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Party Politics, Political Polarization and the Future of Ethiopian Democracy

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I. Introduction

Ethiopia entered the era of party politics only at the eve of the revolutionary upheaval of 1974 that ended the country's *ancien* regime. The positive development that came with both the creation of political parties and the revolutionary upheaval soon began to be overshadowed by political polarization and fragmentation that precipitated an endless crisis in the Ethiopian state and society.

Sadly, the democratic upsurge of 1974 which ended an out-of-date autocracy that used to claim the mandate of heaven and promised a new era of revolution and prosperity quickly ended in a bloody military interlude that decimated the cream of one dynamic generation. The change of regime in 1991 and the charter that followed it promised yet another era of peace and prosperity by creating a nation state of equals and multi-party democracy. Once again, much of the promise made has become empty and consequently, the country and its people continue to wallow under what seems to be an all-round crisis that has led millions to despair and hopelessness.

A closer glance at the source of what appears to be a curse of history can be explained largely by the political polarization and fragmentation between and among Ethiopian political parties, which time and again failed to set a common agenda and mobilize millions for a common good. Conspicuously, albeit at different levels sectarianism, conspiracy and political intrigues have become the hallmark of the Ethiopian political parties and their leaders with the resultant effect of frustration, disillusionment and demobilization of the common folks across the country. To put differently, political leaders are more active in undermining coalitions than alliance-building while their vision is blurred to aggregate societal interests for a broader national

development goals. To be sure, such a political malaise of Ethiopian political parties are not limited to the successive ruling-parties defending their privileges, but also opposition parties claiming to fight for the empowerment of the ordinary citizens. The central objective of the author of this paper is – by using his own unique position as an academic in the field of the profession of political science – **to explain the failure of Ethiopian political parties in setting the common agenda and the political polarization thereof as a major road block to the country's transition to democracy.** Needless to add, this paper as much as it is an academic work, it is also a reflection of a personal involvement that runs from student activism from the last days of the Emperor to long years of prison confinement under a brutal military regime and an opposition MP, in what can be termed a *de facto* one party state.

II. A Brief Theoretical Discussion on the Formation and Role of Political Parties.

Despite the lack of a universally agreed definition of a political party, it constitutes a group of people who come together for promotion of a common vision by aggregating interests around a common agenda and formulating informed policies to implement when they get a chance to assume power. For instance according to Alan Ware:

A political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government, and (b) usually consists of more than a single interest in the society and so to some degree attempts to 'aggregate interests' (quoted in Bofo-Arthur, 2003: 209)

Here, it is important to note that the key elements in the definition of political parties are the struggle for power and aggregation of a broader national interest for a common good.

Seen from the historical perspective, political parties are the product of and organically linked to the modern representative governments, which seek legitimacy and consent from free citizens (see Duverger, 1965). And as such, they are generally organized to represent and promote competing interests in society according to their vision. As sources of alternative policies, they have become dominant in the 20th century

with the full development of the republican ideas, and the fast diminishing role of the monarchical systems of government across the globe. In fact, they became more universal and an essential element of modern governments with the disintegration of the colonial empires.

In the history of political parties some were created as an off-shoot of the parliamentary caucuses of modern parliaments out of the need to aggregate diverse interests while others were created as the practical representation of the competing visions, political philosophies and/or ideologies. In this connection, it is important to note that the intellectual movements of the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the trade unions of the period had been important sources for the creation of political parties while the socialist parties are their best examples.

The traditional role of political parties had been to compete and win elections to form governments and run them smoothly. And, it was with the rise of the communist parties that the role of political parties came to include a revolutionary transformation of societies through insurrections as well as insurgencies. **In regard, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was the best example of political parties assuming power through mass insurrection while the Chinese communist party has been a role model for parties assuming power through insurgencies that could take several years. In fact, the Leninist conception of party organization has introduced a new concept in the role of political parties, i.e. the vanguard party conception whose legacy still dominates the thinking as well as the *modus operandi* of the major political parties in Ethiopia (1).**

The African experience with political parties has been much longer than in Ethiopia, but the origin of African political parties can be traced to the last days of colonialism in the continent and still carry the burden of that legacy. In this regard, as Salih argues "... they are emerged during the colonial rule which was neither democratic nor legitimate" (2003: 2). He has further noted "In a sense African political parties emerged in a non-democratic setting, which to a large extent informed their practice during independence (*Ibid*).

Salih partly by quoting Mazrui and Tidy has also noted that:-

In the urge to leave behind political institution similar to their own, the departing colonial governments decided to report to Africa their peculiar version of parliamentary government, with several parties and recognized opposition (*Ibid*).

Whether imported or not, multiparty democracy was very short-lived as post-colonial states in Africa one after another quickly turned into one-party dictatorships and military juntas, which have had devastating consequences for the various peoples of Africa. **And, it such a condition that Ali Mazrui calls “democracide” the consequences of which is what Ake termed “political underdevelopment in Africa” or what Clapham calls “a shadow state” where the preoccupation of leaders is to stay in power by privatizing the state and its diplomacy.**

According to Randall, who writes in the context of the wider developing world, whatever their origin and subsequent evolution ideally political parties are created to perform the following functions:

- ◆ They endow regimes with legitimacy by providing ideologies, leadership or opportunities for political participating or a combination of all three.
- ◆ They act as a medium for political recruitment thus creating opportunities for upward social mobility.
- ◆ They provide opportunities for the formation of coalitions of powerful political interests to sustain government (interest aggregation), have major influences on policies as a result of devising programmes supervise policy implementation political socialization or mobilization of people to undertake self-help activities.
- ◆ They provide political stability in societies able to absorb increasing levels of political participation by the new social forces generated by modernization (quoted in Salih 2003:4)

To be sure, these are some of the most important functions of political parties both in Ethiopia and in much of Africa successfully failed to perform. Needless to add, without exaggeration - as we shall see below -Ethiopian political parties have few parallels in Africa in their propensity for political fragmentation as well as in their failure to deliver the badly needed public goods mentioned above (2).

III. The Origin of Political Parties in Ethiopia

For centuries, especially more so during the period of Emperor Haile Selassie Ethiopia had been ruled by omnipotent autocrats sustained by an ideological edifice based on the trinity of the monarchy, church and state under a condition where the political parties were neither imagined nor allowed. And, even the 1955 revised Constitution of the Emperor, which Bahru (1991) calls “a legal charter for absolutism” while allowing a universal suffrage and some sort of the rights of association did not have any provision regarding the creation of political parties (3). Furthermore, despite the existence of republican ideas among a very few patriots after Haile Selassie’s flight during the Italian invasion until the foiled coup of 1960 power struggle in the country were limited to aristocratic circles who were seeking the mandate of heaven (Bahru 1991; Merera 2003). Here, it is important to note that while the 1960 coup attempt heralded a clear signal for change in the direction of constitutional monarchy, with the benefit of hindsight, it is not difficult to judge that it was the failure to understand the reading on the wall which frustrated the evolutionary road to liberal democracy in the country by the Emperor and his supporters.

Conspicuously, neither the Emperor had a better sense of history to willingly preside over a badly needed political reform that could reduce his power but earn him a more respectable place in Ethiopian history nor the American friends pushed him to reform his otherwise rotting empire under their very eyes. Consequently, the Americans and the West as an ally of an out-of-date autocracy represented the world of reaction while the East captivated the generation that was ready to right for social justice and the creation of new Ethiopia. And, although it is a matter of historical speculation

regarding what could have happened, if the Emperor allowed more political space for the new forces of change by undertaking real reform of his government in the direction of constitutional monarchy and party politics, his failure to grasp the direction of the movement of history has been too costly for himself, his successor and the people of Ethiopia as a whole (4).

To be sure, by mid-1960s the expansion of modern education in which Emperor Haile Selassie prided himself had relatively been advanced and the modern radical intelligentsia was born ready to become the grave digger of its very creator. **At that critical moment in Ethiopian history when the radicals moved to action by creating the famous Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM)- the promise of liberal democracy was already lost and the role model became the socialist giants: Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara. The call for the revolutionary transformation of Ethiopian society was supported by “Fano Tesemara Enda Ho Chi Minh and Che-Guevara”, a song after the two guerrilla leaders who inspired the student generation of the 1960s and 1970s from the opposite ends of the globe. And, it was under such a political environment the first generation of Ethiopian political parties were created and assumed the historic mission of over-turning feudal Ethiopia.**

Before we move further, it is necessary to understand from the outset that the two political undercurrents had had a pervasive impact both on the birth and evolution of the first generation of political parties in Ethiopia. The two are: the political culture of feudal Ethiopia where feudal intrigues were the wisdom of the day than open political debate and the Leninist concept of a vanguard party, which did not allow other competitors on the same political landscape. The legacy of both, which are still with us – made our politics more conspiratorial and under-ground than open and democratic (5).

The two direct off-springs of the ESM, MEISION (created 1968) and EPRP (created 1972) which destined to pioneer the creation of political parties in Ethiopia had also pioneered the history of division of political parties in the country. And, with them the revos and sabos (the revolutionaries and the saboteurs) within the ESM found their

way to the larger political landscape of the country as new political vocabulary for the division (6). Furthermore, the liberation movements some of which were older than the two clandestine parties added fuel to the burning fire - as the “national question as well as the right to self-determination up to and including secession” became the defining marks for revolutionaries (7).

Ironically, while the revolutionaries organized themselves around MEISON and EPRP- especially in North America and Europe were busy to label each other as “*Regime Guzoists*” and “*Achir Guzoists*” (8) or asking each other which way to go home – the “Bale road” or the “Bole road” – the Ethiopian revolution came as a surprise to both in 1974 (9). Put differently, the revolution came spontaneously before the two newly emerging political parties prepared to assume the leadership of the revolution. The EPRP leadership, which appeared to have chosen the “Bale road”, had a difficulty of reaching Asimba – its future base area through Eritrea while MEISON’s leading personalities came through the much softer road of Bole. Sadly, Ethiopia’s divided and bewildered revolutionaries – at that who were quoting the same Bible – came home largely from North America and Europe to widen their division by turning their Cold War to a hot war on Ethiopian soil – the first gravest error in the history of the country’s political parties (10).

IV. The Coming of the Dergue and the Politics of Cold and hot Wars among Ethiopian Political Parties

With the outbreak of the revolution in February 1974 – Ethiopia’s military officers reluctantly joined the mass uprising, but moved fast with the wind of the day and finally began to lead the revolution without the revolutionaries who brought about the revolution itself. The assumption of power by the soldiers under the name of PMAC - unexpectedly has the debilitating effect of further polarization of the country’s body politic. Surprisingly, the civilian left rather than quickly forge a strong alliance against the rising military junta had followed a policy of more division – the division the less literate soldiers effectively used to destroy all with little mercy.

No less damaging, the coming of other smaller groups to the political stage had further aggravated the political fragmentation and the polarization thereof while the existing liberation movements like the Eritrean fronts and the newly created ones like the OLF and TPLF led the situation in the country to what can be termed a three - dimensional conflict - a situation where the various political groups pitted against each other as much as they were against the soldiers who were in command of the state.

During this period - after the damage was done – several alliance-making efforts were made between the various opposition groups as well as with the military regime, but almost all of them were largely created for tactical purposes and thus were short-lived. For instance, the MEISON-led alliance created with the Dergue around POMOA and the political school was used in the destruction of MEISON itself while the rest of the members were decapitated one after another except Seded (Revolutionary Flame) created by Mengistu Haile-Mariam himself – the architect of Ethiopia’s “barrack socialism”.

The EPRP on its part tried to create several alliances/cooperation with the Eritrean fronts and EDU, but all of them did not go beyond tactical moves for temporary use as the EPLF said to have sided with TPLF against the EPRP in the displacement of the latter from Asimba. There were also less known agreements of cooperation between the OLF and the TPLF as well as between MEISON and the TPLF in 1980s, both of which did not even took-off from the ground. Furthermore, outside the Ethiopian framework there were several alliance creations during the period between and among the various liberation fronts such as the one between the EPLF and OLF. **At any rate, despite its occasional tensions, the only alliance that was more durable, and achieved something big for its creators was the one between the EPLF and TPLF which contributed much in the removal of the Dergue regime from power in 1991.**

The consequences of the political polarization, which blocked the aggregation of the broader national interest across political divides by the Ethiopian political parties, are immense to say the least. Although I should not commit both political and academic sin

by equating the soldiers' party Seded, later turned to the WPE with its victims, there is a need to state the contribution of the opposition to the disastrous political polarization for historical lessons to be drawn. **The political mistake committed by the MEISON leadership in forging the tactical alliance with the military Junta and the reckless moves by the EPRP leadership in launching what it termed the “urban guerrilla warfare” are the best examples for the folly of the two contending groups (11).**

To be sure, all the mysteries that surrounded the diversion of the MEISON and EPRP may not be fully clear both to the involved and the Ethiopian society at large and yet to be resolved by future history. At any rate, for a matter of historical record, there are two books written in Amharic by the survivors from the MEISON leadership and two books written in English by the survivors of the EPRP leadership (12). The authors from both groups did much in explaining and clarifying their respective positions as well as the mistakes of the other, but both were not bold enough in admitting the colossal mistakes made by each of them. Be that, as it may, since the chapter of division of the opposition - a very bad beginning for Ethiopian political parties had started by them, it is necessary to provide here a summary of what happened and why they happened.

As explained earlier, the division that started as differences of opinion and tactics over what was to be done within the external wing of the ESM and its direct off-spring, MEISON and EPRP easily and quickly found their way back home as the Ethiopian revolution began to unfold (13). As both determined to go their own way, the division between the two very quickly widened, and with it character assassinations of a Cold war type was intensified. The tactical alliance of MEISON with the Dergue and the cooperation between EPRP and EPLF pushed their Cold War to a new level of intensity – as the EPRP started to characterize MEISON members as “*bandas*” and MEISON responded by characterizing the EPRP members as “anarchists” (14). Although there is no agreement as to who fired the first bullet, EPRP’s assassination of a leading MEISON member and the killings of young MEISON activists few days earlier turned their Cold War politics to a hot war - a war of all against all - what then termed white and red terrors across the country, despite the differences over whose terror was red or white (15).

Ironically, the Dergue who had the comparative advantage of fire-power unleashed its own terror against both, first against the EPRP and later against MERSON - the terror against the former had been an extension of limited killings in 1975 and early 1976 while the one against the latter war as of 1977 - first in disguise, later openly (16). By 1978/79 the cream of one dynamic generation was brutally destroyed, and that senseless drama included the burial of Haile Fida, the leader of MEISON and Berhane-Meskel Reda, the brain behind the creation of the EPRP in the same grave. No less ironical, the survivors of the terror took their Cold War to prison houses where crossing party-lines considered as treachery by the faithful and easily ended in serious ostracism. In this regard, the author of this paper who spent seven years behind iron bars still recalls even the existence of separate schools each controlled by EPRP and MEISON members in the country's (probably Africa's) largest prison house - incidentally adjacent to the Head Quarters of the OAU (17). Furthermore, the confrontations between the EPRP and TPLF in Tigray, which ended in the displacement of the former from Asimba, and the hostility between MEISON and the Oromo nationalist movements, had an additional effect on the damage done.

To summarize this part of our discussion: even if there were few real issues of division like the “national question”, in many major ways the mutual destruction between and among Ethiopian political parties of the period was a self-inflicted wound. And, the sources of the problem are partly the non-democratic feudal culture of Ethiopia and partly the imported division from the then existing socialist countries while the lack of experience by the youth leadership of the contending groups locked them in a zero – sum-game politics that pushed the political polarization to the limit. Needless to add, the failure to mediate political differences through democratic discussions, the “I know better than you” mentality and/or “I am holier than you” thinking of most political leaders made impossible any sane and genuine political compromises that are necessary to push forward a more constructive positive-sum-game politics.

V. The EPRDF Period: Continuity of Old Divisions and New Dimensions of Political Polarization

The ideological competition during the military regime was to be the left of the left, i.e. to emerge as “Black Bolsheviks” (18). And, the battle for “Black Bolshevism” was won by the TPLF in 1991 - at a point in time when history has begun to shift, socialism has begun to retire as a global competing ideology, and Pax-Americana has become the sole attracting camp. To be sure, as we shall see further down, partly the source of the contradictory tendencies, and the anomaly in the EPRDF’s revolutionary democracy is the desire to be in *Pax-Americana* for political and military support by accepting the Washington consensus in theory on the hand and adhering to the principles of democratic centralism in practice - true to the Bolshevik tradition, on the other.

Here, it is important to note from the outset that when the TPLF captured state-power in May 1991, it neither had any meaningful alliance with any of the political groups in Ethiopia, except the EPLF nor created a broader national consensus needed for a successful state transformation. Its Ethiopian novelty was creation of the PDOS, putting political groups, which have neither an independent existence of their own nor a legitimate representation from the very people they claimed to liberate. By promoting ethnicity to the centre of state policy-making and using it as instrument of divide and rule, it has further deepened and widened the old lines of political polarization while adding the new ones (19). Furthermore, it has opened they way for the mushrooming of political groups of various types, many of whom have neither the political agenda of their own nor the qualities of the older apolitical parties who had, no matter what their mistakes were, a commitment for a cause of societal transformation. Put differently, the political landscape has begun to be infested by more demagogues, hustlers and opportunists of all types while intellectuals, especially those who have remained in the country generally watching the political drama from the side lines.

In the continued alliance-making and breaking - the former took a positive turn by the turn of the 1990s. At the very eve of the demise of the military regime - COEDF was created by the two historical enemies on the Ethiopia political platform, the EPRP and MEISON. For the time being, it seemed the chapter of division was closing and the continuity of Ethiopia as a united polity was to be ensured as both were the centrist forces. Furthermore, from a different direction - the participation of the OLF in the creation of the TPLF/EPRDF-sponsored TGE created a sense of the beginning of a new history, where the North-South dichotomy in the country's political history could and for good.

With astonished speed, in what appeared to be the coming back of the curse of history - both the Cold War and hot war have come back. Col. Goshu Woldie declared his Cold War against COEDF and created his salvation party to "save" Ethiopia. COEDF stayed for several years carrying the heavy burden of distrust between MEISON and EPRP until its back was broken by the burden. The OLF was forced out of the T.G.E in 1992 with a sense of betrayal and treachery. Since then, it has been fighting both Cold and hot wars against the EPRDF government.

Yet another effort of creating a grand coalition came in 1993 where CAFPDE was established by a plethora of political parties operating both inside and outside the country. As CAFPDE began to get weakened CEOPO came in 1998 as another grand alliance, which also included both COEDF and CAFPDE while after the death of CEOPO sometimes in 2001 UEDF was created in 2003 - after two years of labour with the hope to close the chapter of division at least among the pro-Ethiopian unity forces . **Very soon CUD was created in 2004 mainly by break-away groups from UEDF.**

Despite the continuity of the frustrating coalition-making and breaking efforts UEDF and CUD led an apposition, which was not fully united but in a better shape to the May 2005 elections where they made history in the history of the country's electoral politics. During the same period, many political parties were born, but some died as soon as they were born, others were quickly amputated while some only exist on paper.

With the coming of AFD as the last item on the menu of alliance creation by Ethiopian political parties, now we have in the opposition camp a UEDF claimed by a parliamentary group working within the legal framework and an extra legal group; a CUD carrying similar life existence with UEDF claimed by many groups and an AFD whose creation is an attempt to defy Ethiopian history is still struggling to overcome the burden of that history. In the mean time, the Cold War whose delivery has been improved by the electronic media such as the internet has continued to be fought no less intensely.

Lastly, if blames for the generational failure are to be shared between and among Ethiopian political parties, undoubtedly the lion's share goes to the ruling-party and its leaders. This can be summarized around the following mayor problems:

Major Problem 1: Democratization without national consensus. What I can call, for want of a better term, a bad beginning is that, following its impressive military victory the EPRDF leaders quickly moved to the “remaking “of Ethiopia without creating a national consensus over the basics of state transformation, a badly needed action for countries like Ethiopia where there are contradictory perspectives regarding the interpretation of the past, the understanding of the present and the vision about the future. Contrary to the expectation of many, the EPRDF set the rules of the game and invited others to accept the rules fixed by one party. To date neither there has been any real negotiation over the original rules set by the EPRDF nor did the EPRDF fully respect its own rules. What is happening is that, the EPRDF easily changes the goal posts at any stage of the game and at any time of its choice.

Major Problem 2: Perception of the EPRDF leaders towards the opposition. Judged by their actions, the EPRDF leaders appear to have never envisioned a role for opposition parties. If at all they have envisioned one, it appears, not to include winning of elections. Put differently, they have never considered opposition parties as partners in the building of democratic Ethiopia. More disturbing is the ease with which the EPRDF leaders characterize major opposition parties with significant followings by giving them tags such as chauvinists, narrow nationalists, or servants of the neftegnas and their determination to divide and weaken the opposition including by using naked force.

Major Problem 3: The determination of the EPRDF leaders to use the emerging institutions to promote their partisan interests. The major institutions, which are supposed to act impartially and promote democratic governance such as the Election Board, the Parliament, the judiciary, the police, the army and the civil administration as a whole are not fulfilling and not allowed to fulfill their duties impartially as per the provisions of the country's constitution. The end result is no separation of power between

the three branches of government while there is strong fusion between party and state like the old socialist days. Consequently, what is being institutionalized is what can be termed a “shadow state”, i.e. privatization of the state and its institutions - so as to make them work for the survival of the leaders than delivering the public goods for the citizens fairly and equitably.

Major Problem 4: Fixing Elections: The EPRDF leaders have developed a culture of fixing elections, which sometimes include outright harassment as well as manipulation of election results by using such mechanisms as massive tampering with vote counting, manipulation of numbers, damping or burning the votes of opposition candidates, etc. In fact, the importance of the May 2005 elections is partly to expose such frauds of the EPRDF regime both in the eyes of the citizens and the international community.

Major Problem 5: The use of federalism and the decentralization of power thereof as instrument of divide and rule. The Ethiopian federalism has never achieved its historic mission of creating both shared-rule and self-rule. And, contrary to the claims of the ruling party, what it has achieved is facilitating the divide and rule policy of the regime by pitting one ethnic group against the other. Ironically, the EPRDF and the PDOs have little appetite to respect the rule of law as governing parties while demanding others should respect them.

The mother of all problems is the hegemonic aspiration of the ruling party, which not only blurred the vision of the EPRDF leaders but also make them think that “we alone know what is good for the people” and the thinking of others is anti-people. Ironically, the EPRDF leaders novelty of “I know what is good for you” include fabrication of fake leadership for the opposition parties and tell members this is the leadership that best represent your interest and in the meantime make sure the NEB, the court and the government security personnel ensure the desired result. That is what happened to both the CUD and ONC. The problem with such type of thinking is the refusal to allow the people to judge what is good for them and arrogate oneself to the role of judging what is good for the people.

The new guidelines, which prepared for training of senior government officials and leading cadres clearly state that the hegemonic position of revolutionary democracy as an ideology and the EPRDF as a ruling-party should be protected by all means. These documents go beyond strengthening the EPRDF and argue for the isolation of the opposition and weakening them. The ideological foundation of these documents was also elaborated in an extract said to be from the Prime Minister’s new book on the “developmental state”, which in the context of Ethiopia is an ideological cover for a *de facto* one-party state. **Seen in the above light, in the short run - if Ethiopia is to move forward – the EPRDF needs to transform itself both from within and without. From within its constituent parts should be allowed to become equal partners if they are to gain popular support; from without, the EPRDF leaders should devise a mechanism of working with independent non-EPRDF political movements as partners by creating national consensus – a *sine quo non* for successful democratic transformation. Above all else, the EPRDF government should initiate politics of**

inclusion without delay so that we go back to the drawing board and build a common democratic home for our children as well as for posterity.

IV. Concluding Remarks by Way of Reflection

If one has to sum up the history of Ethiopian political parties, by and large, it is a history of division and political fragmentation. The sources of such a seemingly incurable political malaise are many, but the major ones can be summarized around the following a read:

1. There was no experience with party politics prior to our generation. The political culture of compromise which is the hallmark of capitalist societies was largely non-existent in feudal Ethiopia. Instead what was dominant in feudal Ethiopia was submission to the victors - not the art of compromise. If we have to use a popular usage in political science – it is the zero-sum–game politics, which dominated the *modus operandi* of Ethiopian politics.
2. **Political parties have been largely collection of personalities with little institutionalization.** As a result, leaders can easily make or break political parties; make or break coalitions for little profit; or obstruct decisions of political parties, if they so wish, and far worse – parties are sometimes the private property of one or few individuals.
3. **The games of multi-party politics have been imported, and hence political parties are neither fully Ethiopian in their actions nor internalized the civility of inter-party relations in matured democracies.** In fact, what we have is an hybrid political culture, which has contributed more to political fragmentation than the development of accommodative politics based on positive-sum- game
4. The rise of multi-ethnic political parties and national liberation movements side by side has also contributed to the political fragmentation and the political polarization thereof as they fight for the support and loyalty of the populace at large. Put differently, as I have argued else where, the central problem here is the contradictory perspectives of the competing elites over the interpretation of the

past, understanding of the present and of the common vision for the future. **Such contradictory perspectives not only have divided the thinking of the country's competing elites, but also give rise to different conception of democracy.**

5. The systematic destabilization of the opposition by the ruling- party, which uses carrot and sticks, is yet another serious problem in the country's political polarization. **For instance, under the EPRDF regime as the primary goal increasingly becomes how to stay in power at all cost, the *modus operandi* of the state has assumed the "Orwellian style of the totalitarian rule" where commercialization of politics has assumed new proportion and the use of the repressive arms of the state is rationalized as a defense of a democratic constitutional order.**

As to the solution - there is no magic formula. But if we have to move forward there is a need for a fundamental rethinking both on the part of ruling-party and the opposition. **The ruling-party, time and again should be reminded that its dream for a permanent hegemony cannot work in the 21st world. And, it should be told in the language it understands to stop its dangerous road to destruction, and create a broader national consensus, a *sine quo non* for real democratic transformation in Ethiopia.**

The opposition, which has no privileges to defend, has to start a genuine soul searching rethinking about its follies in the past for which the country and its people have paid incalculable cost. More than anything else, it should stop its endless and senseless Cold War that has immensely contributed to its mutual destruction, and start to work for an inclusive politics with a new vision for societal transformation. Furthermore it should reorganize itself where real as well as independent political parties and front organizations for the ruling-party are differentiated. It should also understand that the big task of state transformation needs a clear agreement on the fundamentals of the rules of the game for multi-party democracy in the Ethiopian context. No less importantly, it should be able to decipher and learn from the experiences of other successful democracies both near and for.

Finally, what both the ruling –party and the opposition should not forget is that - as the history of the successful nations amplify and clearly demonstrates - it is political compromise and the aggregation of broader national interests’ not political polarization which serves as a bed–rock for democracy.

Endnotes

1. The legacy of the socialist past is still stronger among the Ethiopian political parties, especially in the thinking and *modus operandi* of the ruling-party.
2. In terms of sacrifice, Ethiopian political parties have few parallels in Africa, but in terms of a united struggle for a common societal transformation, they have very little to show.
3. The Emperor's Revised Constitution of 1955 had introduced a universal suffrage, but the property qualification for candidates officially prohibited candidates from the lower classes.
4. Many people in the academia argue that the Emperor over-stayed in power, and it is his refusal to open the way for a constitutional monarchy that largely blocked the evolutionary road to liberal democracy and finally contributed to the violent revolution of the 1970s.
5. This was partly because of the establishment of political parties before the introduction of liberal ideas and partly the fear of the Emperor's repressive security apparatus, which became brutal over the years.
6. The vocabulary came during the students' strikes of the 1960s and 1970s, where those who boycotted classes were being considered as revos, i.e. revolutionaries and those attended classes were being considered as sabos, i.e. saboteurs to the struggle. Such characterization had seriously divided the Student Movement of the time, and had also contributed to later day divisions.
7. The "national question" was popularized by the Ethiopian Student Movement and the Ethiopian left as part of their class struggle, but it was the national liberation

movements which effectively used it, even against the very people who popularized it more than anybody else.

8. The *Regime Guzoists* and the *Achir Guzoists* were phrases used by the EPRP and MEISON to ridicule each other in the last years of the Emperor's period.
9. The "Bale road" and the "Bole road" as a cynic to differentiate those who claimed to be militant and supported the armed struggle and the softer ones who had little appetite for it. The "Bale road" was symbolized the then raging armed struggle under a command of General Wako Gutu while the "Bole road" was to symbolize home coming through the Ethiopian airport.
10. Ironically, the division was neither over ideology nor over real issues, it was largely over tactics – probably more over personalities.
11. In this connection, Andargachew Tiruneh in his book written in 1993 sarcastically argued that both groups were not neutral in their own destruction.
12. The two Amharic books were written by Dr. Worku Ferede, the first chairman of MEISON and Andargachew Assagid (2000), founder as well as member of the MEISON leadership; while the two English books were written by Kiflu Tadesse (1993 & 1998) and Babile Tolla, both members of EPRP leadership. The latter's name appears to be a pen name for a known EPRP leader.
13. The older generation of the ESM, who were abroad had the luxury to indulge in the controversies among the Marxists movements across the globe while the younger generation at home had little access to the Marxist literature and it was difficult under the Emperor's security personnel who were also busy. As the result, the source of the luxury of division came largely from abroad.
14. The word "banda" came into the Ethiopian vocabulary during the time of the Italian invasion to mean traitors to the national cause while the word "anarchist"

came after the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 to mean some one who is for chaos and lawlessness.

15. In the socialist vocabulary white terror is to mean reactionary terror and red is to mean revolutionary terror. The origin of both was the Russian revolution while in the Ethiopian case there was no agreement over which one white and which one is red. At any rate, for MEISON and the Dergue, the EPRP's "urban guerrilla warfare" is white terror.
16. During the period, the Dergue security personnel used to kill MEISON members and make it appear as if they were killed by EPRP activists - even when MEISON was officially working with the Dergue. The killing of Abdulahi Yusuf, a leading MEISON member is the best example such killings.
17. I still remember today how I was barred from both MEISON and EPRP controlled schools, from the former because of alleged disloyalty, and from the latter because of being an "enemy".
18. Except EDU, all the Ethiopian political movements of the day profess Marxism, and the competition was to be left to the left. Incidentally, it was the TPLF who claimed to be the left of the left, and it used to accuse both the Ethiopian multi-ethnic left, MEISON and EPRP and the EPLF for being soft on both imperialisms – Western Imperialism and Soviet Social Imperialism. But now, MLLT and EMLF have gone underground after 1991 – either withered away or still lying underground and TPLF/EPRDF is seen as most friendly to the West.
19. Many doubt from the very beginning on the sincerity of the TPLF to solve the national question in a manner acceptable to all, and argue that all its designs have been to use ethnicity as instrument of divide and rule.

20. Of all the legally registered UEDF members ONC and SEPDU were the two main members of UEDF who were able to get elected their members to the parliament.
21. The Cold War among the Ethiopian political parties has continued unabated, and there are little lessons learnt from the past mistakes by the parties.
22. Ironically, the AFD is being attacked from three totally opposite directions: from the country's Prime Minister to the Oromo nationalists - including some pro-Ethiopian unity forces - for different reasons.
23. The languages in which the two Amharic guide lines are written are really disturbing for those who still hope for peaceful road to democratic transition in Ethiopia.
24. The sources of division are not limited to and not because of ethnicity alone as some people often argue. To be sure, multi-ethnic parties are as divided as ethnic based political movements and vice-versa.

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Abbreviations Used

AFD	-----	Alliance for Freedom and Democracy
CAFPDE	-----	Council for Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy
CUD	-----	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
CEOPO	-----	Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Organizations
COEDF	-----	Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces
EMLF	-----	Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Forces
EPRDF	-----	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Forces
EPRP	-----	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party
MEISON	-----	An Amharic acronym for All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
MLLT	-----	Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray
OLF	-----	Oromo Liberation Front
ONC	-----	Oromo National Congress
PDOs	-----	Peoples' Democratic Organizations
SEPDU	-----	Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Union
TPLF	-----	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UEDF	-----	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces