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Introduction

Donald N. Levine (1974), author of *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society*, who has popularized Carlo Conti-Rossin's description of Ethiopia as *'un museo di popoli'* - 'a museum of peoples' (pp. 19-20) has credited the evolution of multi-ethnic Ethiopia as an 'Amhara thesis', 'Oromo anti-thesis' and the 'Ethiopian synthesis'. Whatever the merits of his historical analysis and the anthropological fascination thereof for the making of Ethiopia, at a point in time his work did go to the press, the country moved to a crisis of major proportion whose resultant effect was a revolutionary reconstitution of both state and society that relegated the country's *ancien regime* to the museum of history. This put to a severe test both his thesis and the celebrated historical evolution of the country as a whole. And now, in less than two decades, the Tigrayan anti-thesis, the negation of his 'Ethiopian synthesis' - to use Marxist dialectics for want of a better term - is in its full swing - a far reaching agenda of the remaking of Ethiopia, in a manner that redirects, if not fully reverse the historical evolution of modern Ethiopia.

The present experiment involves the objective of accomplishing two historical tasks: the tasks of creating a country that houses 'nations, nationalities and peoples' of equals and ending an authoritarian rule by democratizing the Ethiopian state and society as a whole, a precondition for peace and development. However, as the result of the accumulated five grand failures of the Ethiopian elite in a century, the prennial quest for peace, democracy and development continue to be as illusive as ever. The most fundamental question is, therefore, what lessons to be learnt to move forward? This paper, which sums up the political history of modern Ethiopia in terms of five grand failures is a modest attempt to do that job.

The Expansion and Consolidation of the Empire - State: The First Grand Failure, 1850s -1900.

When the process of the creation of a modern multi-ethnic empire-state was started by Kassa of Begemidir around 1850s, historic Ethiopia (roughly today's northern half of the country and part of Eritrea) had been under feudal anarchy for about eighty years, and central authority existed mainly in name. (See Bahru, 1991; Teshale, 1995). But, the feudal anarchy that precipitated the weakening of the Abyssinian State had the resultant effect of opening up the appetite of the aspirants for power to reestablish past imperial glory and a strong central authority. (See Addis Hiwot, 1975) This was further facilitated by the vulnerability of the then dominant Yejju Oromo elite, who were then controlling the imperial seat at Gonder for about eighty years, but culturally and demographically far removed from the bulk of the Oromo population, who were then living outside of the Abyssinian central control.

Kassa-Tewodros, albeit his humble background, had both a sense of history and a sense of modernization: two major tasks, he had set forth for himself to accomplish. His sense of history had to do with the glorious past of the Christian kingdom mainly weakened by the intrusion of the Oromos, whom he vowed to stop by re-establishing the country to its old glory. (1) His sense of modernization had to do mainly with getting access to firearms without which he could not reestablish past glory.

Tewodros's rule was short-lived (1855-1868) and none of his missions were accomplished, but his legacy helped the creation of a far grandiose empire-state by his successors than what he dreamt. More paradoxically, his proto-Ethiopian nationalism never reconciled with the competing nationalism's of the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia nor could it defuse them, which a century later have produced an anti-thesis of the historical process initiated by Tewodros in 1850s. (2)

During the rise of Tewodros the geographical extension of the Ethiopian State was limited to the northern perimeter of today's Ethiopia. But while his successor, Yohannes was busy in consolidating his authority over what he had inherited from Tewodros and defending his domains against foreign intruders-the Egyptians, the Italians and the Mahadists- a new power center was emerging around a centrality of Shewa. It was this new power center, though peripheral to historic Ethiopia, which destined to transform profoundly the history, geography and demography of the Ethiopian State by the turn of the 20th century. (Bahru, 1991; Teshale, 1995)

Benefited by the political disorientation, economic exhaustion and the military weakness thereof of the Tigrayan elite and the rest of the northern elite, the rising Shewan Amhara elite, which by then was able to assimilate the elites of the conquered areas, especially the Oromo elite who were proved to be able military commanders (*Ras* Gobana, *Fitawrari* Gebeyehu, *Ras* Mekonnen, *Daj*, Balcha) and political 'wizards' like Empress Taitu and *Fitawrari* Habte-Giorgis easily won the battle for hegemony. And, for a century to come, the Shewan Amhara elite - the embodiment of Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language and the Abyssinian cultural values dominated multi-ethnic Ethiopia in a manner hitherto unprecedented in the country's history. (3)

The Shewan expansion and the resultant politico-economic consequences were far profound, far brutal and far devastating in the south than in the north. In the north, it was the issue of re-unifying regions, which constituted part of the Abyssinian polity for centuries, and peoples who were sharing the Christian tradition and Semitic cultural ethos for millennia. (See Markakis, 1974; Addis Hiwot, 1975; Teshale, 1995) In the south, it was the issue of mostly bringing in new lands and new peoples into the emerging empire-state on unequal terms. The resultant outcome was a dual oppression: national as well as class - one polity but two markedly different systems, the dichotomous north-south relations thus emerged in the country's politics. (4)

Both by design and accident of history Menelik's empire-building project had carried in itself the seeds of future conflict. He connived with the Italians to get access to firearms

and divide the Tigrayan elite. (Addis Hiwot 1975) The resultant outcomes were the creation of Eritrea as an Italian colony and the relegation of the Tigrayan elite to a junior partnership in the expanding empire-state, a position the Tigrayan elite has refused to accept for a century to come. Furthermore, Menelik brought together several dozen ethnic groups to live under one polity. But the partners of Menelik's polity were not equals. The expansion and consolidation of the empire-state correspondingly created a new phenomenon, a phenomenon of elite competition and conflict in a far larger multi-ethnic polity. And the seed of future conflict was planted when the victorious Amhara elite of Shewa led by Menelik and his successors began to run the country as personal fiefdom by imposing their language and culture, and in certain cases - their religion. (See Markakis, 1974; Messay, 1999). More precisely, while the Amhara elite of Shewa was able to establish what seemed a permanent dominance, the rest of the other competing elites were reduced to inferior positions with permanent grievances. For instance, the historically rival Tigrayan elite - weakened and defeated had to accept a junior partnership in the sharing of the spoils of the empire but with a permanent grudge.

The defeated Oromo elite were in a far worse position. They had to change their language, culture, religion and even names as well as occupy a far lower status than what the numerical strength of their ethnic origin demanded. The rest of the subjected elite of the south were largely reduced to local servants of the dominant elite while their areas continued to be a hunting ground for slaves for decades. The first grand failure is, therefore, the creation of an empire-state of unequal. This first grand failure is not so much because of a bloody nature of the creation of the empire-state. The European historical experiences of nation - state creation- such as Napoleonic France were not less bloody. The Ethiopian experience was different because of two historical limitations: the elite which provided the leadership were more motivated by feudal grandeur while the material foundation of the expanding state was backward agrarian feudalism unlike the European experiences that were led by the rising bourgeoisie and in the interest of the rising capitalism.

The 'Nation-building' Process During the Imperial Regime and the Second Grand Failure, 1900-1935.

By 1900, almost the western, eastern and southern frontiers of Ethiopia were established, and the northern as well as southern Ethiopia were brought under one political center based in Addis Ababa, which fated to become the political and commercial capital of modern Ethiopia. The Shewan Amhara elite, which took the real command-ship of a larger empire-state, were intoxicated with thier double victories, i. e. internally series of victories through the waves of conquests, and externally, the historic victory over the Italians at the battle of Adwa. Benefited by the ideal situation thus created, under the command-ship of Menelik they proceeded with thier 'nation-building' project along two fronts: creation of one Ethiopian nation out of diverse peoples and cultures on the one hand and a modernization drive to catch up with industrialized Europe, an ambition hitherto limited to access to firearms. (5)

The first of the two fronts- the creation of 'one Ethiopian nation' was the continuation of the expansion process under what was then termed *Makinat* (literally means pacification). The process of *Makinat* involved evangelization of the local population, institutionalization of a new system of political control, imposition of a new political class, culture and language on the indigenous population. Above all, it was an establishment of new centres of political as well as military control, better known as *Ketemas* or garrison towns. (6) Moreover, the subjected peoples, especially the elite were advised, encouraged or even forced to take Christian names to be considered as 'civilized' and authentic Ethiopians. Thus, the 'Gebre-Egizabehers' (slaves of God) the 'Gebre-Mariams' (slaves of Marry), etc.; mushroomed across the width and breadth of the south. (Merera, 1994b) This was to continue for generations to come as an important element in the so-called 'nation-building' process. (7).

While the 'nation-building' process had continued as the unfinished business of conquest with a far deeper institutionalization of the new system of political control as well as cultural and linguistic domination, simultaneously the introduction of European education and technology started by the first decade of the 20th century. An appetite for European technology had begun earlier with Tewodros, but it was Menelik who was able to materialize it in a more feasible and tangible manner. The rail way, bank, modern education, roads and bridges, international trade, a semblance of modern ministerial system; Addis Ababa as an emerging political and commercial center of the new empire, etc., were all part of Menelik's modernization drive in the post-empire creation period. (See Bahru, 1991) Such a modernization drive was partly initiated to facilitate the 'nation-building' project and partly to catch up with Christian Europe with which the Ethiopian rulers were then competing.

History never moved as planned. What continued under Menelik's advanced age in earnest was not the modernization drive but decades of life and death power struggle, as the various elites began to jockey for power and influence. And in what appeared to be the first major post-conquest power struggle, Empress Taitu, who was an extraction of Yejju Oromo, but with a Gonderite regional interest lost the power struggle to the Shewan-Wollo alliance in 1910. Furthermore, the fractious Shewan-Wollo alliance could not stay for long and in the confrontation between the two which took place in 1916, Iyyassu, a young emperor of an Oromo extraction from Wollo lost his throne to a dyarchy of a Shewan representative - Zewditu and Teferi. (See Bahru, 1991) Iyyassu became a suspect and lost power both on religious and regional grounds, but no explicitly expressed ethnic sentiments as can be judged from the participation of Oromo elite who played decisive roles on both sides of the fence. For instance, it was Habte-Giorgis, an Oromo from Shewa who seemed to have moved by the Shewan interest, who sealed the fate of Iyyasu both in leading the coup against him in 1916 and defeating the large Wollo army led by Iyyassu's own father at Sagale, which came to restore the young emperor to power

With a benefit of hindsight, the sad part of the 1916 coup was its abortion of a more balanced post-empire religious, regional and ethnic policy of the Ethiopian regime,

which, although not well-articulated could have charted a new path for the evolution of Ethiopia's multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural polity could as well saved the country from some of its late 20th century crises. And, if history is to judge Iyyassu, it is not difficult to assume that the country had lost with him a historical opportunity of building a multi-ethnic Ethiopia on a more balanced foundation. With his removal and as the result of the power struggle that lasted from 1910 - 1930, the quest for modernization was relegated to a secondary position. Sadly, in spite of the advice of the country's emerging modern elite, compared to countries in similar situation such as Japan, the Ethiopian rulers had chosen to devote their energy, wisdom and the country's resources for power struggle while doing very little to transform the country. This failure to face the challenge of modernization - can be termed the second grand failure of the Ethiopian elite. Needless to add, the endless power struggle and the failure to modernize Ethiopia had the additional effect of exposing it to the Italian invasion and the easy defeat thereof.

The Post-war Ethiopian Polity and the Third Grand Failure.

The Italian invasion had a debilitating effect on the Ethiopian ruling class, part of which was physically eliminated in the course of the war. Furthermore, the Italians tried to exploit the religious, ethnic and regional differences among the various peoples of Ethiopia to their own advantage. (Bahru, 1991) Although it did not work well for the Italians as planned, it clearly exposed the fragility of the hoped for 'nation-building' process. Part of the Tigray, Oromo and Amhara regional elites seized the opportunity of co-operating with the Italians - both lured by the material reward of the Italians and to revenge for the domination of the Shewan Amhara elite. (See Bahru, 1991)

To be sure, Haile Selassie's preoccupation after the war was to consolidate his power base by resuming his pre-war centralization drive. (See Greenfield, 1965; Bahru, 1992; Andargachew T. 1993) To do this, he had to restructure a new government out of the ruins of the war, which needed a serious organization of modern bureaucracy. The Emperor, with-out losing much time, first with the help of the British, who supported his restoration to power against some sort of local resistance, and later the Americans embarked upon building a modern civilian and military bureaucracy. (See Clapham, 1969; Markakis, 1974; Marcus, 1983) (8). As the staffing of such modern institutions needed a large class of educated elite, to meet this increased demand, he had initiated the building of modern schools at home and sponsored hundreds of young men to go abroad and get foreign education. (Bahru, 1991 & 1992) In other words, Haile Selassie was very conscious of the fact that his goal of institutionalizing absolute power against the resistance of the traditional elite could not be realized without the creation of a loyal modern bureaucracy and army whose *raison d'etre* could be loyalty to him alone. Thus, with an eye on absolute power and loyalty, he opened schools and military training centres, which began to produce the desperately needed educated manpower for the staffing of the new institutions. To this end, old elementary schools were promoted to secondary levels while new schools were opened at all levels including a University College of Addis Ababa in 1951 and a full-fledged University, which then was carrying his name in 1961. Foreign scholarship further supplemented the growing needs of the fast growing modern state. (Bahru, 1991 & 1992; Andargachew T. 1993)

In the post -war period, along side the burgeoning civilian bureaucracy, the national defense force was also expanded and branched into occupational divisions - the imperial body-guard, the ground force, the police force, the air force, and after the incorporation of Eritrea - the navy. Urbanization and commerce grew steadily side by side and Ethiopian towns were no more looked like the garrison towns of half - a century earlier. And, in many major respects, post-war Ethiopia had become a much changed as well as a much transformed modern polity compared to a situation just two decades earlier. (See Andargachew T., 1993) But this was only one side of the story because the changes occurred was pregnant of other changes to be exploded very soon thereafter. Paradoxically, Ethiopia's ruling class, which survived the Italians did not move by the shock waves and once again pre-occupied itself with consolidation of power than facing the challenges of the 20th century. The outcome was on the one hand, a growing contradiction between the traditional elite which was refusing to give way to the rising modern elite while the latter was caught with the contradiction of its own, on the other. The traditional political elite felt threatened by the modern elite and instead of giving way for the latter was drawn into an endless competition/conflict. The modern elite on its part entered the struggle with a more serious contradiction within itself i.e. the multi-national goal which was aimed at the need of changing the country as a whole and an ethnic/regional agenda which was aimed at the need to end the marginalization of the hitherto subjected peoples. And thus has begun the new phenomenon of inter-and intra elite struggles which culminated in the demise of the country's *ancien regime* in 1974. This is basically because: the lessons from the two grand failures as well as the lessons from country's defeat in the hands of the Italians were not learnt. In other words, not only the modernization drive but also the whole 'nation - building' project foundered - what can be termed the third grand failure.

The 1974 Revolutionary Upheaval and the Fourth Grand Failure.

By the turn of 1970s, various opposition forces were actually at work. Some were organized to defend the interests of the working class and the peasantry. Others were created to promote national and regional interests. The most serious problem in this regard is that as their ideological orientation run from pure nationalism to radical Marxism and their political agendas were contradictory, there was little co-ordination among the various opposition forces, and each of them was fighting its own battle against the common enemy - the *ancien regime*.

The Eritrean movements were at the forefront of the national/regional struggles against the imperial regime and they had begun to sap both its energy and resources by the early 1970s. By this period, the proto-nationalism among the Oromos and Tigrayans had also begun to take some shape, albeit its clandestine nature. The hitherto subdued Ethiopian Muslims were also began to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with their secondary status in their own country. The most affected social sector, peasants in Bale (1963 - 70) and Gojjam (1968) had already rose against the arbitrary actions of the imperial regime and its agents. (See Gebru T., 1996; Bahru, 1991; Kiflu, 1993) Especially, the Bale Oromo uprising had both and ethnic and religious dimensions, as the revolted peasants were both

Oromo and Muslims. The Bale uprising was a more sustained struggle and has had a reverberating effect among the radical Ethiopian students in general and the Oromo intelligentsia in particular. (Gebru T., 1996; Kiflu, 1993).

A far more inclusive and extensive struggle was, of course, the one fought by the students. Inspired by the then universally popular Marxist ideology and socialist revolutions in Russia and China, the students assumed the role of a revolutionary vanguard in the all-out battle against the decaying imperial regime. (Balsvik, 1985; Bahru, 1991; Kiflu, 1993) Well-placed in the country's major cities and towns, which were the locus of imperial power and having the advantage of concentration around schools and colleges, with a self-less energy of a youth they confronted and exposed the regime on their own terms. In fact, it was the students defiance and determination in a decade that preceded the 1974 democratic upsurge which later moved the other sectors of the population - the teachers, the workers, the taxi drivers, lower government employees and finally the army, the hitherto custodian institution of imperial rule for revolutionary actions. And, in what appears to be the lose of the 'mandate of heaven' by His Majesty, even the lower echelon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the pillars of imperial rule in Ethiopia came out against the Emperor's government with the grievances of their own, breaking the tradition of a symbiotic relationship and the trinity between the Church and state in Ethiopian history. (Andargachew T., 1993; Kiflu, 1993)

The revolutionary upheaval came in 1974, but because of what could go down as one of the ironies of the Ethiopian revolution - despite the convergence of several factors and the activities of the forces of change since the foiled coup of 1960, in Leninist parlance – there was no maturity of the subjective factor, i.e. there was no properly organized political party that could give the necessary leadership to the revolution. The two leftist political parties which were in existence prior to the revolution - the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (popularly known as MEISON), as of 1968 and the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) as of 1972 had remained clandestine and limited their activities to their students constituency from which both were originated. When the revolution broke out in February 1974, in the absence of a credible organized civilian opposition, the military by exploiting the existing power vacuum, easily took over the leadership of the revolution. And in spite of little co-ordination between the military elite which assumed the leadership of the revolutionary movement without past revolutionary credential and the civilian left which claimed the leadership of the revolution as a matter of right, the revolution continue to deepen with the removal of the leading pillars of the *ancien regime* one after another, including the man who dominated Ethiopian history and politics for more than half-a century and believed to be a quasi-divine and untouchable by the country's subjects on September 12, 1974.

 The Ethiopian military with its own limitation as an inheritor of imperial Ethiopia wanted to transform the country without making a major break with the imperial past in terms of the national question and far beyond wanted to lead a revolution without the revolutionaries. (See Markakis & Nega, 1986; Markakis, 1987) As prisoners of the imperial past, the soldiers who turned Marxist revolutionaries over-night successfully failed to resolve the national/regional inequalities, factors which precipitated the

revolution itself. In its lust for power, the military elite mercilessly decimated the very people who brought about the revolution in the first place, and instead began to manufacture half-backed cadres who could understand neither the intricacies of social change nor the complexities of the Ethiopian society. (See Dawit W., 1989; Andargachew T., 1993) The end result was neither fully a positive social transformation nor a successful 'nation-building' project, but one of the most destructive periods in the country's long-recorded history - under what can be characterized, for want of a better term - 'Garrison Socialism' (9). What happened was from day one - Ethiopia's half-backed military elite applied what can be termed, a military method to solve all the country's societal problems. As I have observed elsewhere, which needs to be quoted at large:

> ... Mengistu, the man who emerged as the sole operator of the Ethiopian state machine: ended the *ancien regime* by a proclamation; with his fellow travelers transformed himself over - night to a proletarian revolutionary by a proclamation; established a socialist government by a proclamation; nationalized the country's key economic sectors by a proclamation, destroyed the country's best brains without the court of law as enemies of the people and revolution by a proclamation, organized the supportive mass organizations: peasants, workers, women and youth associations by a proclamation; carried out all the developmental policies including the cooperativisation, collectivization, resettlement and villagization programmes by a proclamation; created his Workers Party of Ethiopia and elected himself its First General -Secretary by proclamation; instituted the national parliament, and in effect elected its members by a proclamation; established the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and elected himself its first president by a proclamation. There were too many proclamations to include them all here. What should be stressed... however, is that the military method employed by Mengistu and his crew not only failed to solve basic issues such as political and economic development, but also miserably failed to solve military issues, which were within their profession. What they managed to do with all these earth-shaking proclamations was to cause incalculable damages to the country and its people by failing a popular revolution that promised the broad masses of Ethiopia: freedom, social justice, peace and prosperity in a just and democratic state. (Merera, 1992 b)

Put simply, the military regime's military method instead of solving daunting societal problems had provoked massive resistances from many quarters, which finally sealed the fate of the military regime itself in May 1991. This can be termed the fourth grand failure in a series of attempts to transform the Ethiopian State and society.

The Emergence of an 'Ethnocratic' State and the Fifth Grand Failure

The hoped for Ethiopian democratic transition was publicly inaugurated with the accord of the London Conference of May 1991. At this Conference, which was held under the

chairmanship of the Americans, who have begun to feel a new sense of historical mission to democratize the rest of humanity as a whole, a consensus was reached to establish a broad-based transitional government of Ethiopia whose responsibility was to oversee an internationally monitored 'free and fair' elections for the Constituent Assembly, a body that was to be entrusted to prepare a permanent constitution for the country within a year. And, in what appears to be the first major step to implement this broad consensus, the 1991 July Conference of Addis Ababa was convened, whose representatives formed a Council of Representatives (COR) which approved the Charter for the transitional period and established a Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE).

During the whole period of the transition, the ruling-party's main concern appears to be not the building of democratic institutions and their institutionalization, but intimidation and marginalization of the opposition, repression of the emerging civil society as well as the independent press, etc.; on the one hand, and on the other building of its own institutions of control - all aimed at consolidation of power. In other words, alongside of the constitution-making, etc.; members of the free press continued to be harassed and detained, human rights violations continued unabated and even Addis Ababa University, the country's sacred institution was attacked and its staff massively dismissed. Moreover, with the tacit support of the West, especially the Americans who were eager to see the 'new breed of leaders' who would follow Museveni as their role model, the constitutional engineering went ahead according to plan. And, despite the half-hearted calls on the part of some Western powers for the political opening-up to accommodate the opposition as well as the calls of the diverse sectors of the Ethiopian society for both national reconciliation and an all-inclusive political process, the national constitution was drafted in a non-transparent way and the election to the Constituent Assembly was held in a seriously flawed manner. (10) As usual the EPRDF won 89.3% of the seats, a number that can be higher when its unofficial affiliates included. Consequently, the TPLF/EPRDF solo-authored constitution was ceremoniously adopted and the basic tenets of the EPRDF political programme - including the ' right to secession' was sanctified as supreme law of the land.

Finally, after four years of expectations and suspensions, hopes and despair, the lingering transition came to an end with the national and regional election of 1995. As usual the TPLF/EPRDF claimed to have won a landslide victory of 90.1% of the seats. Neither the manner in which this election was conducted was different from the prior elections nor its objective differs. In fact, the big 'democratic' promise of the Charter on which the whole transitional process was hinged on: the transfer of power to a democratically elected party was pushed aside and a *de facto* one-party state was further institutionalized. (11) Moreover, under what appears to be a 'transition without change', the old games continued: violations of human and democratic rights, repression of civil society organizations - especially the Ethiopian Teachers Association, the Ethiopian Trade Union - the pressures and harassment of the nascent independent press, etc.; continued unabated. On the whole, it has become business as usual, except during the interlude of the Ethio-Eritrean war, which forced the TPLF/EPRDF government to be less repressive towards the independent press - more for its support for the war than democratic considerations.

The May 2000 election was held under similar unconducive political environment i.e. the administration of the election was as flawed as ever, and the real opposition parties were given only thirteen seats in the 547-Federal parliament. If we have to identify the pitfalls, in many major ways, they have to do with the discrepancies between the policy initiatives on paper and their practical implementation. For instance, human and civil rights were enshrined in the constitution, but there have been well-documented violations of them; both civil society organizations and independent press were allowed to operate, but have been working under a very precarious condition; the right to association and multi-party democracy are constitutionally guaranteed, but not all parties allowed to operate legally and those which allowed to operate legally work under serious pressures and all the elections held to date were seriously flawed; rights of ethnic groups are constitutionally recognized and the decentralization of power policy was initiated for their practical applications, but the reality on the ground is a new 'Ethnocratic state' under a command of a Tigrean minority; on paper there are all the trappings of constitutional-rule - the separation of powers that include the existence of an independent court that oversee the respects for the rule of law, but extra-judicial detentions, killings, etc.; are very pervasive in the country; Ethiopia's economy is freed from the old style of command, but the ruling-party is controlling the commanding heights of the country's economy, and hence, a ruling-party's business empire has replaced the classical state-controlled strategy. (12)

In a nutshell, what can be termed a dubious commitment to pluralistic democracy has derailed all the major initiatives to democratize the Ethiopian State and society. To put in a better perspective, what has been undertaken in Ethiopia certainly amounts to a political liberalization level, albeit serious contradictory moves, but falls short of democratization. Hence, less kindly judged, what has really happened in Ethiopia is that the century old hegemony of the Amhara elite with the concept of a unitary state, which continued to linger on even after its death blow as a result of the 1974 popular revolution has finally got the requiem of history in 1991, and replaced by the hegemony of the Tigrean elite, which has based its hegemony on a deformed liberal democracy trajectory: controlled devolution of power and a certain level of political liberalization. Here, the critical issue in the Ethiopian transition problematic is to carry out what Harbeson (1998: 11) has termed a 'dual transition - from an ethnic dominated empire to an ethnically egalitarian nation-state and from authoritarian rule to democracy'. The TPLF/EPRDF regime, which destined to sponsor the Ethiopian transition, seems to have failed on both counts. To put our observation in perspective, for the TPLF, the hard core of the EPRDF, to succeed in its project of sponsoring the hoped for Ethiopian democratic transition, it itself needs to undergo a triple transformation, i.e. the transformation of the TPLF to a real EPRDF; the ideological transformation of the EPRDF from revolutionary democracy to some form of pluralistic democracy and the transformation of the TPLF/EPRDF from an armed movement to a democratic movement with all the implications thereof.

The successful triple transformation as a whole involves committing a triple ideological suicides on the part of TPLF/EPRDF i.e. giving up the aspiration for hegemony, the *modus operandi* of the Marxist - Leninist democratic centralist doctrine, which is an ideological edifice and a bed rock for leftist authoritarianism, and a military strategic thinking. However, like the Marxian class suicide in history, each of the transformation is

not an easy task to accomplish. For instance, if we take the first transformation from a Tigrean liberation movement to an Ethiopian wide movement, it implies the need to forgo several original interests for which the TPLF was created in the first place. Several works (Markakis, 1987; Young, J., 1997) directly and indirectly demonstrate that the creation of the TPLF was part of the history of the struggles of the succeeding generations of Tigrean elites to reclaim the central position they had lost to the Amhara elite in the last decade of the 19th century. And, the TPLF is both the product as well as the embodiment of that history, and far beyond has made history by fulfilling the dream of the Tigrean elites for generations. Consequently, it appears, the moving spirit of the TPLF leadership is not how to share it with other contenders of power, but how to jealously guard and sustain it for generations to come.

To make our points clearer, in many major ways, real share of power and/or democratization undermines, even may totally reverse the gains the Tigrean elite achieved through blood and fire. This is simply because the TPLF's Tigrayan interests may not be easily achieved in a democratized Ethiopia. Several reasons can be cited for this. First and foremost, the population of Tigray, the home base of the TPLF is about 6% of the country's population, compared to the population of Oromo and Amhara, each of which are about six times and five times respectively greater than that of Tigray. (See CSA, 1998) And, in a country where as a result of the competing ethnic nationalisms - ironically to which the TPLF itself has contributed more than any other political force in the country - demography has become almost the sole base of democracy, the Oromo and Amhara elites would have a far better comparative advantage of number. Conscious of such a reality, the TPLF leadership seems to operate under a serious dilemma of opening up the political process to other forces to gain legitimacy or closing the political space to the contending forces at the cost of losing legitimacy. Seen from the TPLF leadership angle, this is not an easy choice to make - since it is an issue of a possible lose of power immediately in any 'free and fair' election and the privilege thereof. In other words, this means lose of centrality achieved at great cost after one full century. And, giving up the present primacy of Tigray as a state within a state appears to be a nightmarish scenario for the Tigrean elite at the helm of state power in Ethiopia.

Secondly, the available resource in Ethiopia is not enough to build war-torn Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia on equal basis. Under a condition of scarce resources, the TPLF leadership's choice very often seems to end up in favouring Tigray, which cannot pass unnoticed in the atmosphere of rising ethnic nationalisms. This means, the TPLF leaders either have to continue with their project of building their relatively poorer region of Tigray even by Ethiopian standard - by giving a deaf ear to the opposition outcry: 'everything is going to Tigray' or abandon it altogether. The implications of both choices are clear: the former is in direct contradiction to peace and democratization in the larger Ethiopia while the latter helps democratization in the rest of the country but would negate the achievements of Tigray and its elite to date and would have serious impact on the future of both.

The third problem, which is a corollary to the second, is that, in relative terms Tigrayan elites were the junior partner in the Ethiopian empire-state. And, the 'Amhara domination'

the Tigrean elites have been fighting so vigorously has not been so much that the Amharas were extracting surplus from Tigray, but the Amhara elites denied them equal access to the larger Ethiopian resources, especially to that of the Oromo and the rest of the south. (13) The Tigrean elite assumed state power at a point in time when ethnic nationalism is in the rise - and under any political structure that resembles democracy - extraction of surplus, especially without political consensus has increasingly become difficult. This becomes more serious, especially as Oromo and the rest of the southern Ethiopian elites have begun to advance their own interests and that of their respective communities without any patronage from the Tigrean elite who wants to sell themselves as 'liberators'. If any thing, the OLF's brief honeymoon with the TPLF/EPRDF and SEPDC's dismissal from the Transitional Government of Ethiopia are reflective of these changed circumstances.

Fourthly, the Amhara elite who knew better what marginalization involves and had better experience with the Ethiopian State and the resources under its command would have little reason to accept a new marginalization under any cover. Hence, there is a reasonable fear, if not a paranoia, on the part of the Tigrean elite for further opening up of the Ethiopian State along democratic lines. And, as the risk of opening up appears to be real rather than imaginary, to hang itself to some sort of authoritarianism as long as possible than risking the costly democratization venture seems to be a better alternative left to it.

Lastly, the legacy of the ideology of liberation, i.e. commitment to a cause for which one has sacrificed his youth does not die easily. The known TPLF leaders were young university students who had forgone their education and other alternative futures, fought for sixteen solid years to win political power in Ethiopia. To easily give up what they have achieved by sacrificing their youth to their less determined and softer contemporaries who followed other avenues of life, which made the latter more advanced in education and more articulate in their democratic discourse seem to be a most difficult decision to make. Thus, in fairness to them, this may be a permanent scar on the mind of the TPLF leadership, which generally have been paranoiac in its reactions to any move by the Amhara elite. Their alternative is, therefore, to device a survival strategy of a minority, such as the ethnic-based decentralization policy under the control of the PDOs, which serves more the policy of divide and rule than the cause of democracy and ethnic equality. And, paradoxically not democracy but authoritarianism has become a life insurance for the ruling minority. More paradoxically, even after the miticoulessly built TPLF/EPRDF political structure began to collapse with the recent split in the TPLF leadership, there is little change in their approach and they continue to talk about their revolutionary democracy demagogue and its potentiality for quick economic development while giving a donkey ear to the opposition's call for national reconciliation.

To put in the nutshell, the real issue, at that, the most difficult part of the Ethiopian democratization is what emanates from the contradictory interests and vision of a minority who controls the Ethiopian State without the consent of both majorities and minorities. And, in the absence of such the consent and far beyond a 'new social contract' between majorities and minorities in Ethiopia, the TPLF seems to have failed to make a

radical break with the country's authoritarian past. Instead what it has achieved is 'a tyranny of a minority over majorities and minorities'. It appears, what is central in this failure of making a radical break with the authoritarian past is the failure to answer the perennial question in contemporary Ethiopian politics: which way power is to be transferred - through the barrel of the gun or the ballot box.

No less importantly, central to the current crisis of the Ethiopian State is ethnic nationalism, which easily gives rise to multiple competing interests, contradictory visions and clashes of dreams - especially among the contending elites who are the moving spirit of ethnic nationalism. For instance, the hegemonic aspiration of the Tigrean elite, the nostalgia for the imperial days by part of the Amhara elite and the dream to create independent Oromia by part of the Oromo elite are excellent examples of the contradictory demands on the Ethiopian state. In fact, the contradictory perspectives of the competing ethnic nationalisms have impacted on the Ethiopian democratization in many major ways. First and foremost, they have negatively affected the political will of the competing elites to reach a national consensus on the fundamental rules of the game of the democratic transition as well as on the future fate of the country as a whole. Secondly, they have fragmented the opposition, undermined their unity of purpose and action while giving advantage to the ruling-party to continue to divide the opposition - harass, intimidate and weaken it. Additionally, the contradictory perspectives not only pitted one ethnic group against another, but also have affected the working of civil society movements and the independent press, which as a result of this are as fragmented as the political parties. In this regard, what Mesfin (1993: 33) has observed '…the crisis of national consensus, manifested primarily in the intra - elite cleavages, is bound to obstruct the process of democratic changes' has already become part of the Ethiopian reality. The accumulated effect of all this is yet another grand failure, whose consequences may be the end of Ethiopia, as we know it.

Concluding Remarks

Samuel Huntington (1993) in his work, which appears to be a guideline for democratizers has advised 'History, …, does not move forward in a straight line, but when skilled and determined leaders push, it does move forward'. Be that, as it may, the summation of Ethiopian history of the last quarter of the 19th century and the whole of the 20th century clearly indicates, a lack of political will as well as the existence of little sense of history by the country's dominant elite of the day, its determination to play a zero - sum game politics to the endgame, its lack of the art of compromise, its blurred vision of the future regarding the larger societal goals, its propensity for hegemony, its vanity of grandeur, and above all its successful failure to learn from past mistakes and history are all the hallmark of the succeeding generations of Ethiopian elites. The main thrust of this paper is to show the need for a behavioral change by the competing Ethiopian elites so as to reverse the perilous road to destruction, which has long become the country's predicament. A soul searching as well as a serious rethinking about alternative futures, pragmatic politics of give and take should start without delay. Furthermore, understanding both securing international support through public relations exercise and by manufacturing internal support through dubious means, in the end can neither help the

cause of democracy nor be a life-insurance for a regime unresponsive to the plight of its citizens. What is more, crying for the lost opportunities of the 20th century alone cannot help us much to move forward. Lessons of the lost opportunities of the 20th century need to be taken seriously and with a sober mind by the competing elites, if we have to face the challenges of the 21st century with hope and confidence.

According to this study two factors are critical to move forward out of the present political impasse: the abandoning of the hegemonic aspiration and the zero - sum game politics thereof on the part of the ruling elite and leaving behind the fixation on history as well as the extravaganza of some elites on the right to secession in a more globalised world of the 21st century. Without national consensus on the modality of democratic governance and the 'political rules of the game' thereof, successful democratization is more of an illusion at best and hypocrisy at worst. A corollary to this is that democratizing multi-ethnic polities need a careful construction of political structures and institutions, which able to mediate and accommodate diversities, not those, which exacerbate differences at the cost of shared commonalties. Furthermore, to accomplish such tasks, political leaders who think and act bigger than their own ethnic groups - and with a sense of history are needed. Finally, there are two critical issues that need to be underlined, if Ethiopia's hoped for democratization enterprise is to put back on track. First and foremost, abandoning the in famous PDOs policy and allowing a real autonomy to take root for the country's diverse communities, seems to be the greatest service on the part of the TPLF/EPRDF both to the peoples of Ethiopia and democracy. Secondly, if we have to tie our thesis of the five grand failures with trends of Ethiopian history, the present reality of the country and the challenges for the future, it is this: the attempt to build a nation by a dominant elite with hegemonic aspiration and top-down approach for more than a century had failed to produce the desired result be it under the philosophy of the "mandate of heaven" or that of 'barrack socialism'. And the present dominant elite appears to suffer from the same political malady. Although this appears to be the original sin of the succeeding generations of the country's elites that resulted in the vicious circle of crisis of the Ethiopian State and society, there have been elites who fought for social justice, democratic rule and economic wellbeing for ordinary citizens. Hence an innovative way of salvaging the country's foundering democratic transition is, therefore, to make the competing elites reach a national consensus that can lead to a new 'social contract' for New Ethiopia, where inter-elite competition is democratically regulated and ordinary citizens are empowered to choose their own leaders freely. Needless to add, unless we are cursed by history to be blurred, if we were to learn the lessons from both our grand failures and the historical experiences of those who succeeded to control their own destiny this is the only proven path to durable peace, democratic governance and material prosperity.

Endnotes

1.   See Tewodros's letters of the period in Rubenson, S. (ed.) (1994) (Document No. 90, p. 154; Document No. 108, p. 189; Document No. 117, p. 197; Document No. 162, p. 266) See also Teshale Tibabu (1995) for a fuller discussion on Tewodros's action against the Oromo elite in the north at the time.

2.   Tewodros started the historical process of creating a unified Ethiopia in 1850s, which became a reality by 1900. What was created in the process was ethnic and religious inequalities which provoked the rise of various nationalist movements in 1960s and 1970s whose goals were the reversal of the historical process of the 19th century that led to the creation of the empire-state on unequal terms.

3.   Many Amharas of Gojjam, Gonder and Wollo used to feel that they were also marginalised by their Shewan brothers, and not the beneficiary of the imperial regime. But, as they share the same language, cultural values and Orthodox Christianity, the country's marginalized ethnic groups usually do not differentiate them, although they might have had a point on regional grounds.

4.   Many observers of Ethiopian politics make a distinction between north and south Ethiopia in many major respects: the political institutions, the land owning system and other instruments of oppression. See for instance, Markakis 1975 and Addis Hiwot 1975, the extent to which the peoples of the south wallowed under dual oppression - markedly different from the north.

5.   For Ethiopia's warrior class, it was the European technology of fire-arms, which was important until the turn of the 20th century when they recognized somewhat reluctantly the need for modern education and other areas of modernization.

6.   Most of the old southern Ethiopian towns were product of the garrison settlements created for political as well as military control of the various parts of the south. They soon developed both as administrative and commercial centres of the respective areas.

7.   After the conquest, adopting Amharic and or Christian name was directly and indirectly encouraged, especially at schools where students were made to feel inferior because of their original names. Thus changing their names to Amharic or Christian names became an unwritten rule for the southern elite, through which they could become members of the club of the northern elite.

8.   From 1941-1952, it was the British who helped the Emperor consolidating his power base, but the Emperor quickly replaced the British in 1952 by the Americans who were then the rising star. The Americans sustained the imperial regime until the revolutionary upheaval of 1974, which ended American hegemony in Ethiopia together with the country's *ancien regime*.

9. For a good account on how the Ethiopian revolution turned sour see, Dawit W., 1989.

10. For a detailed coverage of the 1994 Constituent Assembly election, see Siegfried Pausewang, 'The 1994 Election and Democracy in Ethiopia', Human Rights Report No. 4 November 1994 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights).

11. The Department of Political Science & International Relations, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia undertook a good comparative study of elections in Ethiopia including the national and regional elections of 1995. See 'the Study of the 1995 Elections in Ethiopia' (unpublished paper, 1997).

12. For the Human Rights Violations see the reports of EHRCO of the period and the State Department Report of 1999; for the workings of the ruling-party's business empire, see 'Ethiopian Non-governmental Business: A Preliminary Survey with Special Emphasis On Companies Controlled by or Associated with EPRDF - Member Organizations and the Al-Amudi Family' (No author, September 1996).

13. Historically, by and large, the flow of resource has never been from North to South, and Tigray has been a junior partner in the Ethiopian empire-state. See for instance Addis Hiwot, 1975.

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Acronyms Used

AAPO ----- All Amhara People's Organization
CAFPDE---Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia
COEDF-----Coalition of Ethiopia Democratic Forces
COR---------Council of Representatives
EDP----------Ethiopians Democratic Party
EDU---------Ethiopian Democratic Union
EPDM ----- Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF ----- Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF ---- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP ----- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
MEISON -- Amharic acronym for All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
MLLT-------Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray
OLF ------ Oromo Liberation Front
ONC-------Oromo National Congress
OPDO ----- Oromo People's Democratic Movement
PDOs------- Peoples Democratic Organizations
SEPDC-----Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Union
TGE ------ Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF ----- Tigray People's Liberation Front