to disintegrate the unity of the country. It perceives the Charter as a move by the Tigriña-speaking (ethnic Tigreans) to take control of economic and political power together with "alien" forces, i.e. Eritreans (*Andinet*, 14 May 1994). The TPLF regime is regarded as an enemy of Ethiopia because, among others, it allowed the secession of the province of Eritrea from Ethiopia. Furthermore, the AEUP regards the TPLF/EPRDF's recognition of self-determination rights, including the right to secession, for the country's different nationalities as destructive and a threat to the country's unity (Hailu 1996, interview; Asrat 1994, interview). It also has accused the ruling party of instigating animosity/revenge against the Amhara ethnic group by associating all the problems of the country with the Amhara and labelling it as "chauvinist" and "*neftegna*" (AAPO, 2000). The AAPO believe the charter and the FDRE constitution were a mere institutionalization of the Debit Manifesto, the TPLF's declared political programme imposed on the people of Ethiopia. In fact, on the same date the FDRE constitution was ratified, the AAPO declared its objection and called for the establishment of a provisional government, claiming that the

TPLF/EPRDF had no mandate to draft a constitution, contrary to the TPLF/EPRDF's regime-sponsored transition process (*Andinet*, February 1995).

Thus, the AEUP's political discourse is fundamentally opposed to the EPRDF's political and legal reorderings of post-1991 Ethiopia. It contests the whole political process of post-1991 Ethiopia, including the legitimacy of the TPLF/EPRDF, both of which are perceived as a 'threat' to the country's existence. As a precondition to its vision of democratization, the AEUP seeks the removal of the incumbent and the reversal of the latter's New Ethiopia. Its adamant upholding of Pan-Ethiopianist politics and skepticism towards ethno-nationalist forces reveals the tension that underlies the political discourses of the Ethiopian opposition. This is evident in its rejection of ethnic based federalism and its disapproval of ethno-nationalist movements/political parties. Therefore, it is fundamentally opposed to the ruling TPLF/EPRDF and the ethno-nationalist political forces.

5.3.4. Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)

The Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) is a non-leftist, Pan-Ethiopianist opposition political party established in 1999/2000 in the TPLF/EPRDF era. It is one of four parties that established the CUD in the pre-2005 national election and, consequently, it rose to prominence in the opposition political arena. In particular, its profile has been raised as a result of its founder and long-time leader, Mr. Lidetu Ayalew, who has remained a controversial figure in the opposition camp. Among other things, this controversy stems from Ayalew's alleged role in ending the CUD coalition, a subject beyond this discussion.⁴³ As

⁴³ There was serious allegation about Lidetu's ties with the EPRDF and the spy agency. Both Hailu Shawul and Berhanu Negga mentioned this allegation without providing much information. Lidetu has denied any link to the EPRDF/intelligence agency, although the allegation against him seems to be widely upheld. For more on the accusations, see the books written by the aforementioned leaders. Hailu Shawul (2013), *My life and Political Participation*, (an autobiography of the writer published in Amharic). Addis Ababa: Far East Trading. Lidetu, A. (2010) *Medilot*, published in Amharic. Addis Ababa: Progress Printing. Lidetu, A. (2006). *Ye arem irisha*, published in Amharic. Addis Ababa: Progress Printing. Berhanu, N. (2006). *Yenetsanet Goh siqedi: Liqelesesi yetemokorewu ye Etiyopiya democracy (The Dawn of Freedom: an attempted reversal on Ethiopian democracy)*. Kampala, Uganda: M.M. Publishers.

an opposition political party, however, the EDP is one of the few in the opposition to attempt to clearly articulate its position vis-a-vis the ruling TPLF/EPRDF regime and the actors in the opposition camp in a written form.⁴⁴ The subsequent discussion briefly presents the discourses of the party in relation to its rationale, position and the characteristics of its political struggle based on a review of the party's key documents.

The EDP's stance is that there is no democracy and that the country is in darkness under the current TPLF/EPRDF rule. To the EDP, the ruling regime has imposed its rule on the country's people down the barrel of the gun, a reference to how it seized state power in 1991 after defeating the military junta. It essentially sees the country's problem as the continuation of a plethora of problems related to governance, backwardness and the exacerbation of extreme poverty under the current TPLF/ERPFD 'totalitarian' regime, which organizes 'sham elections' ostensibly to promote democratic governance. The EDP regards the current FDRE constitution as having no legitimacy. It sees it as an institutionalization of the political programme of the ruling party. It further states that it is an imposition of the ruling group's interests and its ideology of revolutionary democracy on the people. It therefore insists that the FDRE constitution is not based on the consent of the majority of the people and is not a properly negotiated document. As such, it is a winners' document (Lidetu, 2010, 2016). Due to the regime's legitimacy crisis, the EDP asserts that the institutions established by the constitution are also illegitimate. The EDP objects to the regime's fundamental ideals. To this end, it rejects the notion of ethnic federalism as informing the reconstitution of the country. It regards the reordering of the country based on ethnicity as racist, divisive and discriminatory and states that, among other things, it is based on incorrect readings of the history of the country and what it means to be Ethiopian (EDP 2003a). This tribalist federalism not only ignores individual rights in

⁴⁴ See, for instance, its official documents (All published in Amharic in a six-volume series): (1) EDP (2003a), Analysis of EDP's Political program: Political beliefs and strategies (vol.1), (2) EDP (2003b), EDP's Stand on Government Restructuring and Organization (vol.2), (3) EDP (2003c), EDP's Economic Development Policy and strategies (Vol.3), (4) EDP (2003d), EDP's Policy and strategies on Agricultural, Industry and other Related Economic Issues (Vol.4), (5) EDP (2003e), EDP's Policy on social issues, Vol.5, and (6) EDP (2003f), EDP's stand on electoral system. All are available online at <http://edponline.org>, accessed on (February 23, 2019).

favor of group rights but, like the constitution and the ruling regime itself, is an imposition on the people of the country by force. Thus, it characterizes the current regime as combining racism with dictatorship to rule the country (Ibid. 2003a: 49). On the inclusion of a secessionist clause for ethnic groups in the FDRE constitution, the EDP not only deplores this but sees it as a strategy by the TPLF to “disintegrate”, as illustrated by the regime’s facilitation of the secession of Eritrea. Indeed, it appears that the EDP takes a stronger stance on this issue and against the TPLF/EPRDF than the previously discussed Pan-Ethiopianist opposition forces. Moreover, it regards the issue as a threat posed on Ethiopia and Ethiopianess. When it comes to the nationality question, the EDP asserts it is still national oppression, in which the TPLF, made up of the Tigrean ethnic minority, dominates the rest of the country using divide-and-rule tactics. On the economic front, the EDP believes the TPLF/EPRDF regime is running a system that benefits only a few, i.e., its political loyalists and the business elites affiliated to the ruling regime, and not the majority (the peasants and other segments of society). In particular, it problematizes the role, practice and impact of the TPLF’s business empire on the economy of the country. These political and other socio-economic crises are what led to its establishment and advancement of what it calls the ‘third way option ’ or ‘politics based on reason’, as opposed to the options of the ruling party (EDP 2009).

The EDP’s third option or politics based on reason (in Amharic: *mikinatiyawī politica*) appears to be more of a modus operandi that becomes visible as one closely examines the party’s behaviour, operations and interactions. Its political position is dissimilar to other Pan-Ethiopianist groups. As an alternative to the TPLF/EPRDF’s revolutionary democracy, the EDP favours liberal democracy, which prioritizes individual rights, as opposed to the current system, which prioritizes group rights. In light of this view, the EDP seeks to alter the current ethnic-based federalism into one that, among other things, focuses on geographic and administrative convenience factors. While it is clear the EDP disapproves of the current ethnic-based arrangement, its alternative lacks essential details that would allow for further comparison of its position vis-a-vis others (EDP 2003a). Accordingly, a discussion on this important topic is limited. On the issue of recognizing the right to secession as part of the right of ethnic communities to self-determination, the EDP seems

to have a firm anti-secessionism stance, as it regards the country's territorial integrity and unity as inviolable. With regard to the EDP's economic policy, it endorses a free market economy in which the state plays a 'provisional 'and legally circumscribed intervening role in the process of building a capitalist system. The party contends that the state's role is necessary, given the state of the country's economy and the fact that the private sector is yet to play the leading role. With regard to land ownership, the EDP recognizes three types of ownership rights: private, communal and government ownership rights (EDP 2003c). In this regard, it appears to accept the EPRDF's approach but with an essential addition, which the EPRDF rejects outright. The EDP has clearly stated it believes in peaceful struggle, and strongly condemns armed struggle as an option. Additionally, despite its position on the constitution and current institutions, it advocates engaging in politics with the ruling party, rather than outright rejection and withdrawal. This means it does not approve of the boycotting of elections as a strategy of political struggle. Finally, the EDP's political programme states that the country needs a fresh start in which all political actors, including the ruling party, reconcile with each other, and that this national reconciliation should form the basis of a national consensus on various issues affecting the country. In the absence of this national reconciliation, the EDP believes Ethiopia faces a serious threat to its survival, as the political forces in the country have not yet reached consensus regarding their political differences, which is vital to the nation's survival. Therefore, EDP's conceptualisation of politics remains a securitised one though its mobilisation strategy has remained non-violent as proclaimed by the party.

5.3.5. Blue Party or Semayawi Party

The Blue Party is another non-leftist, Pan-Ethiopianist party. It was established in 2012 but rose to prominence shortly though the internal battle later ultimately contributed to its weakness. It promoted itself as a new-generation party founded by the youth and, indeed, its leaders are younger than their counterparts in the opposition camp. The party believes the 'leftist generation ' (commonly referred to as '*ya tiwiliid*' in Amharic) has failed to transform the country's political system, and thus it bestows the responsibility of

changing the current political order on the new generation, in particular Ethiopia's youth (Yilikal 2014). Although its stance towards the current regime has remained radical, the party adheres to a policy of peaceful political struggle. Since its establishment, the Blue Party had organized and engaged in many activism rallies against the ruling regime, which have led to the imprisonment of its leaders and supporters, mainly on charges of alleged terrorism. The party had an official newsletter called *Negere Ethiopia*, in which it used to communicate the rationale for its political struggle and its alternative positions.

The Blue Party contends that the country is still suffering from backwardness, civil war and extreme poverty due to the prolonged political problems and poor governance. The party further maintains that although Ethiopia is endowed with rich natural resources and a proud history, it has lost its pride and become one of the world's poorest nations. The party also claims that the current regime is a repressive dictatorship that has effectively turned the whole country into an "open prison" (*Negere Ethiopia* n.1, 24, January 2014). It also accuses the government of torture, imprisonment, corruption and creating a situation of mutual suspicion among Ethiopia's ethnic communities (Silesh 2014). In this regard, it appears to vehemently oppose the ethnic-federalism arrangement in place, calling it tribalist and divisive (Ibid. 2014). Furthermore, it claims that the majority of the Ethiopian people have become second-class citizens as a result of the TPLF's divisive and discriminatory rule, which it believes the latter sustains by creating animosity (*Negere Ethiopia* vol.1, no.14, May 23, 2014). The Blue Party also accuses the TPLF/EPRDF regime of deliberately compromising the country's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. To substantiate this claim, the party refers to the secession of Eritrea, the case of port access (Aseb) and the latest case of Badme, in which it accuses the regime of intentionally ignoring the country's national interests more than any other regime in Ethiopian history (*Negere Ethiopia* n.1, January 24, 2014). It appears that the Blue Party, in its attempts to rectify the deeds of the ruling party, has clearly indicated its irredentist claims (Blue Party 2012). The party is not only against the inclusion of secession as part of the self-determination rights for ethnic groups, but it is also against the idea of reconfiguring

the country based on ethnicity. Accordingly, it takes a different approach to the nationality question. The party also claimed Ethiopia's economic system was benefiting only a few.

As a solution to the above problems, the Blue Party offers a different vision. Politically, it advanced a liberal democracy that prioritizes individual rights over group rights. It advocates a federal system, but based mainly on geography and administrative convenience, it fails to provide the details except that it is unequivocally in favour of dismantling the tribalist TPLF/EPRDF option. On the territorial integrity issue, it clearly spells out its position that it is against the secessionist option, and regards the country's territorial integrity as inviolable. The Blue Party believes in a free market economy, and supports private land ownership rights for both rural and urban dwellers. Although the party is committed to peaceful political struggle, it has continuously organized rallies on a variety of issues. These rallies have created an uneasiness among the ruling party, as demonstrated by its reaction to this activism. Moreover, the Blue Party has persistently called for a popular revolution against the regime, which has evoked a repressive response from the latter on the grounds that the party is acting unconstitutionally and engaging in acts of terror against the state. Apparently, the Blue Party's vision for the democratic political future of Ethiopia, is not only different to that of the ruling party, but its vision conflicts radically with the current political process, which it seeks to reverse.

5.3.6. Ginbot 7: Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy

In Amharic, *Ginbot 7* means May 15, the date in 2005 when the national elections were held. The movement believes the ruling minority dictatorship rigged the votes of millions of people. During these elections the opposition parties challenged the ruling party, which won all the seats in Addis Ababa. Before the counting was over, the ruling party declared it had won the election, a claim the National Electoral Board later affirmed. But the opposition rejected the outcome, and their supporters took to the streets. The ruling regime responded with force; many people died, and the opposition party leaders were jailed. Berhanu Nega, a professor and economist at Bucknell University in the USA, was one of

those detained. After his release, he established the Ginbot 7 movement in 2008 with other renowned politicians based in the US.⁴⁵ Ginbot 7 associates its movement with the May 2005 election and, in fact, it sees its struggle as one against “the coup d’état the regime conducted against the outcomes of the May 15, 2005 election and the ever narrowing of political space in the country” (Ginbot 7 2008: 4). Ginbot 7 subscribes to the Pan-Ethiopianist camp and has a newsletter called the *Voices of Ginbot 7*. The movement decided to merge with the Ethiopian Peoples Patriotic Front, a group that had waged an armed struggle against the Ethiopian government from its base in Eritrea in 2015. Consequently, the movement was renamed the ‘Patriotic Ginbot 7 Movement for Unity and Democracy’ until it regained its original name and its independent existence in 2018, following its split from the EPPF.

The movement believes the country is at risk of plunging into chaos, which would not only destabilize Ethiopia, but the entire Horn of Africa region (Ibid. 2008: 3). It contends that the “totalitarian ethnic minority dictatorial regime of the TPLF” is seated on policies that advance ethnic favoritism and nepotism and, as such, are racist and discriminatory, as a result of which the majority in the country are relegated to live as second-class citizens (Ibid. 2008). Politically, it believes the country is in a “dark life”, while the economy is deteriorating and benefiting only a few (Berhanu 2009:614). It further refers to an apartheid system in which the minority Tigrean ethnic group dominates key state apparatus (military, security services, etc.) and monopolizes the economy of the country through its business conglomerates (*Voices of Ginbot 7*, no.27, November 19, 2009). Moreover, Ginbot 7 states that the ruling narrow nationalist group is anti-Ethiopian, secessionist and against “Anything of Ethiopia: our national flag, the territorial integrity, unity, etc. that it wants to destroy” (Andargachew 2009: 2. Own translation). As a Pan-Ethiopianist party, it refers to the issue of Eritrean secession and the loss of access to *Aseb* port under the TPLF regime, which it calls a traitor (*Voices of Ginbot 7*, no.13, August 16, 2008). It accuses the latter of forcefully occupying the country following the fall of

⁴⁵ Berhanu Nega is a renowned politician who co-founded the movement with Andargachew Tsige, formerly the group’s secretary-general. Tsige was captured by Yemen security forces at Sana’a airport in 2014 and handed over to the Ethiopian government, which imprisoned him until very recently.

the Derg Military Junta in 1991. It is firmly opposed to rearranging the country on the basis of ethnicity and promotes a liberal democracy in which individual rights get precedence over group rights. Thus, the federalism option the movement advocates is radically opposed to that of the incumbent one. Indeed, it sees the incumbent's existing policy as dangerous and racist – one which favours the divide-and-conquer tactic (Ginbot 7 2008; Berhanu 2006; Andargachew 2018). It believes territorial integrity is non-negotiable and inviolable, thereby clearly ruling out the recognition of secession as part of any right to self-determination for ethnic groups (Ephrem 2008). In general, it regards the issue of building a democracy as a matter of survival, but for that to happen the movement believes the regime must be removed from power. This would lay the foundations for a democratic political order in the country (Ginbot 7 2008). To achieve its goal, the movement has launched an armed struggle against the TPLF's anti-democratic tyranny. The TPLF/EPRDF, in response, has outlawed the movement as a terrorist organization.

In conclusion, despite their differences the discourses of the Pan-Ethiopianist opposition political forces radically oppose the democratization discourse of the ruling EPRDF. They fundamentally question the legitimacy of the whole post-1991 political process and its guardian actor, the TPLF, on the grounds of legitimacy. They perceive the rule of the TPLF itself as self-imposed, with the backing of some Western powers. For them, it is a force that is overseeing the disintegration of the country and posing a threat to Ethiopia's very survival due to the governance ideals it promotes. Furthermore, the Pan-Ethiopianist opposition are vehemently opposed to the New Ethiopia the ruling regime is attempting to build by reconfiguring the country through ethnic-based federalism. For the Ethiopians, the post-1991 political system represents a repressive authoritarian system, and should therefore be reversed. Furthermore, the regime should be dismantled, either peacefully (through elections or popular revolution), or through an armed struggle. The ultimate aim of removing the EPRDF regime is to spur an authentic democratization process. Moreover, the Pan-Ethiopianists envisage an end goal more focused on the whole of Ethiopia, an approach which emphasises advancing the territorial integrity/inviolability of the country. It thus contains a unitary and centralist approach towards building or sustaining the country as opposed to the ethno-nationalist approaches. Evidently, the politics the

opposition is pursuing is that of reversal, i.e., the dismantling and removal of the regime's excesses of power, which involved political violence when demands for democratization were securitized and political opposition was perceived as a threat.