

The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life

SARAH VAUGHAN AND KJETIL TRONVOLL



For more than a decade, reforms designed to liberalise Ethiopia's economy, decentralise its state, and democratise its politics have sought to reverse a history of centralised autocracy and violent political conflict. Despite important advances, the capacity and the freedom of action of civil society and political opposition remain limited. The current period is critical in terms both of political stability and pluralism, and of pro-poor socio-economic development in Ethiopia. The study advocates an analysis of power that takes account of the political culture, knowledge, and beliefs of Ethiopia's diverse citizens. The authors argue that involving all Ethiopians in decisions affecting their lives is one of the most significant challenges to socio-political transformation.

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BY SARAH VAUGHAN AND KJETIL TRONVOLL

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Foreword by Sida

The mission of Sida is to contribute to poverty reduction in partner countries. Sustained poverty reduction requires equitable growth – but it also requires that poor people have access to political power and resources.

To better understand the persistent and multi-dimensional aspects of poverty as well as the potential for and obstacles to poverty reduction and development, Sida decided to commission, on a pilot basis, a “power analysis” of Ethiopia during the preparation of the Swedish Ethiopian Country Strategy for 2003–2007 in 2002.

The purpose of the study is to provide Sida and the Swedish Embassy in Ethiopia with a deeper understanding of the formal and informal political, economic and social power structures and power relations in Ethiopian society as well as their implications for poverty reduction and development in Ethiopia. The study may also help Sida to identify different processes and initiatives in Ethiopian society, which could contribute to poverty reduction, democratisation, and increased respect for human rights and socio-economic development. Our hope is that the study will also be of interest to everybody interested in developments in Ethiopia.

To quote the authors of the report: “This study foregrounds culture, convention, and systems of shared belief in the study of relations and structures of power. In doing so, it seeks to look beyond the so-called ‘formal’ or ‘modern’ political sphere, to investigate the way it is influenced by, and influences social developments more generally. ... it seeks to move beyond the constitutional developments, and formal structures which provide the waxen form of politics in Ethiopia, to illuminate its ‘golden’ alternate: the relations and systems of power and convention which underpin and give it life and meaning.”

Hitherto, Sida’s experience of conducting power analyses has been rather limited. The first round of analyses includes Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Mali. All these analyses were carried out as an integral part of each country strategy process. At present, Sidas’s Division for Democratic Governance (DESA) is assessing the approaches used in these four analyses further to develop methods for these types of studies.



Thomas Kjellson

Acting Head of Division for Democratic Governance (DESA)

Authors' Foreword

The paper was written in May 2002 and broadly represents the situation as it was perceived at that time. Whilst some revision and restructuring was carried out in 2003, no attempt has been made to update it to take full account of developments subsequent to the initial writing.

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Executive Summary

The distribution of power in a given society is a function of the system of knowledge as it operates throughout that collective, itself a function of the interaction of all of its members, be they regarded as 'powerful' or 'powerless'. It is continually constituted and reconstituted in each of these interactions, and it is here that the distribution of power inheres, rather than in the structures, or resources of the state *per se*. Thus a shift in the relations of power requires a shift in the 'systems' or 'patterns' of knowledge and interaction which constitute the society.

Dominant socio-political culture in much of Ethiopia has historically been vertically stratified, and rigidly hierarchical. As a result it is often the case that processes of socialisation from birth teach Ethiopians that people are *not* equal. Rather they instil an understanding of the roles and statuses which are assigned to different individuals, marking them as either marginal, and disenfranchised, or privileged and empowered, usually on the basis of ethnicity, clan, class, gender, wealth or age. This contributes to a non-egalitarian distribution of power, which is deeply entrenched, and resistant to change. Whilst male household heads mediate access to family and local political arenas, representatives of the state at each level play the same powerful role vis-à-vis public life and resources, with little likelihood of challenge from their subordinates in either case.

Given that the state in Ethiopia continues to exercise extensive control over major resources (budgets, salaried employment outside the major cities, land, services, etc.), the question of expansion and equity of access to the resources and decision-making powers of the state is more than usually critical. This is a question of some urgency since inequality of access had been the primary root of conflict for many decades prior to 1991. Even under circumstances of democratised access, such conflict could nevertheless be expected to escalate in a context of growing population, and dwindling resources. On the approach to power adopted here, the democratisation of political life in Ethiopia would require the transformation and the 'democratisation' of social and economic relations and interaction at all levels of the collective. This is in line with the publicly expressed commitment of the ruling party to the entrenchment of 'people's power'. The patterns and distribution of power are, therefore, investigated in this report in each of four arenas: the popular, 'associational', state, and party political spheres.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF,

came to power in 1991 with a commitment to democratise and decentralise access to the resources of the state, and rapidly undertook three major processes of reform. In the political sphere the regime sought to transform a highly centralised single party arrangement into a radically deconcentrated federation, drawn along the lines of the major language groups, and subject to periodic multi-party elections. To achieve this, reform of the civil service attempts to overhaul its systems, culture, and capacity. Finally, in the economic sphere the pre-existing command economy is being liberalised with the gradual introduction of privatisation and plural systems in many areas.

Progress was interrupted in 1998 with the outbreak of the Ethiopia-Eritrean war. In the wake of the war, the period from late 2000 saw both political and economic confidence shaken as a result of a combination of circumstances. Falling producer prices for cereals and coffee, the impact of the war, and the curtailment of investment loans in the wake of corruption scandals depressed the economy and damaged investor confidence. Political morale within the ruling party (together with the confidence of the wider population) was damaged by the unprecedented division within its leadership that emerged in March 2001, and the political departures which followed. During a subsequent period of suspended animation the remaining leadership of the government and ruling party sought to consolidate its position, renew policy, and revise strategies for its implementation. As these new initiatives began to be implemented, Ethiopia's leaders seemed poised for an intensification of efforts to professionalise and improve the capacity of the state and civil service. It is unclear whether this will herald a revival of progress towards devolution and 'power sharing'.

On paper the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, FDRE, is a radically devolved 'confederation', with all residual powers and sovereignty resting with the National Regional States, NRSS, which enjoy rights of self-determination including secession, and the Federal Government existing only 'because the states will it'. There are three centripetal influences that counteract this degree of devolution in practice. Firstly, constitutional Chapter 10 formally requires that NRS policy-making develop in line with federal norms. Secondly, a combination of centralised policy making by the ruling party, and lack of capacity in the NRSS means that this formal constitutional requirement is in practice rarely challenged by autonomous development in the states. Thirdly and critically, the financial balance of power is tipped overwhelming in favour of the centre, which controls the flow of federal subsidy (the overwhelming majority of their budgets) to the NRSS.

During 2001/2, three major steps have been taken to restructure the executive, its relations with the party, and with the other two branches of government. Firstly, all ministers at federal and NRS levels are now political appointees of the ruling party: it is reported that civil servants and advisors, meanwhile, will be appointed on the basis of professional considerations. This is intended to create a clearer demarcation between party and state. Secondly, the leadership of legislative bodies at NRS, zonal, *wereda*, and *kebele* levels has been removed from the purview of the executive at each level, with the creation of a new office of parliamentary ‘speaker’ (*af gubaye*). This is intended to create a clearer separation of executive and legislature. Thirdly, various of the functions of the Prime Minister’s Office, PMO (or of the chief administrator at each level) have been allocated to a series of newly established ‘superministries’, catering for Capacity Building, Infrastructure, Rural Development, and (at federal level) Federal Affairs. This group of ministers (or cabinet members at lower levels) can be regarded as forming the core leadership of the government’s development programme at each level.

Two related changes are being effected in the structure of government within the states. The first is the ‘abolition’ of the zonal level of administration; the second is the move to a system of block grants which, since July 2002, pass directly from the federal government to the *weredas*. Ethnic zones in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ National Regional State, SNNPR, and ‘special zones’ (which have a political as well as an administrative status) elsewhere, continue to exist and function. Nevertheless, the proportion of expenditure and personnel allocated to zones and NRSS has dropped significantly even in these cases, with a likely concomitant drop in capacity and authority. There is some indication that this move may be designed to curb calls for separate ethnic zonal status which have been prevalent in the SNNPR, and which are thought to have been encouraged by the relatively generous budgets previously allocated at ethnic zonal level. Whilst the increased focus on *wereda* level development is broadly welcomed, uncertain capacity for its ‘instantaneous’ implementation has been of concern. The assignment of large numbers of civil servants from federal and NRS offices to the greatly expanded *wereda* level of government initially met with some resistance, in view of the reduced facilities offered by *weredas* – particularly to government officers with families. The government sought to counter this problem by means of significant increases in salaries for administrators assigned to local areas.

The judiciary is constitutionally independent of both legislature and executive, an autonomy which remains functionally constrained in a num-

ber of respects. Recourse to the law is an important feature of Ethiopian life, both urban and rural. The bottlenecks and delays in the court system which emerged in the mid-1990s became a focus of frustration and vitriol. The incoming Transitional Government of Ethiopia, TGE, was keen to establish a 'new' judicial class, and had removed many judicially competent former members of the Dergue's Workers' Party of Ethiopia, WPE. With the removal of many cases brought by the Office of the Special Prosecutor, SPO, to separately constituted benches, bottlenecks eased in recent years, and centred primarily on labour courts, which were flooded with compensation claims in the wake of privatisations. Since 2001, attention has focused on high profile proceedings against former senior political figures amongst the ruling party 'dissidents', and well-connected business people, for alleged corruption. The view that these proceedings have been politically motivated is widespread, a fact which risks undermining the credibility of both the Anti-Corruption Commission, ACC, and the court system itself. Significant problems with the judiciary and police persist at local levels, where a potentially highly effective social court system lacks resources, training, and institutional autonomy.

Public administration in Ethiopia faces two core problems. Firstly the public sector has for some years been crippled by the heavy haemorrhaging of professional personnel, as a result of gross disparities in public and private sector remuneration and opportunities. Secondly, the sector is affected by a culture of inertia and 'lowest common denominator self-preservation', apparently fostered by the decline of living standards and job security experienced by state sector workers over the last few years. There have been widespread complaints that the combined requirements to recruit personnel on the basis of ethnic quotas, *and* political affiliation or loyalty means that the most able and efficient functionaries are continually overlooked. It is notable that the educational level of zonal and *wereda* administrative personnel has increased dramatically in the last 5–6 years, with most if not all now graduates, many of the civil service college degree and diploma programmes in law, economics, and urban development. New government emphasis on capacity building is likely to continue this trend, which has both improved the capability of local government, and built a class of educated administrators who share an investment in, and commitment to, the current system of government, if not the ruling party itself.

Throughout the 1990s the government faced opposition from two quarters. Firstly, a number of ethnic-based parties and liberation movements called for autonomy, or secession, for their constituents, and claimed that under EPRDF federalism was a 'sham' – a means of 'divide

and rule', rather than the genuine 'self-determination of peoples'. Secondly, pan-Ethiopian nationalists opposed both Eritrean secession, and Ethiopian ethnic federalism in principle, regarding both as divisive and destructive of Ethiopia's 'natural interests'. Both groups have had their legally registered, and their illegal and armed or exiled elements. To these two wings has now been added the so-called internal 'dissident group', sacked from the leadership of EPRDF in 2001. It is possible that, despite a former commitment to ethnic self-determination, this group may now seek to appeal to pan-Ethiopian nationalist elements, stressing controversial issues of economic and territorial sovereignty, and even questioning the manner in which the Eritrean referendum was held.

EPRDF is one of a number of political organisations that grew out of the Marxist student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its preferred conception of democracy has not been the liberal bourgeois variety, based on individual participation, a diversity of interests and views, and plural representation. Rather 'revolutionary' democracy is based on communal collective participation, based on consensus forged through discussion led by the vanguard organisation. The party's long-standing commitments to Leninist and Maoist precepts of mass political mobilisation were confirmed by the TPLF's success in Tigray, where the peasantry was mobilised on an ethnic basis. This, in turn, became the mode of participation and representation in the TGE/FDRE. The extent to which the ideology associated with this history may have been revised by EPRDF during the recent period remains unclear and controversial.

The Front has drawn on a Stalinist understanding of the so-called 'national question', which incorporates two contradictory elements. The first is the (laudable, and demonstrably true) notion that a community can be mobilised better in its own language, using its own culture, by its own people – effectively 'from within'. The second is the (more problematic) view that the criteria for the establishment of 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' are objectively and externally identifiable, and verifiable by a vanguard organisation independently of the views of the groups' members – effectively 'from above'. Tension between these contradictory tendencies can be seen at work in a number of shifts in policy towards ethnic autonomy over the decade to 2001.

Finally, the EPRDF has never appeared as an organisation committed to pluralism for its own sake, and it has long understood the great political potential of a coincidence of interest between peasant populations benefiting from socio-economic development, and the party/government winning support by being seen as responsible for such benefits. It has thus been equally resistant to the emergence of competitors, whether for the

allocative power of government office (opposition parties), or over the distribution of other resources and delivery of services (NGOs, churches, etc.). A particularly frustrating area of ruling party philosophy is its unwillingness to engage in dialogue with alternative political perspectives. A dominant view has been that those who disagree with EPRDF should look for political competition with it, rather than policy dialogue. Given the political culture referred to above, and the domination of resources by the state, such attitudes are more likely to foster exclusion and conflict than healthy competition.

EPRDF is composed of four organisations: the Tigray People's Liberation Front, TPLF; the Amhara National Democratic Movement, ANDM; the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, OPDO; and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front, SEPDF, itself a Front encompassing ethnic people's democratic organisations, or PDOS, in each of the SNNPNS's ethnic administrative units. There are indications that EPRDF is moving to become a single national party with local units, rather than a front of nominally separate organisations. Currently, however, it is co-ordinated by a 20-member politburo of 5 representatives of each of the constituent organisations or fronts. Each front is organised in classic Marxist-Leninist style, led, between congresses, by an elected Central Committee, and powerful executive committee. The structure extends hierarchically down through series of cadres, to party cells established throughout the four National Regional States, NRSS, administered by EPRDF. Membership distinguishes between peasants (who pay a flat fee) and 'intellectuals' (salaried members, who pay a sliding percentage of their income). Recent changes in party structure have included the expansion of Central Committee membership, and the disassociation of the former mass associations for women, youth, and farmers.

Many of the opposition parties which operate within the constitutional framework, seeking to mobilise support, and contesting elections, are also organised on an ethnic basis, and include: Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition, SEPDC; All Amhara People's Organisation, AAPO (now the pan-Ethiopianist All-Ethiopia Unity Party, AEUP); and the Oromo National Congress, ONC. An exception has been the relatively new Ethiopian Democratic Party, EDP, appealing to pan-Ethiopian nationalists, particularly regarding the issue of Assab, and recently merged with the Ethiopian Democratic Union, EDU, to form the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party, EDUP. All opposition parties have complained of intimidation and harassment by members of the ruling party, and the security instruments of the state, between and during elections. It is true that the opposition parties are weak, lack clear programmes, and enjoy only lim-

ited support in the rural areas (an exception is the support shown for the Hadiya National Democratic Organisation, HNDO, in Hadiya in 2000). The pervasive character of the repression they seem to have faced, particularly at local levels, suggests a systemic problem.

Of the armed opposition to the government, by far the most significant in political (and military) terms is the long-established Oromo Liberation Front, OLF. Whilst organisationally and militarily weak, the OLF nevertheless enjoys the residual attachment of many Oromo nationalists and intellectuals, a fact that has been sufficient to cripple the capacity and credibility of the ruling OPDO over the last decade. The activities of armed opposition groups tend to be concentrated in the pastoralist areas, an arc stretching from the border with Eritrea in the north-east, clockwise through the Ogaden and Borana, to the border with Sudan in the west. They involve Afars, Somalis, Oromos, and, increasingly, the small pastoral groups along the border with Sudan. None of these armed campaigns in themselves represents a threat to the state or to the government. However, the containment of each involves considerable military and developmental cost. Each of these armed campaigns is deeply implicated in regional security and diplomatic relations, involving at least the passive facilitation of one of Ethiopia's neighbours.

Whilst significant steps were taken during the TGE to effect the formal separation of the ruling party and the state, their roles remained closely blurred and intertwined through the 1990s, with a system of party decision-making often overshadowing that of the state/government. It is possible to interpret the power struggle within the TPLF, which culminated in early 2001, as a contest between those relying on the authority of state positions, and those influential only within the party. In its wake, significant changes seem to be being forged in the party-state relation. Political and administrative appointments are now more clearly demarcated; the party is no longer involved in the evaluation (*gimema*) of government activities; and government policy is debated and evolved by government bodies, not separately as previously throughout the party. At the lower levels, this generated dissatisfaction amongst veteran cadres who question the changed functioning of the party. At the highest level the two structures of party politburo/Central Committee and Council of Ministers seem effectively to have been fused. This kind of package of centralised bureaucratic reform, involving either the downgrading, or the incorporation of the nationalist party, or 'liberation movement', by the state, was undertaken in other parts of Africa in the postcolonial period, where it was uniformly accompanied by the downgrading of representative institutions.

As in many cases where state structures are poorly emancipated from society, throughout the 1990s, local administrative and political party systems were overlapping and interwoven, so that local government structures and officers were rarely either politically ‘neutral’, or perceived as such. The current system of *kebele/wereda* administration was inherited from the Dergue, by whom it was devised as a means both of communicating development plans and ideology, and of gathering intelligence regarding ‘anti-revolutionary’ activities. Ethiopians are well aware of the extensive authority of the *kebele/wereda* officials, and the fact that their relations with them will mediate the access they enjoy to all of the resources and services the state has to offer – jobs, health services, land rights, water, relief food, credit, rented houses, and so on. The fact that local militia, police, prosecutors, and judges are often part of the same party hierarchy which has nominated such powerful officials, seems to have contributed to the instances of abuse of power by local officials. Many have enjoyed effective impunity vis-à-vis the state, and little social sanction from community and constituents.

In many instances, local religious leaders of all faiths have the power to define appropriate social conduct, frequently resulting in limitations on the social space accorded to women. Given the hierarchical nature of social and political relations in highland tradition, peasant-to-peasant relations in Ethiopia have been few, and restricted to the achievement of practical tasks, such as ploughing. Several common types of local association (*iddir*, *mahaber*, *senbete*, *equub*) offer either mutual socio-economic support and collaboration to members, particularly at times of stress or expense, such as weddings or funerals (‘balanced’ reciprocity), or the more generalised reciprocity of social and religious obligation. Such relations are commonly characterised by their horizontal orientation, with members co-operating on an equal basis, since traditional collaborative associations bring together existing peers. Community co-operation thus tends to be reconstitutive of the status quo, and inimical to social transformation. It is nevertheless significant that the leaders of such structures are selected by, and remain accountable to, their fellows. There is evidence that, as a result, the collective sanctions (or other norms) they are able to apply – for instance regulating repayment of credit – may in some instances be more effective than those coming, externally, from government or other outside actors, including NGOs.

Ethiopia’s human rights record under EPRDF is a clear improvement upon the nadir it had reached under the Dergue regime, particularly the Red Terror period of the late 1970s. A decade after EPRDF came to power, however, human rights violations occur throughout the country, and are

sometimes very grave. Detention without trial, torture, ‘disappearances’ and extra-judicial executions are regularly reported by international and national human rights monitoring organisations. The government is sensitive to criticism of its human rights record, and generally reluctant to admit direct responsibility for abuses, often blaming the unauthorised actions of individuals outside the control of the central government. Recently there have been some indications of increasing willingness to hold local police and government officials responsible for violent incidents, such as those which took place in SNNP/NRS, particularly Tepi and Awassa, in the early and middle parts of 2002.

A body of recent case studies of electoral practice indicates that the operation of the political system in many parts of the country is such as to make it difficult for opposition parties and candidates to use the liberal democratic provisions of the constitution and relevant legislation effectively to challenge the dominance of the ruling party. The studies document a range of tactics which commonly disadvantages the opposition prior to and during elections. These include: the closure of offices, harassment and arrest of candidates, and refusal of some of their signatures of endorsement; last minute shifts in the regulations regarding the number of candidates to be fielded; and suspension of candidates falsely claimed to be ‘under police investigation’. As a result, the opposition parties which contest elections regard themselves as beleaguered on a far-from-level playing field. They do not see EPRDF as responsible for bringing ‘democratisation’; and they do not consider that they should form an opposition ‘loyal’ to a regime they distrust and feel repressed by. Donor engagement in the democratic process, meanwhile, has been superficial, focusing on formal political institutions, and neglectful of the socio-political dynamics which give them meaning and significance.

The Ethiopian government is now in the midst of a second Five-Year Development Plan, designed to enhance agricultural productivity, improve rural infrastructure, encourage private investment, promote participation of the private sector in the economy, mobilise external resources, and pursue ‘appropriate’ macroeconomic sectoral policies. The government has several times revised and liberalised the investment code, recently giving those of Ethiopian origin the same investment status as nationals. Ethiopia has privatised approximately 180 enterprises, mostly in the trade and service sectors, but also the large Lega Dembi Gold Mine. None of Ethiopia’s utilities has yet been privatised, and the government retains ownership of all land. The state retains its dominant position in the ownership of key assets, although the emerging private sector has played an increasing role, particularly with respect to the

service sector. What critics have called the ‘genuine private sector’, however, has been dwarfed by the activities of two large blocs: the Midroc ‘empire’ owned by Sheikh Mohammed Alamoudi, and the so-called ‘party-associated’ enterprises.

The Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray, EFFORT, was established by the TPLF in 1995 as a means of co-ordinating the effective developmental use of the material and cash resource in the possession of the TPLF at the end of the war with the Dergue. Under the umbrella of the foundation, and sister organisations in other EPRDF-administered regions, a range of commercial enterprises and factories were established, dealing in trade, agriculture, cement production, textiles and garmenting, livestock and leather, transport, mining, engineering, and finance. Together these represent an enormously influential and strategically integrated bloc, dominating key sectors of the economy. Critics and supporters fear the potential political and economic implications of the concentration of such economic power in the hands of bodies effectively controlled by the ruling party, and allege the emergence of new monopolistic and unfair trading practices.

It is ironic that whilst the NGO sector has flourished, grown, and diversified with the establishment of many new voluntary bodies under EPRDF, it has also felt itself to be threatened from many sides. Bilateral and multi-lateral government funding through the NGO sector dropped off dramatically as the international community renewed government-to-government relations after the demise of the Dergue. The Ethiopian government policy environment of the last decade has involved strict regulation and monitoring of the proliferating national and international NGOs, curbing their income-generating, commercial, and autonomous activities, and requiring that they work increasingly through government structures. As in the commercial sector, the party has also been active in the development industry, establishing a series of powerful regional NGOs with close, if informal, government links. Recently, a number of independent research and consultancy associations have grown out of Addis Ababa University, and are now producing useful and challenging studies.

Gender roles in Ethiopia are, as elsewhere, bound by social and cultural norms, and there is great variation across ethnic and socio-economic groups. To a high degree, marriage and motherhood determine Ethiopian women’s relationships to work, property, and public space, and define their status as political actors. Many of the factors that disadvantage women are problems of poverty and underdevelopment, shared by the wider community. Female genital mutilation, however, is reportedly experienced by between 73 and 90% of Ethiopia’s women, ranging from in-

fibulation and radical clitoridectomy, especially in lowland areas, to the piercing of labia more common in the highlands. During its opposition to the Dergue, TPLF/EPRDF recruited women fighters and commanders, and endorsed the separate organisation of women 'to prepare them to participate fully in the class struggle'. Since 1991, however, women have seen little advancement to positions of political influence, and the proportion of women elected to representative office at all levels has not increased. The enrolment of female school students has recently gone up, and this will be profoundly important for the future. Meanwhile, there are some indications that the upsurge of ethnic consciousness in some parts of the country may have revived a number of traditional practices (often seen as ethnic boundary markers) which further disadvantage women.

Given the ethnic federal arrangements, minority ethnic groups, even numerically small ones, are less marginalised at the national political level than ever previously in modern Ethiopia's history. However, a number of occupational or clan minorities within ethnic groups continue to be marginalised, despised, and disadvantaged, their political representation subsumed within the wider ethnic group. Such stigmatised groups (often craftsmen or hunters) exist amongst many of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, and a number have been encouraged by ethnic federalism to petition for separate representation. Since they live mixed amongst other groups they are unlikely to secure representation in a 'first past the post' (or 'plurality-majority') electoral system, and remain largely excluded from the local socio-political arenas.

EPRDF has chosen to stress the positive aspects of ethnic identity, which invest communities who share language and culture with a sense of common identity. The ethnic federal arrangement was instituted as a means of diffusing the pattern of conflict which had engulfed Ethiopia in the second half of the twentieth century, as a direct result of the coincidence of ethnic and class divisions under centralised imperial and military rule. Ethnic federalism, along with the cession of Eritrea, were seen as conflict resolution mechanisms designed to bring three decades of civil war to an end. Some critics have argued that ethnicity 'captured' within the political structure of the state is in fact likely to inspire conflict, bringing such groups explicitly into competition with one another over their share of the state resources. Others argue that it is only its explicit invocation – and neutralisation – which can diffuse pre-existing tensions. Ethnic federalism has, in some instances, added a new dimension to pre-existing local conflicts over land, water, government budgets, and other resources, sometimes adding legitimacy and motivation to an 'ethnic rationale' for dispute. There are confusing and contradictory processes at work: some

inspired by 'rightful' or 'exaggerated' claims by local communities, others imposed from above; some driven by political entrepreneurs for their own purposes, others perhaps seeking to diffuse opposition. This critical issue, requiring a full study in its own right, is not considered in this report in great detail.

Given the weakness of the opposition parties, and the strong central dominance of the state, it seems likely that the major agents of change in Ethiopia will continue for the foreseeable future to be the leadership of the ruling party. Since early 2001, the intentions, objectives, organisation and methods of the ruling party have perhaps undergone a greater sea change than at any time since the inception of the TPLF in 1975. The dramatic challenge presented by the 'dissident' group in 2001 has had far reaching implications for the reorganisation and restructuring, 'renewal' and remobilisation of both ruling party and state structures at all levels. These implications have taken on a life of their own, and have penetrated far beyond the rapid and effective marginalisation of the initial group. Perhaps the single most important issue in Ethiopian politics in the immediate period will be the cohesion, stability, and vitality of the ruling party leadership, all of which were challenged in 2000/2001.

In the longer term, the educational strategy of the government, which prioritises a dramatic expansion of educational access at all levels, is likely to promote both capacity and pluralism. The government sees the creation of an educated population as a prerequisite for the democratisation of a hierarchical socio-political culture. A risk is that without a commensurate expansion of opportunities for enterprise and employment, a large pool of unemployed school and college leavers might prove socially and politically destabilising.

In mid-2002 Ethiopia was potentially beginning to emerge from the calamitous period of the last 4–5 years of developmental disappointment caused by war. The outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war marked a disastrous setback for a state and government which had, until then, been thought to have been making steady progress towards economic growth and administrative reform, capitalising on a context of peace. Periods of change are often also periods of uncertainty, and instability. This paper is written at a time when significant changes to the structures and relations of power seem to be occurring. The coming period will demonstrate whether the ruling party has been able to reconsolidate the stability and cohesion it seeks, and whether this will be put to serve plural and inclusive, or authoritarian and exclusive ends. The report concludes with concern that the immediate period is a critical time for Ethiopia – in terms both of political stability and economic development. Recognition that

there have been important changes, including significant downturns, in a number of political indicators, however, should provide a basis for realism in constructive and increasingly active engagement with the socio-economic and political reform projects of the current Ethiopian government.

The paper gives lengthy consideration of the nature and potential of political opposition in Ethiopia. It is, however, a clear-cut conclusion that, despite the existence of a spectrum of alternately exciting, intriguing, or worrying shifts in the politics of this large country, there seem to be, at least the next decade, few viable national alternative political forces to the parties of the ERPDP. A key implication of this analysis is, therefore, that the most influential and important agents of change with whom Sida can work in Ethiopia can be expected to continue to be the political leadership of the ruling party.

Introduction:

perspectives on power and culture

CHAPTER 1

Insofar as Ethiopia is committed to the pursuit of modernity, she cannot fail to be embarrassed to some extent by the wax-and-gold¹ complex. For nothing could be more at odds with the ethos of modernization, if not with its actuality, than a cult of ambiguity. (Levine 1965:10)

There is a tendency for studies of Ethiopian political development to focus exclusively on ‘the modern’: the state and its projects, the formal arena of political competition, the developmental potential of civil society at the national level. It is usually easier for researchers to canvass the views of educated officials, civil servants, opposition leaders, businessmen and NGO activists, than of the many women, hunters, pastoralists, or farmers who are fluent only in local languages, and resident far from towns and metal roads. Whilst social anthropologists and others have studied this more ‘traditional sector’, their findings have been under-integrated into political analysis at the level of the Ethiopian state.

This has begun to change recently. A number of authors now focus their investigations at the complex interface between the modern and the traditional in Ethiopian political life (cf. for instance Donham 2001, Abbink 2000, James et al. (eds) 2002). In demonstrating how much the two spheres influence, shape, even ‘reconstitute’ one another, they suggest the artificiality of the divisions and categories within which politics has commonly been studied. Studies at the interface between state and population, have demonstrated that there is no straightforward correlation between such dichotomies as ‘state/people’ ‘modern/traditional’

1. ‘Wax and gold is the formula used by the Amhara to symbolize their favourite form of verse. It is a form built of two semantic layers. The apparent, figurative meaning of the words is called ‘wax’; their more or less hidden actual significance is the ‘gold’ [...] (this terminology is developed from the work of the goldsmith who constructs a clay mould around a form created in wax and then, draining the wax, pours the molten gold into that form)’ (Levine 1965:5)

‘urban/rural’ and ‘national/local’. Indeed, they have shown that transactions across and between these dualities are so important as to challenge the their status as preferred analytical categories.

This study foregrounds culture, convention, and systems of shared belief in the study of relations and structures of power. In doing so, it seeks to look beyond the so-called ‘formal’ or ‘modern’ political sphere, to investigate the way it is influenced by, and influences social developments more generally. In the terms suggested by Levine (above), it seeks to move beyond the constitutional developments, and formal structures which provide the waxen form of politics in Ethiopia, to illuminate its ‘golden’ alternate: the relations and systems of power and convention which underpin and give it life and meaning.

In 1991, after three decades of war, the incoming Ethiopian government inherited a centralised authoritarian state, and the ruins of a command economy. It publicly committed itself to a series of radical reform measures designed to transform this situation. Below, this introductory section gives a brief account of the kinds of changes the government envisaged, and of the difficulties of evaluating the progress made over the last decade in transforming the relations of power in Ethiopia. These difficulties suggest that a broader approach, which goes beyond formal political institutions, may help processes of understanding and evaluation. The introductory part of the paper, therefore, concludes with a brief account of the kind of theoretical framework under which power and culture are brought centre stage in this study, and some introductory comments on the operation of ‘political culture’ in Ethiopia.

The main body of the study, then, is divided into four sections, which investigate the patterns and distribution of power in each of four arenas: the popular, associational, political, and state spheres. It begins with an account of some of the key strands of popular practice, convention, and experience that shape political life at the ‘grassroots’. This investigation is then extended to the more familiar spheres of: associational life and civil society; the state/government arena which is referred to in Amharic as *‘ye mengist’*; and the political party system. Each of these sections offers not so much an exhaustive description of current circumstances, as a review of issues relevant to political culture and the operation of power. Each shows how power and culture combine to produce an intertwining of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ influences in each and all of the spheres examined, something which contributes to Ethiopia’s famous ‘cult of ambiguity’ (Levine, above). Each part discusses cross cutting factors such as the participation of women, ethnic groups and minorities, and the status of human rights. A concluding section considers relations between these four

arenae, and offers a review of trends and indicators for the future direction of political culture, and patterns of power.

1.1 Reform from 1991–2001

1.1.1 The dynamics of reform

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF, came to power by force of arms in 1991, after civil wars in Ethiopia and Eritrea which had engulfed much of the north of the region for over a quarter of a century, and which also resulted in the secession of Eritrea, *de facto* in 1991, and *de iure* in 1993. The EPRDF quickly convened a conference of the major movements of opposition to the defeated *Dergue* regime, along with representatives of the country's various other ethnic (or language) groups and certain social sectors². The meeting adopted a Transitional Charter under which the country would be governed for the time being, and set its principled approval on a raft of reforms, designed radically to transform the inherited political, economic, and administrative order in the longer term³.

The new Transitional Government, TGE, led by the EPRDF, publicly pledged its commitment to three radical reform objectives: namely,

- the decentralisation of the state,
- the democratisation of politics, and
- the liberalisation of the economy.

EPRDF announced its determination radically to decentralise power within the Ethiopian state of which it had won control. It had long identified the extreme centralisation of state power, its 'ethnocratic'⁴ concentration in the hands of an elite from a single group, at the expense of the country's other impoverished, oppressed, and exploited populations, as the central root of Ethiopia's modern political history of war, famine, and underdevelopment⁵. The solution it proposed was 'self-determination' for

2. Addis Ababa University, and the Trades Union Movement, for instance, were represented. A number of organisations (notably the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, EPRP, and other members of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces, COEDF) were not included on the grounds that they refused to surrender a commitment to armed opposition. The fact that they did not participate maintained the tradition, and established a focus, of 'extra-legal' political opposition which has continued at varying levels, but uninterrupted, since.

3. Cf. Vaughan (1994) for further details of the preparation and dynamics of the conference.

4. The term was coined by Ali Mazrui (1975).

5. There is a substantial body of literature available which documents the party's analysis, of which the 1980s English language publication of the tplf, People's Voice, is the most accessible. The issue is summarised and discussed in Young (1997). Strongest ideological influences are Marxist-Leninist perspectives on the National Question, and the position bears close resemblances to

those populations: an expansion of popular access to decision-making and control over resources, which would encompass the great majority of Ethiopia's agricultural and pastoral producers, democratise relations between them, and release their potential for socio-economic development. These were objectives with which few of Ethiopia's donors found fault.

Over the decade since 1991, then, the Ethiopian government under the EPRDF has been simultaneously engaged in a range of reform processes, each of which would represent in itself an ambitious undertaking in any country, and each of which has drawn in high levels of support from the international community. In the political sphere, the regime has moved to transform a highly centralised single-party arrangement into what is potentially a radically devolved federation of nine Regional States, based on multi-party competitive election to representative office, the formal separation of the powers of legislature, executive, and judiciary, and accession to a raft of international legal instruments related to human, economic, civil, and political rights. The reform of the Ethiopian civil service has focused not only on the extensive changes in administrative and fiscal arrangements required to underwrite changes in the political sphere, but also extends to attempts to overhaul its systems, capacity, and professional culture in the five areas of: expenditure management and budget control; human resource development; senior management approaches; service delivery; and ethics and corruption-related issues. Finally, in the economic sphere, the Ethiopian government, with the extensive involvement of the international community and IFIs, is seeking to restructure the pre-existing socialist command economy with the (gradual) introduction of market forces in many, although not all, sectors.

The decade from 1991 was marked by frantic activity in each of these areas of reform of state, government, politics, and economy. The leadership of the ruling party and government have been consistent and persistent in their public expressions of ideological and practical commitment to change⁶. In a number of areas there has been concrete progress that would have impressed observers a decade ago⁷. Nevertheless, fundamen-

Gellner's views on uneven development, modernisation and nationalism (cf. esp.1960). The issue is further discussed below.

6. Although it is worth recording that critics complain that these expressions have not been widely disseminated, but rather confined to government, party, and diplomatic circles, such that the wider public is often not party to knowledge and discussion about these vision and intentions. In turn one may observe the conscious determination of large sections of the middle class to distance themselves from politics and any interest in the considerable information which is disseminated through the government media.
7. There is considerable disagreement as to the extent of development over the last decade, with a range of critics claiming that 'nothing has changed since the Dergue'. Whilst it is certainly the case that Ethiopia is subject to overwhelming continuities of political culture and context (and that much of this influence is negative), such views fail to recognise extensive and significant

tal doubts remain with citizens, observers, and donors, about how to interpret and evaluate the changes that have occurred. This report seeks to go some way towards weighing up these queries, stressing issues of political culture and the distribution of power.

In doing so it draws on conversations, research and analysis on Ethiopian political development over a fourteen-year period. It offers suggestions regarding the current situation, and also regarding the best places to keep looking for evidence regarding future directions. In this sense, the report also seeks to address what may seem to be the more modest, and longer-term goal of looking for ways of ensuring that Sida's involvement with Ethiopia not only supports, but also seeks better to illuminate and understand, the processes at work. In a lot of ways, after 10 years of dramatic events, shifts, setbacks and hopes, analysis of social and political developments and relations, especially as they operate at local levels, is little advanced.

Particularly since the outbreak of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May 1998, the international community has perhaps been overly engaged in evaluating and judging, at the expense of learning, understanding, knowing – as a result of which the basis of evaluation has become all too brittle and thin⁸. This report is intended to fuel a discussion not only as to how to advance towards developmental goals which are shared by Sida and the Government of the FDRE, but also as to how both parties can, in another 10 years, be in a significantly better position to evaluate the extent of their shared commitment, and scope for future collaboration. Information regarding social, political, and economic developments and perspectives at the level of local communities remains at a premium.

The point may seem trite, but perhaps emerges as more significant when one considers that in many spheres inadequacies of basic data apply not only to the knowledge base from which donors' decisions are made, but – far more crucially – to that on which the Ethiopian government's own decisions are founded. A new concentration of support is required in the development, expansion, and consolidation of institutions and resources geared to the generation, accumulation and analysis of relevant

developments, which are perhaps most prominent in the areas of infrastructural development (particularly arterial and feeder roads, electrification, and also urban expansion), and the reorganisation of public administration and government (which forms the subject of much of the following).

8. The rather sharp distinction between the relative enthusiasm of those members of the international community who came to know EPRDF during the TGE, and the more cautious approach of many of those who first encountered it during the Ethio-Eritrean war, can presumably be related to the different preoccupations and optimism of the two periods: it is sufficiently striking to require mention in analysis which draws heavily on such sources. Such inconsistencies are, of course, greatly exacerbated by high turnover of personnel in the international sector.

and accessible ‘base-line data’ regarding the development of Ethiopia’s disparate populations, be it social, economic, or (most neglected of all) political.

1.2 Power and collective perceptions of power

An approach to the study of power which goes beyond the formal political arena, beginning with a consideration of power and political culture at the grassroots, would seem also to be encouraged by the perspective articulated by the ruling party, which is as follows:

In the philosophy of the TPLF, the question of democracy is the question of peoples’ power. Unless there is peoples’ power, which is controlled by the people and beneficial to the people, the TPLF has the stand that the question of democracy shall never get an answer. As a result, the TPLF believes that in order to achieve the economic benefits of the entire people, to alleviate social problems and thus create a sustainable development growth, political power should rest with the majority of the people. (TPLF 2000, unofficial translation from Tigrigna).

How then should we understand power, in terms which can account for its operation at every socio-political level and in every arena?

1.2.1 *Some theoretical reflections*

An interesting sociological account suggests the important connection between the distribution of power and the pattern of knowledge operating in a given society:

[The leader’s] underlings had knowledge of [him] and of each other. They knew he was everywhere obeyed. Knowing what they did, they obeyed him. By their obedience they confirmed the validity of what they knew, and continued to accept it as valid. Acceptance of the knowledge generated confirming instances of it. Rejection of the knowledge would have led to disconfirming instances. As a system, knowledge of the power structures was self-referring and self-validating: indeed knowledge of the power structure was the power structure. The overall system of domination and obedience had the character of a vast monumental self-fulfilling prophecy.

If social life is constituted by the actions of responsible knowledgeable agents, then this is how we should understand the basis of such stability and orderliness as it possesses. Not just crude systems of domination and obedience, but all manner of organisations, institutions and hierarchies. (Barnes 1993:215).

In considering structures and relations of power, this report treats the distribution of power as both function and constitutive feature of the interaction of a social collective: the system of power which operates in a given society is the continual product and resource of the interaction of all of its members. Although the study aims to identify the effects of the operation of power on individuals and groups of citizens, that power cannot on this analysis be understood as wholly separable from them and their own activities and interactions. Power is not, for instance, a mere attribute of *other* individuals (agents who become ‘power-ful’, for instance, as a jug is filled with water⁹): it is a function of the whole social system. Thus we need to apply an understanding of power that captures the positions of individuals and groups of actors by means of their relations with others, and what they believe their options to be. Analysing structures *of* power does not imply that such structures *have* power; nor does a description of the distribution of power in society by the relations between peoples imply that the relations between those people are themselves powerful (Dowding 1996:28).

Structures, then, do not have capacity to operate ‘on their own initiative’ – people do. It is true that a ‘system’ or ‘structure’ or ‘convention’ can appear – indeed can *be* – powerful vis-à-vis individuals, even large groups, caught up in that very system/structure/convention. But this power is in fact a function of the interaction of the collectivity of individuals, who are themselves also all positioned in, and constitutive of, the structure: all party to the same ‘system’ of knowledge, which encompasses the experiences of all of those both constituting and subject to it. What we argue, then, is that, independent of this interaction, there is no further mysterious external force which constitutes social structure, and dictates social power.

Analysing an African state from this perspective, we conclude that state power is not an attribute of the state machinery as such, but a product of the interaction between (and resultant distribution of knowledge amongst) the state’s ruling elite and *all of its citizens*.¹⁰ The concentration of social power at certain points in this interaction (the fact that the elite ‘wield power’) remains a function of the whole constellation, and will shift as that constellation shifts. Now, perhaps, we can suggest a shift of approach which may provide a means of improving our understanding of power. Instead of imagining that the question of power is settled simply by deciding who ‘has’ it, one can instead pay more attention to the ques-

9. The metaphor is from Barnes (1988).

10. For insightful studies on this issue, see, in particular Bayart (1993); Ayittey (1992); and Ake (1996).

tion of what kind of power is seen to be being exercised¹¹, and how this is understood or perceived (known), and by whom¹².

From this point of departure, the state is neither the source of power, nor simply the projection of the power of an interested subject (a ruling group, for instance). Rather than an entity 'holding' or 'exercising' power, it may be more fruitful to think of the state, political parties, and all other forms of organised associational social life, as instead forming points of relay or co-ordination and multiplication of power relations. 'The state' (meaning the collectives that constitute it) will influence the structure of power in so far as it is influential in dictating the social distribution of knowledge: and in Ethiopia the state does this to a very high degree. Within this notion of 'bureaucratic state power,' the state as such is not an entity possessed of power (the jug metaphor as above) but a characteristic mode of exercise of power, a mode of power that is organised through state institutions, but which transcends them¹³. On this view of state and power, it remains collectivities of *people* who influence and exercise power; and in order to illuminate this, our analytical focus is on the relational and operational aspects of power, and the collective system(s) of knowledge which underpin them¹⁴.

Simply put, in the Ethiopian case this approach means that whether or not the country enjoys democratic relations, justice, and an egalitarian approach to social transformation depends not only on the activities and aspirations of its leaders, but also upon the nature of the social and political relations, expectations, and perspectives of each and all of its citizens; the state as it is experienced and shaped from below, as well as how it is shaped and experienced from above. This would seem to tally closely with the view commonly articulated by the ruling party that democratisation means 'democratisation of society', that is of relations at all social levels, and not just of formal political institutions. It also suggests the conventional and entrenched nature of political relations. Thus, for instance, a failure to democratise relations which have for centuries proved hierarchical and authoritarian cannot be attributed exclusively –

11. James Ferguson (1994). This is also a point debated by Foucault in his analysis of 'disciplinary power' (1979).

12. The link between power and knowledge is of course famously developed and explored by Michel Foucault. The more radical connection, on which the present discussion draws heavily, is made by S. Barry Barnes (1988), based on his work in the sociology of knowledge. It is perhaps important to stress that this school rejects the distinction between knowledge and belief, regarding both true and false 'knowledge' as of equal sociological interest.

13. Ferguson (1994: 272).

14. Inherent in this approach is a rejection of the structure / agency dichotomy which underpins both individualist and functionalist analyses, in favour of an interactionist emphasis which takes social relations and the collectivity as its subject. Cf. Barnes (1995, 1988).

or even primarily – to government policy. At this point, the significance of an emphasis on political *culture* should be becoming clear: if power is intimately connected with patterns of knowledge, belief and convention, it is intimately connected with patterns of culture.

1.2.2 'Political culture' in Ethiopia

A number of general observations concerning some of the pervasive traits of the 'political culture' dominant in much of the country may provide a background for the subsequent discussion.¹⁵

Hoben has suggested that

[i]t is a fundamental postulate of Amhara culture [...] that social order, which is good, can be created and maintained only through hierarchical, legitimate control deriving ultimately from God. (1970).

In other words, 'Abyssinian'¹⁶ political culture emphasises a strict hierarchical understanding of society, where each member's socio-political position and status is clearly defined and understood. Social and political interaction and behaviour are guided by an elaborate set of norms and rules, which establish socio-political order on the basis of a rigid system of deference and sanction. This is not to say that all Ethiopian cultures can be compared to the Amhara tradition. Levine, for instance, in a much-cited and much-criticised account, asserts that

The Oromo are in many ways the antithesis of the Amhara. [...] Where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic. (1974:128).¹⁷

However, since the control of the Ethiopian state has historically been associated with the Abyssinian, or Amhara/Tigrayan, socio-political tradition, it may be argued that it provides the context for the formation of the dominant trends in the 'political culture' of contemporary Ethiopia.

15. This brief review cannot but caricature the diversity and vitality of Ethiopian socio-political culture. Readers are encouraged to look, for more nuance, at such work as Poluha (2002) (forthcoming); Freeman & Pankhurst (2001); Donham & James (2002[1986]); James et al. (eds) (2002); Kurimoto & Simonse (eds) (1998); Fukui & Markakis (eds.) (1994); Baxter et al. (eds) (1996); amongst many others.

16. Referring to the historically dominant Orthodox Christian highland area where the ge'ez language family (Amharic and Tigrigna) is in use.

17. It is worth noting that Levine's work (1974, 1965) has elicited strong criticism from the time of its publication, and remains highly controversial, particularly amongst Oromo nationalist circles, not least because of the kind of generalisation cited. Alternative sources for Oromo socio-political culture would include Mohammed Hassan (1994[1990]), and various of the contributors to Baxter et al. (eds) (1996), particularly Bassi.

Ideas about, and norms of political culture and behaviour (i.e. that system of knowledge which, we asserted above, itself ‘constitutes’ the distribution of power) are transmitted to new generations first and foremost through the general pattern of socialisation. As such, a child receives his/her first impression of political behaviour, and all other social institutions, through observations, experiences, teaching and sanction at home, based on the interaction among family members and between family members and the outside world. Levine’s characterisation of the Amhara household is that it “is less a family unit than it is a vertically ordered set of status-roles” (1974:123). The elaborate set of rules guiding social conduct between family members, and within the community at large, ensures that everyone, from an early age, knows their place in the hierarchy with respect to one another and is expected to show the appropriate degree of deference¹⁸. Thus, for instance, interaction continually reaffirms how men are superior to women, and elders to those younger. Moreover, religious or political office gives added authority, whereas members of certain despised groups (craftsmen, potters, tanners, hunters) are classified as inferior. A system of social classification along these lines continues to be widely reproduced, imbuing new generations with cultural notions that people are *not* equal and the world is *not* egalitarian. Individuals are ranked according to a set of criteria which invests some people with greater ‘value’ than others – both in social and political terms – and determines, moreover, that one should always be subservient to any individual regarded as superior to oneself.

The pattern of social interaction in Ethiopia hence sustains a strictly hierarchical stratification of society, where one is constrained, by a largely invisible but rigid system of collective sanctions, to obey the ‘orders from above’ (*yebalal akal*). This applies whether the orders are a fatherly command to assist in the chores of the household, or an instruction from the *kebele* to join in a political meeting. We may thus also say that the traditional socio-political framework of highland Ethiopia defines both the relevant *political arenas* of interaction, and also the specific *gate-keepers* who control access to these arenas, at different levels. In the political arena of the household, the male household head is the gate-keeper, and administers the political capital of the household. Women are commonly quiescent in discussions outside the household, since the prevalent social norm defines that the household is controlled and represented by the male household head, and that women are represented in public arenas by

18. For an extremely critical study of Amhara tradition in these respects, see the controversial analysis of Molvaer (1995).

their husbands. At the level of the village community, the relevant gate-keepers may be identified as the local *kebele* administrators.

A deeper understanding of the 'political culture' of Ethiopia suggests how the distribution of power in the country must be viewed as both 'function and constitutive feature of the interaction of a social collective'. Focusing on the position of individuals and groups of actors by means of their relations with others allows one to understand the continuing marginalisation of, for instance, women and minorities. Since the state and other institutions should be viewed as relay points of power and thus as facilitating the enhancement and multiplication of power relations, the position of individuals or groups disassociated from these institutions from the start is thereby the more likely to remain in powerlessness.

On the kind of analysis advocated, then, the social and cultural (and indeed economic) norms and institutions persisting between the groups in question must be understood as much more than the 'context' within which their political life develops. These institutions form part of the system of knowledge, which constitutes (which *is*) the pattern of distribution of 'social power'. If power relations are to be democratised and transformed, these transformations must take place at every level and in every sphere of such social relations. Similarly, the corollary of this position is that there is a powerful weight of inertia in the pre-existing social and cultural arrangements, which counteracts the attempts of any force (be it ruling or opposition party, or civil society group) committed to their reform. It seems essential to recognise that – whatever the aspirations of the government – fundamental socio-political dynamics and norms in Ethiopia, as they currently operate, favour not democratisation, but the perpetuation of hierarchy and authoritarianism at many levels of interaction.

In Ethiopian tradition and in the Amharic language (which remains the language of state at the federal and some regional levels) no distinction is made between 'state' and 'government', both being referred to as *mengist*. Since the *kebele* administrators are government representatives, they are also vested with the authority of the state/government, the prime power-holder in highland Ethiopian tradition (with the exception of God). Traditionally, local administrators control the public political arena at the village level, and, as a result of prevailing social institutions, their authority is seldom publicly questioned by the people¹⁹. Moreover, in a similar manner, powerful norms mean that *kebele* administrators themselves seldom question the orders they receive 'from above' to implement in their localities. 'As long as one says nothing and makes no remarks, neither can

19. See the fascinating description by Eva Poluha (2003) on the continuity of understanding of power at the grassroots over three Ethiopian regimes.

one be punished for one's actions' is a postulate traditionally followed equally by peasants, administrators and low/middle level politicians in Ethiopia. This is a situation which has presents powerful challenges to initiatives for democratisation.

The hierarchical expression of political culture creates various mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. The gate-keepers also, to a certain degree, define the socio-political agenda for discourse, be that within the household/family/clan or within the village/local community. Most of Ethiopia's rural citizens do not imagine that they should debate and select from alternative means of asserting control over their own lives. Nor do they consider it appropriate that their peers should do so, let alone those they regard as superior or inferior. Rather, the major source of political discourse continues to be the central government. In this kind of socio-political context there is little realistic alternative to the communication of political programmes from the top-down, from centre to periphery (whatever the aspirations to the contrary of those involved). Thus, it is the political agenda of the EPRDF which dominates, communicated through its control of the state mass media (notably radio), and the state administrative structures. It would require a transformation of political culture for government officials to imagine that constituents can be 'relied upon' to choose between alternative political visions. Similarly, attempts from opposition parties or other civil society actors to define an agenda for discourse are actively counteracted by the organs of state and government, and vice versa. The result (and perpetuating cause) of this exclusionary culture is the polarisation of public political debate. The government and opposition do not enter into public dialogue on issues and ideology, but tend each to be entrenched in their own inwardly-informed political positions, from which they communicate *against* each other, rather than *with* each other.

The outcome of such polarisation can be expected to be the channelling of political opposition through other means than peaceful statements and rallies. 'Since our opinions are not heard or considered through political debate, let us talk with the barrel of the gun' has been a political tradition in Ethiopia. It would be surprising if this tradition were quickly reversed²⁰. As the following sections suggests, the potential for violent political conflict has been not only driven by exclusionary political culture, but also fed by the long-standing predominance of the Ethiopian state in the control of material resources of all kinds.

20. A number of the armed resistance movements in the country, of which the Oromo Liberation Front is the most prominent, are discussed below.

Popular practice: power in the village and community

CHAPTER 2

This section, then, traces a number of aspects of patterns of interaction at the level of the community, which represent a range of obstacles and opportunities to democratisation initiatives.

2.1 'Traditional' patterns of interaction

In Ethiopia, with over eighty-five separately categorised ethnic communities, and a range of forms of livelihood (from sedentary agriculturalists to nomadic pastoralists, from urban environments to rural hinterland), power relations are manifested at the grassroots in endless ways.

2.1.1 Customary democratic practices

The introductory remarks on political culture, above, stress hierarchy and segmentation. However, it is also true that many of the ethnic groups of Ethiopia share elements of what can be regarded as customary practices of 'democracy'; that is, practices which stress broad-based, consociational, or inclusive approaches to power sharing. One of the best known and researched of traditional systems of governance in Ethiopia is the so-called *Gada* system of the Oromo. *Gada* is essentially a social order of age sets, according to which every male Oromo goes through a series of cycles, usually of eight years, which assign his status, his role in the division of labour in the predominantly pastoral areas of Oromo society (notably Borana). Each age group has its distinct tasks and responsibilities, where the younger male members of the community take care of the cattle, a second group has the responsibility to protect the community, while the leadership is in the hands of the fifth group. Every eight years, in a "*luo*" ceremony, men are collectively promoted to the next age cycle, while the

boys born during the previous eight years are ceremonially promoted to the first age cycle. Each age group chooses its leaders by election. Though certain families had in practice a claim on leadership positions, the entire (male) group was in a position to choose those it had trust in, and to get rid of a leader who did not fulfil its expectations. Those who had to hand over leadership to the incoming *luo* group of new leaders were retired into the status of respected elders. Women are excluded from the *gada*, as are slaves and minorities: an abrupt reminder of the limitations of its democratic credentials. It is clear that the *gada* system, even when its operation was widespread and intact, was far from an ideal democracy. Nevertheless, nationalists amongst the Oromo, including the Oromo Liberation Front, OLF, have long considered it a symbolic base on which to build a modern democratic political order that Oromos would cherish and relate to as indigenous. It has thus gained in potential political significance²¹.

There are other customary practices in Ethiopia with rich inclusive, power-sharing, or 'democratic' traditions. The *Xeer* of the Somali (Lewis 1961), the *Seera* of the Sidamo, the Gurage and the Kambata (Bahru Zewde & Pausewang (eds) (2003)), and the council of elders in many regions (Poluha 1995), all constitute institutions which arbitrate in disputes. They contribute to mechanisms which can re-establish peace and a balance in which all parties can be accommodated. Studies show that even the much maligned *rist/risti* system of land-tenure amongst Amhara and Tigrayan societies had its intrinsically democratic roots. It was abused in the conquest of the Ethiopian South, to reduce indigenous populations to tenancy, and is thus discredited among many Oromo and other southern groups. Yet the *rist* system, in its original spirit, made every member of the community co-responsible for providing the means for feeding themselves, their families, and those of all members. Everyone had a right to access to land and, in case of incapacity to work, to food, assistance, and solidarity. As population increased and the demands of the nobility on the peasantry grew, land became scarce, and *rist* turned more and more into a fight for access to land. When *rist* was exported to the South during the time of Menelik II's expansion, it became a mechanism for the exploitation of southern peasants, and expropriation of their land by new (assimilated) Abyssinian landlords.²²

In sum, then, the cultures encompassed within Ethiopia's borders are extremely rich, complex and varied in the range of their practices and tra-

21. Although see also Bassi (1996), on the shortcomings of the *gada* system as a viable political arrangement.

22. This section builds on Pausewang et al. (2002). See Markakis and Nega Ayele (1986) for a full discussion.

ditions of authority and power, so that any kind of generalisation is difficult. The oral and articulate cultures of the Somali and Afar, have an extreme sensitivity towards kinship and clanship in organisational models (and not confined territory/spaces); the open and plural cultures of the south, compare with the more closed, inward-looking and territorially-based organisational features of the highland cultures of Amhara and Tigray. The 'Abyssinian' highland, as discussed above, is known for its strict hierarchical order, where social conduct is defined and delimited by an individual's rank (according to kinship, age, sex, social/material resources, religion, etc.). The cultural background and upbringing of Ethiopia's citizens fundamentally influences their way of thinking about 'modern' concepts such as 'democracy'. This remains an under-researched area of political analysis.

2.1.2 Customary power-holders

In many of Ethiopia's rural areas traditions and norms apparently little changed over centuries still guide much social interaction. Fully to understand power-relations at the local level, factors such as religious office, traditional authority, age, and gender need to be taken into account. Many of these factors often run counter to the 'democratic' tendencies noted above.

In rural highland Ethiopia, several local associations, established and run by the villagers themselves, have been instruments to organise socio-economic collaboration and mutual assistance among villagers (Poluha, 2003). We find, for instance, the almost ubiquitous *senbete*, a religious association to take care of church affairs; *idir*, which is a burial network for mutual support during times of death/funerals; *equub*, a credit and savings collective; and *mahaber*, which binds together smaller groups of villagers to celebrate a common guardian saint, but which also serves as a socio-economic welfare network. The leadership of these organisations is selected by and among the villagers themselves, normally bringing existing peer groups together for practical purposes. As such they tend to be instruments less of social transformation than of reconstitution of the – often iniquitous – *status quo*.

In particular, religious leaders, Christians, Muslims and traditional believers, have power to define appropriate social behaviour and conduct, a capacity that, for instance, severely limits the social space of women in Ethiopia. In Orthodox Ethiopia (the highland areas of Amhara and Tigray in particular), the village priests are influential small-scale power brokers. In every village, no matter how small, there are several priests and deacons of the Orthodox Church. They ensure that the norms and

rules of the church are followed, a set of precepts that, *inter alia*, puts restrictions on when farmers can work in their fields (in order to uphold the prohibition of physical labour on saints days), and confines women to narrowly defined gender roles. In the Muslim communities of the lowlands, and highland pockets, the Imams and religious leaders of Islam also wield strong influence over appropriate social behaviour. Afar and Somali communities, in particular, have strong and elaborate customary codes, which work in parallel with sharia and state law. In the pastoral-nomadic areas of Afar and Somali, the clan leaders hold almost total authority over social and political affairs on behalf of their clan members.

All across Ethiopia, elder age is accorded a high socio-political value in the local community. *Shimagile* (elder) councils are frequently used to settle local disputes (over land or grazing rights, for instance)²³, and it is always the elder men who are first heard in community meetings. Elders serve in both formal and informal capacities, and their decisions are usually consensus-based.²⁴ In some Ethiopian communities, as for instance among Borana Oromo, particular age groups have traditionally defined roles in society in relation to administration, protection, and arbitration.²⁵ Although the institution of elders often plays a positive role in mediating power relations at the local level, one must keep in mind that the groups of elders are not in themselves representative of the local community as a whole. Further, not all elders achieve status as respected *shimagile*; women are basically excluded, as are also elders from despised minorities (crafters, tanners, hunters, etc.).

Another group of individuals that exerts power at the local level is traditional healers and spirit mediums. In many of the local communities there are a number of spirit cults consulted by the people in order to identify remedies for health problems, for resource management, and even regarding more politically-oriented issues. The spirit mediums are individuals from various backgrounds, and they are highly respected and/or feared in the local communities because of their perceived spiritual powers.²⁶

23. The Ministry of Federal Affairs has increasingly drawn on councils of elders in conflict resolution between Afar and Issa Somali, for instance. Particularly in the Somali NRS, elders' councils occupy a position of importance vis-à-vis the state.

24. On elders, see Poluha (1995) and Birhanue (1998).

25. On the analysis of age system communities, see Kurimoto and Simonse (1998).

26. On the practice of spirit cults in highland Ethiopia see Aspen (2001).

2.2 The experience of state power at the local level

Since the socialist revolution of 1975, one may say that two parallel systems of organisation have been operating at the village level (Poluha, 2003). One is made up of the different locally organised and (often) locally controlled associations, whose activities are directed towards social and religious affairs²⁷. The other system is that of the state, namely the *wereda*, *kebele* and *nus-kebele* (sub-kebele) committees, assemblies, and associations, along with other state or state-initiated organisations. These include: the local offices of government bureaux, encompassing development and extension agents, health workers and tax collectors; local social court judges and officers, police and militiamen; as well as the micro-level organisation of the population into *mengistawi budin* and *lema'at budin*²⁸. During the 1990s, state structures have been closely accompanied in the core EPRDF-administered areas by the less visible party structure of cadres, officers, and local cells. The objectives of the state/party sector structures have been to ensure the implementation of government laws, policies, and programmes (including those intended to bring about socio-economic development), and to see that government taxes and other dues are collected²⁹. Poluha observes that the people categorise these two types of institutions/structures as 'private' (*yegil*) and 'governmental' (*yemengist*), respectively.

2.2.1 The wide influence of the kebele/wereda structure

The policies and work of the *wereda* (district) and *kebele* (neighbourhood) administrations have a great impact on the everyday lives of Ethiopians. As is the case in many countries where state structures are poorly emancipated from society³⁰, the administrative and political structures in

27. Although in a number of instances of religious networks, local control is not always evident.

28. *Mengistawi budin* are the so-called 'government groups', which at the level of 50 households, represented the lowest level of the state. They were led by unpaid elected representatives, and dealt with highly localised matters below the level of the *kebele* or sub-*kebele*. *Lema'at budin* are the so-called 'development teams' of 10–15 households which have been organised as the vehicles for implementing employment generation and other development schemes. Although it had been planned to establish both structures throughout settled agricultural areas, their formation was strongest in Tigray and Amhara NRSS. Research in 2002 suggests that they have become less prominent, or have been abandoned, in the context of an ongoing policy move away from collectivised approaches to development, in favour of emphasis on individual farmers.

29. A point of concern is the frequent conflation of the role of tax collection with that of the agricultural development agent; even where extension agents are not explicitly involved in tax collection, they are often associated with pressure for repayment of credit loans related to the extension packages, and these involvements, usually perceived as repressive and negative, do little to enhance their capacity to play a positive part in animating communities for social change.

30. Cf. for a fuller discussion, Chabal and Daloz (1999).

Ethiopia overlap and interweave in such a way that, in practice, the local administrative units (*kebele*, *wereda* and *zone* levels) are infrequently politically neutral or independent. Rather, they have tended to work in ways which often make them barely distinguishable in practice from the ruling party itself³¹. There is evidence that the local administration is normally conceptualised by the villagers as a fusion of both state and party authority.³² This issue is discussed in greater depth below.

The administrative structure of *wereda* and *kebele* (*baito* and *tabia* in Tigrigna) councils was first developed during the Dergue regime, with the primary objective of implementing land reform in the mid-1970s, as the cornerstone of the socialist revolution throughout the rural areas. Later, however, the objectives entrusted to these councils were broadened, and administrative, political and defence tasks were added to the remit of what has ever since been known as the *kebele* system. For the authoritarian Dergue government, the *kebeles* soon developed an important two-fold capacity. On the one hand, they worked as the extended arm of the central government in communicating the Marxist ideology and the political orders of the day. On the other, they operated as a tool of intelligence, since the local administrators worked as informers and spies, keeping the grassroots under surveillance and reporting any ‘anti-revolutionary’ and ‘anti-government’ activities back to the party and intelligence services. In this manner, the *kebele* system became an effective and efficient means for the state to keep a tight control of their citizens and to clamp down on any opposition activities.³³

People remain well aware of the comprehensive powers of these administrative bodies and are conscious of the fact that they need to maintain good relations with officials. In principle each *wereda* has about one hundred thousand inhabitants³⁴. Every *kebele* is allowed to elect three

31. Extensive fieldwork undertaken in 1998/9, for instance, demonstrated that *kebele* and *wereda* executive councils would often conduct meetings on Saturdays which would deal first with the governmental business of the *kebele* or *wereda*, before adjourning to the business of the party. It was widely reported, for instance, that, whilst individuals who were not party members but were held in esteem by their communities were encouraged to stand for election, they were frequently also encouraged thereafter to become party members. Whether this took place before or after their election, the result was that few administrators remained outside the party system for long. (Interviews, Amhara NRS and SNNPRS, May and October/November 1999).

32. Amharic and Tigrigna languages have only one term to describe both ‘state’ and ‘government’, in Amharic: *mengist*.

33. For a closer description on how the administrative system was organised during the Dergue see Clapham (1988), Dessalegn Rahmato (1984) and Andargachew Tirunch (1993). Andargachew Tirunch, in particular, describes the political working of the *kebele* system in detail: ‘An outstanding example of their political function was the role they played in harassing, detaining and eliminating members of the various political organisations during the red terror’ (1993:261).

34. Although it is reported that in practice they range in size from 6,000 inhabitants in very sparsely populated areas of the south-west periphery, up to nearly half a million population.

members for the *wereda* council. Each *kebele* has on average five hundred households. In a standard size *kebele*, the number of members in the *kebele* council is thirty, but if the number of inhabitants exceeds five thousand, the council can have up to fifty members.³⁵ The *kebele/wereda* bureaucracy is a significant politico-administrative force at the local level, exerting widespread power over local inhabitants often with extensive *de facto* impunity. The *wereda* as the basic administrative entity of every regional state in the country has its own administrative apparatus, police and security force, judges and prosecutors and increasingly, power and resources to prepare and determine economic and social plans in the area under its authority. The *kebele* is generally concerned with the implementation of plans and policies determined by the *wereda*, and has its own social court elected by the *kebele* council.

Until recently the administration at all levels (regional government, zone, *wereda*, and *kebele*) was carried out by an executive committee composed of seven individuals (occasionally five or nine, according to capacity or need) themselves elected from the relevant elected council at that level³⁶. At the lower levels only a maximum of three of these council members were salaried, and often none of the *kebele* committees received remuneration. Although most of the council members were unpaid, membership gave influence in matters that are highly influential for the majority of citizens. In a country with a high level of unemployment, membership in one of the councils could be a way of securing an income, if not directly, then indirectly. Pausewang *et al.* (2003) report that all Ethiopians who are dependent on support or approval from the state have to get in touch with officials in these institutions. First and foremost, people are dealing with the *kebele* officials. Those who want health services, tap-water and electricity, or who are applying for a job in the public sector, need a letter from the *kebele* to the concerned authorities, showing that they are citizens entitled to services or employment. The *kebele* owns houses, which are rented out to residents. *Kebele* officials hand out identity cards, which are a precondition for every Ethiopian to be able to move around freely and get access to all kinds of services. Many people are also directly involved in community work and local politics through these administrations. As one informant phrased it:

35. During the 2001 *kebele* election, each *kebele* was divided into three to five zones, where each zone elected ten members to the *kebele* council. In Addis Ababa, there are twenty-eight *wereda* with five to eighteen *kebele* in each.

36. This system of course only applied to the ethnic zones of the SNNPRs that have an elected council: in other regional zonal administrators were political appointments of the regional government.

“The house belongs to the kebele. If I need to repair it, I need to get the approval from the kebele. If I get sick, I have to pass through the kebele to the hospital. If my sons and daughters are looking for a job, they have to go to the kebele first. Unless and otherwise we follow the orders of the kebele we have no services.” (Pausewang et al. 2003).

The workings of the *kebele/wereda* judiciary at the local level have been widely problematic. The Norwegian research team to follow the election processes of 2000 and 2001 reported that in one rural area people were convinced that there were two grounds on which someone could be imprisoned: by court decision or by administrative decision. The police executed both, and both were, in popular opinion, legal and beyond challenge. Even officials in one zone confirmed this understanding and had no qualms about its implementation.³⁷ Lack of awareness of the principles of judicial independence, among both the administrators themselves and the people, creates severe obstacles to its establishment at the grass-roots. Local experience of electoral practice is discussed below, in the chapter on the political party system.

2.2.2 Implications and dynamics of local government reform

The system which had resulted in this unsatisfactory and largely uncontrolled situation was radically revised last November, 2001, following changes introduced as a result of the EPRDF renewal or ‘tehadso’ movement. Instead of an Executive Council, the administration of Regional Governments, Zonal governments (in the SNNP/NRS), weredas and *kebeles* is now overseen by a ‘cabinet’, which includes a chairman and vice chairman elected from the wider elected council (or parliament), together with the Bureau, Department, or Office heads (at region, *wereda*, and *kebele* levels respectively) of the new key co-ordination Ministries: capacity building, rural development, infrastructure development, finance, economic development and planning, and information. Judicial, security, and administrative oversight responsibilities are often also overseen by a member of the cabinet.

It remains to be seen whether *wereda* and *kebele* administration can be ‘cleaned up’ to any appreciable degree by these means. Any such change would have to militate against the weight of decades of abusive tradition, built on top of centuries of moribund and hierarchical local administration in the imperial period. What is already remarkable is the dramatic increase in educational qualification and capacity of *wereda* and *kebele* cab-

37. Reported by Pausewang et al. 2002.

inet members throughout the country, as compared with the earlier period of the 1990s. Whilst in 1994/5 it was common to find *wereda* administrators who had only 6th or 7th grade education, now cabinet members who do not have degrees or diplomas are the exception³⁸.

Whilst this transformation of local government capacity³⁹ provides grounds for certain optimism regarding the future of local socio-economic development in Ethiopia, the dramatic building of capacity has occurred in circumstances which have also fostered its problematic side. The government has created a class of local administrators and civil servants who have benefited enormously from educational and administrative opportunities provided from above by the state/party/government. In addition to education, the government has recently provided markedly increased local government salaries⁴⁰. The loyalty and concern of administrators and civil servants is, unsurprisingly, focussed sharply upwards towards the system which has benefited them, rather than downwards in the public service of their constituents, who may often seem largely irrelevant to their rise to influence. This situation is a further reflection of the hierarchical social and cultural context within which these developments are taking place.

The changes also have potentially significant ramifications in terms of the bureaucratisation of local government in Ethiopia, in two ways. Firstly, they will bring about the closer incorporation of government ministry activities (and budgets) under the purview of the local administration⁴¹. They are thus designed to locate and equip *wereda* cabinets to be in a position to control, allocate, and manage the block grants, which were expected to be transferred directly to them from regional government in the financial year commencing July 2002. Secondly, the move reduces to only two the number of the executive cabinet members at each level who are subject to election from the membership of the council/parliament. Remaining members can apparently be assigned, not elected. Of note, there-

38. Interviews in Yirgalem town in June 2002 indicated that of the *wereda* cabinet of 7 only one had education only to ESLC: the others included 3 BA holders (from the civil service college), and several with diplomas either completed (Addis Ababa University, AAU) or in process. There were however no women in the cabinet, and only 7 women in a *wereda* parliament of 252 people (elected three from each of 84 *kebeles* in this large *wereda*)

39. To which the Ethiopian Civil Service College has provided the key.

40. According to interviews, June 2002: Zonal administrator: 2,600 EB per month; *wereda* administrator: 1,500; *wereda* cabinet members 1,150; *kebele* chairman are also now expected to be paid for the first time.

41. It was an idiosyncrasy of the previous arrangement, for instance, that Executive council members at *wereda* and *kebele* levels were unable to answer questions about *wereda* and *kebele* level budgets beyond the extremely small proportion which was allocated to run the administrative office and its resources. The wider perspective was available within each ministry at that level; whilst this information was technically shared with – and subject to the authority of – the executive council, this was rarely the case, and the authority rarely exercised.

fore, is the quiet introduction of an associated shift of policy, which will, in principle, allow the appointment to these positions of candidates other than those whose ethnic background is indigenous to the administrative unit in question. In marginal areas of the south, for instance, only the chair and vice-chair of the cabinet need be elected from the area, the rationale being that a much wider pool of educated people will be available for recruitment to the rest of the cabinet positions⁴². Meanwhile, whilst the *kebele* and *wereda* parliaments continue to meet only for four or five days quarterly, their nominal independence of the executive has been extended by the establishment of the office of speaker and deputy speaker (*af gubaye*) down to *kebele* level⁴³.

2.3 Implications and trends

2.3.1 At the limits of participation under federalism

Ethiopia, in common with most other countries, faces a serious challenge in order incorporate broader shares of its population into decision-making processes. The current Ethiopian context can be considered on two levels. At a general level, the ethnic federal system has radically improved the possibility for people to express their local ethnic identity and to feel 'at home' within the newly defined ethnic administrative constituencies. This new system has also opened up the possibility for all Ethiopians to be recruited into the administrative system, since Amharic language and education is no longer a prerequisite for official employment. Since the local state, zone, and *wereda* officials and bureaucrats are predominantly from the area in which they reside and work, most Ethiopians no longer have to speak Amharic to engage in local affairs, which, for many, is a great relief, and transformative of their access to the state. In this sense, ethnic federalism has dramatically broadened the access to the state enjoyed by Ethiopia's multiple populations.

42. Quite what the impact of this major reversal of policy will be in ethnically mixed areas remains to be seen. In Bench-Maji zone, for instance, the zonal executive committee at Mizan Teferi was delicately balanced to incorporate members from each of the five major groups in the zone: Bench, 3; Sheko 2; Me'enit, 2; Dizi 2; Surma 1 (interviews, Mizan Teferi, October 1999). Even this careful balancing act seems to have been insufficient to satisfy the demands of the minority Majengir community, whose violently pursued grievances initiated bloody conflict in neighbouring Sheka zone, in 1991, 1993, and most recently in April/May 2002.

43. It is interesting that a *wereda* speaker interviewed in SNNPRS in 2002 explained his role in terms reminiscent of that of the prospective human rights commission: to bring to the attention of parliament, and deal with and resolve popular complaints of abuse of power by the executive. It will be interesting to monitor the development of this new position at different levels, to trace whether and how this kind of promise is fulfilled; and to see whether the parliament, which elects only the cabinet chair and vice chair, will be in a position to exercise power of recall over other members of the cabinet.

On the other hand, looking at the individual rather than the collective level, in terms of social strata rather than ethnic groups, the current situation has perhaps not changed dramatically for the absolute majority of the population, and challenges remain. It can be argued that a new local elite has emerged which has taken over the positions and benefits previously held by an Amhara (or Amharicised) ruling class.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, with an apparent decline in certain economic indicators, and conflict in a number of areas, it is arguable that some pastoralists and peasants, especially women and those from the peripheries, may not have gained that much in practice. The return of widespread food insecurity in 2002/2003 again raises questions about the capacity of large numbers of the population to embrace or engage in 'democratisation' initiatives whilst confronted not only with poverty, but with daily crises of survival. Despite significant changes *de iure*, and extensive processes of constitutional 'consultation', *de facto* and on a day to day basis the 'broad masses' have still been little involved in influencing and participating in the political process, whether at the local, regional or national level. Among this large sector of relatively disempowered people, there are groups who are yet more marginalised. These are, in particular, women and certain minority groups. There *may* also be ways in which the ethnic federal system itself actually exacerbates obstacles to participation for individuals with specific backgrounds⁴⁵.

2.3.1.1 Women

The roles and relations of women in Ethiopia are predominantly bound by tradition, although there is great variation across the various ethnic and socio-economic groups. Still, to a large degree, marriage and motherhood determine women's relationship to work, property and other matters of public importance, and define their status as political beings in society (see Pankhurst (1992) and Berhane-Selassie (1991)). Women's lives are embedded in their social, economic and religious contexts, so that many of the factors that disadvantage women are problems of poverty and underdevelopment, shared by their communities and the country as a whole.

44. The analysis and identification of the Ethiopian ruling elite, both historically and in modern times, warrants a separate study. However, one should be aware of that although many speak of the 'Amhara' as the historical ruling class in Ethiopia, this is a simplification which requires qualification. A distinction needs to be drawn between the educated elite of Amharic-speaking Orthodox Christians, often from Shoa, but who intermarried irrespectively of ethnic affiliation; and the people who speak Amharic as their mother tongue, the majority of whom are poor peasants, and had no stake in state power.

45. The extent to which the introduction of ethnic federalism may have 'ethnified' politics in Ethiopia, and its involvement in inflaming ethnic conflict is a matter on which the authors of this report have somewhat differing perspectives. A detailed analysis lies outside the scope of this paper. The discussion here builds on Tronvoll (2000). Cf. also Freeman & Pankhurst (2001).

The high level of poverty across Ethiopian communities bears particularly hard on Ethiopian women, resulting in a huge burden of domestic chores. In particular the three tasks of grinding grain, preparing food, and fetching water and fuel-wood are extremely time-consuming and physically demanding. Fetching water and fuel usually entails hours of walking daily. In this context, women's problems can no longer be dismissed as part of the socio-economic context only. Poverty-related problems are also compounded by socio-cultural factors and customary norms which consign women to a very low socio-political status compared with men. This 'double oppression,' explains Hammond, is the hardest to eradicate because it has become entrenched as part of 'culture' and even internalised as a sense of inferiority by the women themselves.⁴⁶

A recent study conducted on harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia estimates that about 73% of the female population have undergone one form or other of female genital mutilation, FGM, another 90%,⁴⁷ and that the majority of ethnic groups inflict variations on this custom upon their female members. The child's age at the time of operation varies according to the type of operation and the ethnic group, but generally the operation is performed before the girls reach puberty.⁴⁸ Among the Amhara, the excision generally takes place on the seventh day after birth, while among other groups the operation is commonly undertaken between the age of four and 8–10 years. There are reports, however, that the operations may also be carried out in adolescence or even at the time of marriage. Traditionally, the Afar and Somali practice infibulation, while the highland groups undertake clitoridectomy, and labial piercing. There is also a distinction based on social class, and a recent study indicates that female circumcision is more common in poor sections of Addis Ababa than in wealthier residential areas (Rye 2002).

More recent studies of women suggest that some may be affected negatively by the new ethnic federal system introduced in Ethiopia. The upsurge of ethnic consciousness after the introduction of the federal system may have led to the revival of certain traditional practices that discriminate against women, since these practices are seen as ethnic boundary markers by political or ethnic 'entrepreneurs'. Therefore, even though the

46. "Women in Ethiopia: The Struggle for Liberation and Development", lecture presented by Jenny Hammond at Middlesex university, March 1999.

47. The first figure is from a survey conducted by the Inter African Committee. The statistics are weak on this issue. According to a study from 1995 by the National Committee on Traditional Practice in Ethiopia, about 90 % of Ethiopian women are believed to undergo one of the three forms of mutilation (clitoridectomy, excision and infibulation).

48. See the study by Rye, S., *Men, women and female circumcision in a poor community in Addis Ababa*, Ethiopia, PhD dissertation, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, Oslo, 2002.

Ethiopian federal state discourages such practices, the regional states or ethnic groups may tacitly approve or allow them to be carried out. Tsehai Berhane-Selassie notes that among the particularly harmful practices which have re-appeared are the abduction or kidnapping of brides and the reinstitution of forced marriage.⁴⁹ Other studies suggest that female circumcision, or female genital mutilation, FGM, is also often employed as an ethnic boundary marker.

2.3.1.2 Occupational Minorities

Minorities here refers to marginalised and despised occupational groups within ethnic groups. In other words, given current constitutional arrangements, ethnic groups as such should no longer be regarded as minorities, in the socio-political senses of the term. Throughout Ethiopia one finds minority groups, traditionally called 'hunter groups' or 'occupational castes' (like smiths, potters, and tanners). The minority groups are usually identified as endogamous groups of hereditary occupational specialists within the Ethiopian Cushitic and Semitic-speaking areas. They are often partly assimilated by the dominant group in the area in which they live and whose language they speak. Traditionally, these groups had a serf-like status among the dominant people: they could be purchased and sold, had few political rights in the local community, no land rights, and could not participate in public meetings. Since some are considered as impure and culturally 'polluting', there are very often restrictions on social interaction between members from the minority group and the dominant group. The minorities are found in all regions, as for instance, the *Watta* among the Oromo, the *Weyto* among the Amhara, the *Fuga* among the Gurage, the *Manjo* among the Kaffa, the *Kwegu* among the Mursi/Bodi, the *Hadicho* among the Sidama, and the *Mijan* and *Yibir* among the Somali.⁵⁰

These minorities are still considered to be the most stigmatised and discriminated groups in Ethiopia, and are found at the bottom of the social and economic strata of their society. In practice, many of them still do not have land or dwelling rights, and can be expelled at any time from their living areas (Abebe 2001). Findings of a recent study made on twelve marginalised minority groups in south-western Ethiopia show (based on perceptions of ranking shared by farmers and the marginal group themselves) that the 'hunting' groups rank lowest. This means, *inter alia*, that there is more or less no intermarriage between these groups and the dom-

49. Cf. Berhane-Selassie, T., 'Women's Rights in the Militarized Ethiopian Society', *Ethiopian Register*, May 1998, p. 31.

50. On these minorities, see Freeman & Pankhurst (2001), Levine (1974), Pankhurst (1999), and Tibebe (1995).

inant communities, and they are generally excluded from the socio-political arena of the local community (Pankhurst 1999).

Amongst the objectives of the new ethnic federal system introduced by the EPRDF, was the enhancement of the rights of minorities and marginalised groups. Although some of the minorities have been recognised as distinct groups in the formal population census, in some instances at the local level the minorities have been even more marginalised than before due to the ethnic federal system. Since federalism, in practice, takes account of groups defined primarily by language, the minorities, who speak the language of the dominant group, are subsumed under the political representation of their 'host' community. Consequently, since the dominant group consider the minority representatives as polluting and impure, they are not included in the political representative system, or their voices are not heard in the local administrative set-up.⁵¹

Only some few of these groups, as the Hadicho among the Sidama, have managed to organise themselves in order to run in local elections, or to be represented in the local administrative structure (Solberg 2000). Meanwhile, for instance, repeated petitions by the Manja community in Kaffa zone for separate and constitutionally secured representation at zonal level, have fallen on deaf ears. Manja, who live mixed amongst other ethnic communities are never likely to be in a position to secure elected representation by means of the current 'first past the post' system⁵². This frustration spilled over into a further round of unrest and conflict in the zone in early 2002. It seems vital that development strategies target these marginalised minorities, as means of building peace and participation.

2.3.1.3 *'Peripheral' Regions*

The four regional states of Afar, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella continue to be regarded, to some extent, as marginalised and 'emergent' in view of their relatively low levels of political capacity, stability and influence, economic resources, physical infrastructure, and social, health and educational facilities. The acute historical marginalisation of these four regions, as a result of geographical and politico-historical factors, is greatly reduced under a federal arrangement designed to reverse the situation of the past. Nevertheless, acute challenges remain. For instance, in the whole of Afar NRS, there are only three secondary schools.

51. See the study of the Weyto in Amhara regional state by Zerihun Abebe (2001) as an example of this.

52. The constituency majority, or so-called single slate 'plurality-majority' arrangement, contrasts with proportional representation.

Only one percent of the Ethiopian Afar population ever finishes primary school, and only about five percent has access to health care facilities. A 2001 WHO report concludes that in almost every area of health, the Afar were well below the national average: no health outreach service has been offered for three years because of financial constraints and lack of transport, and immunisation against disease was almost nil⁵³. Central to the difficulties faced by the state in tackling the socio-economic problems of Afar, is their pastoral-nomadic lifestyle. Since highland Ethiopia is sedentary, and the country's political elite throughout its modern history has been recruited from this tradition of production, the pastoral-nomadic societies of Ethiopia have gained little in the way of politico-administrative experience. In this context it is unsurprising that the NGO the Pastoralist Communications Initiative identifies the new ethnic federal system itself as placing an added burden on the Afar people, since there is only exceptionally limited regional/local capacity to tackle the enormous problems facing them.⁵⁴ Similar problems are also faced in Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gabella regional states, despite governmental attempts to provide targeted support to each area.

2.3.1.4 *'Ethnic' conflicts and ethnicity under federalism*⁵⁵

Ethiopia was first described by Enrico Cerulli (1956) as 'a museum of peoples', and the coincidence of class and ethnic fissures has long provided the primary nexus of conflict over the Ethiopian state (see discussion below on the State and Government). To this extent, therefore, EPRDF did not introduce ethnicity into Ethiopian politics by means of the federal system, but merely recognised and sought to confront its role as a primary pre-existing focus of conflict. Politicised ethnicity arguably constituted the most important form of the conflict which had torn apart the Ethiopian state for more than 30 years by 1991. On the other hand, there has been a long process of inter-ethnic integration in Ethiopia, such that today a significant proportion of the Ethiopian population, particularly in urban areas, has a mixed ethnic background.⁵⁶ This population complicates the physical demarcation of geographical borders between the various ethnic groups' 'home territories', as does the mixing effect of considerable migration and population movement in many parts of the country.

As a result, the ethnic federal constitution which has sought to neu-

53. See "Ethiopia: Focus on the Afar people", IRIN news, 24 May 2002 (<http://www.irinnews.org>)

54. See "Ethiopia: Focus on the Afar people", IRIN news, 24 May 2002 (<http://www.irinnews.org>)

55. It should be noted that the limited space devoted to this issue in this report does not reflect the seminal importance of political ethnicity in historical and contemporary Ethiopia, a topic which merits a separate study in its own right.

56. This section builds on Tronvoll (2000).

tralise the discrimination historically associated with ethnicity, but which also renders ethnic identity more relevant in any social, political or economic interaction, is regarded by some as a dangerous strait-jacket. It is likely that future urbanisation, industrialisation, growth of the free market economy, and democratisation, as well as increased population mobility, will encourage inter-ethnic integration to continue at an even greater pace. Opponents of the ethnic policy thus argue that cementing ethnicity – even temporarily – as *the* salient political identity-marker will have a negative effect on the political, economic and social development of the country. The perspective of the architects of federalism, meanwhile, is that current constitutional arrangements, so far from ‘cementing’ ethnic relations, will neutralise the legacy of bitterness of past centralisation, and contribute to integration in the longer term.

In its policies, EPRDF has chosen to concentrate on the positive elements of ethnicity: its ability to provide a group of people that shares language and cultural values with a sense of common identity, and collective purpose, advantages which it believes can be usefully harnessed for social, economic, and political development. Opponents argue that ethnicity ‘captured’ within the political structure of the state is inherently conflictual, since ethnically defined groups will necessarily compete with others for scarce resources, namely political power and material and natural resources. The response, in turn, is that politically managed competition under ethnic federalism is surely preferable to the civil war of the previous 30 years. Concern remains, however, that if the relationships between Ethiopia’s various ethnic groups now become formed on the basis of control and domination of a range of political centres (federal, state, and district), and if access continues to be experienced as discriminatory, the political system may foster conflictual perceptions of ethnicity with destructive outcomes.

In multi-ethnic regional-states and zones some are concerned that a system of ‘ranked’ ethnic groups (like that under centralised imperial rule which federalism was introduced to eradicate) might re-emerge. Were future development to prove discriminatory, they could be expected to entrench ethnic positions of superiority and inferiority, domination and subjugation, reflecting the ethnic profile of control of the political centre and the resources of the state.⁵⁷ Were such processes left unchecked, or indeed fuelled by the political system itself, conflict might occur which not only sets one group against another, but also fragments groups along lines of

57. On the theories of ‘ranked’ ethnic groups, see (Horowitz 1985); there is room for considerable disagreement as to the relative likelihood of the emergence of ranked groups, or of increased fluidity in ranking pursuant on increasing localisation of resource-related competition.

clan, lineage, or language dialect difference (as, arguably, in the Gurage-Silte, and *Simien* Omo cases⁵⁸). Such fragmentation might not in itself create problems (other than the potentially enormous cost of establishing smaller and smaller units of administration)⁵⁹; it is perceived, however, as potentially vulnerable to a politics of 'divide-and-rule'.

The ethnic federal arrangement seems to have contributed to the realignment of a number of conflicts which have been labelled as latent 'ethnic' disputes. Ethnicity explains neither the causes nor, in many cases, the dynamics of conflict. Nevertheless, apparently similar patterns have emerged between agriculturalists and pastoralists, as for instance between Sidama and Guji, in the south Omo between Ari and lowland pastoralists, in the east and centre between Kereyu and Afar pastoralists and Oromo and Amhara peasants. Many of these conflicts, which essentially reflect competition over scarce land resources, have been dormant, but the new constitutional order (and urge to draw boundaries based on ethnicity) has offered new legitimacy to pre-existing competition and antagonism, whilst infusing both with an ethnic dimension. Recent attempts to reform what was throughout the 1990s a strong connection between ethnic identity and access to budgets, can be expected, particularly in the multi-ethnic Southern Region, SNNPNS, to dampen secessionist and conflictual dynamics.

Conflicts between regional states have also emerged, as between Borana Oromo and the neighbouring Garre Somalis, as well as the current conflict between Afar and Somali Issa. Some of the difficulties in settling such conflicts rest also with the fact that the state borders were initially decided by the federal government, but under the constitution any changes to the borders must be jointly decided by the states concerned. Given the complexity of such circumstances, and the implacable nature of the causes of conflict, it is unsurprising that a local, contextual solution to border issues cannot often materialize from below.

58. Regarding the evolution of Gurage 'ethnicity' see Markakis (1998) who argues that it was constructed for external consumption only, in the context of migration to Addis Ababa, and was hence vulnerable to collapse when the dynamics of interest altered with ethnic federalism. North Omo zone has, in the last two years, been divided into three zones and two special weredas (Welaiyta, Daro, and GamoGofa zones, and Basketo and Konta special weredas) in response primarily to the demands for separate recognition (and budget allocation) from Welaiyta. This division, whilst massively impairing developmental potential in marginal new zones such as Daro, has yet not diffused calls for further sub-division, which persist between Gamo and Gofa (interviews, Darota Dojamo, Awassa, June 2002, and in Sawla, July 2002).

59. These urges towards fragmentation in the SNNPNS are of considerable concern to EPRDF who would like to see consolidation and integration rather than fragmentation. Recent changes to the administrative structure, and in the system of allocation of *wereda* block grants (with only a small percentage of regional subsidies reserved to zones, and primarily for prison administration, etc.), may be interpreted as attempts to remove the incentive for groups to seek zonal or special *wereda* status, by curtailing the authority and resources at the disposal of this level of administration.

The introduction of ethnic federalism was a highly experimental move, designed to attempt a solution to the persistent centrifugal dynamics which had increasingly plagued the Ethiopian state through the second half of the twentieth century. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the admirable ‘ethnic’ rights granted in the Constitution also have less than positive side-effects⁶⁰. It is clear that, in the federal context, a range of new local arenas of competition and potential suppression, of hegemony and potential confrontation have emerged, particularly within the multi-ethnic south. Within multi-ethnic zones and states, locally dominant groups have, and will undoubtedly continue to attempt to suppress smaller groups to achieve local or regional hegemony, in a system of decentralised political competition. What is new, under ethnic federalism, is the access of the different ethnic elites to the political arena. In terms of participation, the introduction of ethnic federalism has had a profound effect in expanding access to the offices and resources of the state to a new elite drawn from each of the country’s ethnic groups.

2.3.2 Human rights

As set out above, on assuming power in 1991 the EPRDF-led government committed itself to an ambitious programme of political reforms, enshrining democratic standards and the respect of human rights. Their promise was followed up with a process of accession to international instruments of human rights⁶¹, with accompanying obligations to draft and implement policies in coherence with international human rights standards. The Ethiopian Constitution reaffirms this intent, and contains comprehensive chapters on human and democratic rights (articles 8 to 44), which, according to article 13.2, ‘shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia.’

2.3.2.1 Documented, reported, and alleged human rights abuses

A decade after the demise of the Dergue, human rights violations still occur throughout Ethiopia.⁶² Detention without trial, torture, ‘disappear-

60. See also (Poluha 1998), and various of the contributions to James *et al* (eds) (2002).

61. See Annex for a full list of UN and ILO covenants and conventions ratified/acceded to by Ethiopia.

62. This section draws on reports from international human rights monitoring organisations. See, for instance, the Ethiopia section under Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2001*, Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002*, and us Department of State, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2001*. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued separate in-depth reports on Ethiopia, respectively *Ethiopia Accountability past and present: Human rights in*

ances' and extra-judicial executions are regularly reported by international and national organisations. The International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC, has been given increasing access to places of detention by the government. They report that by the end of 1997 some 10,980 people were still held in custody in relation to the 1991 ouster of the Dergue regime or for other security reasons. Additionally, the ICRC had registered 5,660 new detainees.⁶³ The conditions in prison are harsh – overcrowded, little food, and minimum medical treatment. The worrying human rights situation in the country seems to continue, and Human Rights Watch (2002) identified a marked deterioration in human rights observance in Ethiopia in the wake of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war⁶⁴.

Since 1991, several categories of individuals have reportedly been targeted for detention/imprisonment on politico-juridical grounds. A number of reports written by international human rights organisations⁶⁵ document these cases. Very broadly speaking, it is alleged that the first category of people targeted immediately after the change of power in 1991, was individuals belonging to the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, EPRP, which continued a policy of militant opposition. A number of their key members are reported to have disappeared in detention in 1991 and 1992. In parallel with the crackdown on EPRP, was the arrest of individuals belonging to the former Dergue/WPE regime of Ethiopia.

After the 1992 local and regional elections, and the withdrawal from government of the Oromo Liberation Front and a number of other minor political movements, Oromo were reportedly targeted for imprisonment and harassment by the Ethiopian government. It is difficult to estimate how many have been imprisoned/detained without charge, for longer or shorter periods of time during the last decade, but the number is alleged to run into the tens of thousands. The UK-based NGO Oromo Support Group, OSG, has, as of July 2002, reported 2,915 extra-judicial killings and 854 'disappearances' of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the government during EPRDF's tenure. According to this source, most of these have been Oromo. OSG also claims that "scores of thousands of civilians have been imprisoned. Torture and rape of prisoners is commonplace, especially in secret detention centres, whose existence is denied by

transition (1995) and *Ethiopia: The curtailment of rights* (1997). Recently, Amnesty International issued the special report *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Human Rights Issues in a Year of Armed Conflict* (1999) debating the abuses carried out in the wake of the Eritrean/Ethiopian war. Several Ethiopian organisations undertake human rights reporting, the most notable being the Ethiopian Human Rights Council.

63. Information taken from Human Rights Watch, *World Report 1999*, section on Ethiopia.

64. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002*.

65. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

the government.”⁶⁶ Today, the political leadership of OLF claims that there are about 30–40,000 Oromo prisoners in Ethiopia, a number it is impossible to verify.⁶⁷

During the Eritrean–Ethiopian war, the Ethiopian government is reported to have detained and expelled about 75,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin on the grounds that they represented a security threat to Ethiopia⁶⁸. With the conduct of the 2000/2001 elections it is alleged that thousands of individuals in the southern region of Ethiopia, SNNPRS, who sympathised with the opposition Southern Coalition were detained and imprisoned, and that dozens of them were also killed by the police or military⁶⁹. The international human rights reports on Ethiopia for the year 2001, for instance, all list the detention of political prisoners as a grave human rights abuse by the current EPRDF government. Amnesty International writes: “suspected rebel supporters were detained, tortured and extra-judicially executed. Several thousand remained in detention; some had been held for years without charge or trial”.⁷⁰

Last year’s demonstrations in several cities throughout Ethiopia were also reported to have resulted in the detention without charge of several thousand people. For instance, over 400 All Amhara People’s Organisation, AAPO, members and 100 Ethiopian Democratic Party, EDP, members were arrested between April and June 2001, the authorities claiming that they had instigated violence. While in detention, four of those arrested died, some allegedly in circumstances where there was suspicion of torture.⁷¹ The us State Department’s report on Ethiopia’s human rights practice lists a number of cases of political imprisonment, and reported killings, during 2001. The Department concludes that:

“The Government’s human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Security forces committed a number of extra-judicial killings and at times beat and mistreated detainees. Prison conditions are poor. Arbitrary arrest and detention and prolonged pre-trial detention remained problems. The Government continued to detain persons suspected of sympathising with

66. See OSG web-site: <http://www.oromo.org>. Note that OSG is associated with the opposition OLF.

67. Information from OLF foreign spokesperson, 16 August 2002.

68. Cf. Amnesty International (1999).

69. Pausewang, et al. (2002); see also: *Ethiopia 2001, Local elections in the southern region*, and *Withering Democracy: Local Elections in Ethiopia, February/March 2001*, both authored by S. Pausewang and L. Aalen, for the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, and available on the Institute’s web-site: www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/publikasjonsliste.html#nr.

70. Source: Amnesty International: *Annual Report 2002*, London, p. 98.

71. Human Rights Watch *World Report 2002*, p. 54.

or being members of OLF. [...] Thousands of suspects remained in detention without charge...”⁷²

2.3.2.2 Government attitudes and responses

The government is generally reluctant to admit direct responsibility for human rights abuses, and usually blames the incidents on action taken by local officials out of control of the central government. According to Human Rights Watch, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted in 2001 that conditions in Ethiopia were “not conducive for liberal democracy”, and the Minister of Education acknowledged that Ethiopia’s justice system had major deficiencies and that “government agencies interfered in the justice system”.⁷³ However, the government appears sensitive to criticism on human rights abuses: criticism is often taken as an attack on the government’s legitimacy.⁷⁴ After critical reports made by Amnesty International and the American Association for the International Commission of Jurists, AAICJ, in 1995, a booklet by an organisation called the International Transparency Commission on Africa, ITCO-Africa circulated, apparently in response to the allegations made by Amnesty and the AAICJ.

Governmental denial of abuse of human rights was repeated after the 1999 report by Amnesty International on the consequence of the Eritrean/Ethiopian war, and all allegations were bluntly rejected.⁷⁵ The government has tended to defend itself by pointing to the progress that has been made in economic, social and political development since the fall of the Dergue, and the fact that to transform the political culture of the country will take time. However, when the Prime Minister was recently questioned on this issue, he acknowledged that certain police and security officers had violated human rights, and that at least 100 officers had been dismissed over the recent period⁷⁶. He was less willing to acknowledge a more deep-rooted culture of human rights abuses, or indeed political responsibility for those that occurred.

One should be sympathetic towards the tremendous challenges the government is facing in terms of economic, political, social, and cultural constraints on the enhancement of human rights observance. Moreover, taking the regional context into consideration, with a long history of po-

72. US State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2001: Ethiopia. See website: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hrrpt/2001/af/8372.htm>.

73. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002*.

74. See the country-profile on Ethiopia by Siegfried Pausewang (1996).

75. See statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Response to Amnesty International's Report of 21 May 1999 'Ethiopia and Eritrea: Human Rights in a Year of Armed Conflict'*, 4 August 1999.

76. Interview with Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, January 2002.

litical violence, it is a daunting task to transform a ‘culture of violence’ in a short time. This, in combination with limited resources to carry out an efficient juridical reform process (Elgesem 1998) and the link between some human rights violations and long-standing local norms, renders the context of human rights in Ethiopia a complex issue. One should not judge the government’s record only on the basis of concrete changes experienced, but also consider evidence of its expressed and practical will to bring change vis-à-vis a complex human rights situation. A vigorous policy campaign to change attitudes and behaviour in the directions pointed out by international human rights instruments, NGOs, and (increasingly) Ethiopian citizens, is needed. An apparent lack of appropriate social and political action and determination to condemn and sanction social norms abusive of human rights has been of concern to date. Evidence to support recent government claims that this is to change will be welcomed. The Government’s plans to establish an independent Human Rights Commission and an Ombudsman’s Office are positive steps, although it seems appropriate to reserve judgement in relation to the likely working conditions and political independence of these institutions.

2.4 Concluding remarks

At the local level, the most important achievement of the EPRDF after ten years in power is the establishment of democratic administrative structures. This is significant in itself, although the culture and practice of democracy has serious limitations. Clearly people have begun to understand what democracy could mean for them, and when they experience abuse, increasing numbers now know that this is not according to constitutional principles. The difference between what is set by law, and what is practised, is apparent for some – though by no means all – rural people.

Given the hierarchical nature of social and political relations in highland tradition, peasant-to-peasant relations in Ethiopia have been few, and restricted to narrow foci of practical import. Where they do exist, however, they are characterised by their horizontal orientation (as in *senbete*, *idir*, *equub*, and *mahaber* associations); people who co-operate do so on an equal basis (Poluha, 2003). In order for this to be the case, however, traditional associations are designed expressly and exclusively to bring only existing peers together. The horizontal collaboration thus embodied in these structures is extremely circumscribed, re-constitutive of the social status quo, and inimical to social transformation.

This being said, however, the leadership of these organisations is appointed/elected by their fellow villagers, and is thus accountable to their local community or membership. In cases where members of the associations are not satisfied with the leadership, this can be addressed within the organisations to find a solution, either dismissal or other corrective measures. The peasant-to-peasant relations administered by these indigenous networks/associations incorporate internal capacity to sanction deviance, and are thus qualitatively different from the organisations administering the peasant-to-state relations (*kebele*, etc.). Poluha asserts that where relations between individual peasants and state officials are concerned, these are always vertical, entrenching a hierarchy that prevents trust or interdependence from developing. In such structures, whatever the formal situation, in practice the leaders are less likely to be accountable to their fellow villagers, than to those above them in the system.

The *kebele/wereda* administration forms a crucial relay mechanism for local power relations. Since the *kebele* administration represents the arm of the state/government/party with all of its resources and potentially coercive apparatus, *kebele* leaders are widely perceived in terms of their potentially repressive and punitive powers. Moreover, since the *kebele* structure effectively reaches out to every village and locality in Ethiopia, the central government has no incentive to co-opt or work through traditional offices of authority. Thus, in order to establish a local administration which is accountable to its own constituency, and not only to its leaders at the higher administrative levels (and which accepts plural political expression at the grassroots), a clear separation of political and administrative powers is required. As such, the reform of *wereda* administration is of crucial potential importance in addressing these issues.

The contradictory political context in Ethiopia today, where the ethnic federal system has given rights and resources to earlier suppressed ethnic groups, but where individual human rights abuses also continue, prohibits any general conclusion on whether Ethiopians feel themselves to be 'citizens' or 'subjects'. Some would reject the label 'citizen', because their citizenship rights are not upheld and protected. As such, they are rather 'subjects' under a state and party structure which still do not allow for democratic accountability. Others, however, would emphasise the newly obtained rights of language, administrative autonomy, and mother-tongue education, granted under federalism as essential preconditions of their status as equal citizens. Confusing and contradictory processes are at work within the 'ethnic' and 'participatory' landscape. As ever, it remains the case that the real issue on the ground is that of equal development and

resource distribution, whether or not it is also couched in terms of 'ethnicity' in all its varying expressions.

Associational life and the emergence of civil society

CHAPTER 3

This section considers the operation of associational life outside the state, looking in turn at the areas of spiritual, developmental, media, and commercial activity. It concludes with a brief review of trends and implications.

3.1 Spiritual activity: religious institutions and organisation

The period of EPRDF-led government in Ethiopia has been marked by a resurgence of religious affiliation and activity. Islam in Ethiopia has gained in status and recognition under EPRDF, with new working hours in the public sector facilitating Friday mosque attendance, and recognising Islamic as well as Christian holidays⁷⁷. The federal status accorded to Harar NRS, together with the visible inclusion of Muslim communities in government contrasts strikingly with the situation under Haile Selassie I where it was ‘easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a non-Amharic speaking Muslim to [gain access to state position]’ (Markakis 1974).

During the imperial period, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church formed the state religion. The EPRDF-government continued the policy of the Dergue to separate state from church/religious affairs. Thus, religious institutions have generally not been employed by the government to implement its policies.⁷⁸ After the EPRDF-take-over in 1991, the old Patriarch of the Orthodox Church was dismissed because of his closeness to the

77. Some progress in this direction had been made under the Dergue.

78. During the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, the Orthodox Patriarch and representatives from other religious communities, were involved in attempts to inspire the Ethiopian troops, as well as interfaith peace building initiatives sponsored within the international community.

Dergue regime, and a new Patriarch was appointed (arguably in contravention of Orthodox traditions, which would normally prohibit the appointment of a new Patriarch, as long as the incumbent is alive). As a result, a number of educated and conservative Christians⁷⁹ refuse to accept the new Patriarch as a true representative of the Church. Moreover, the Patriarch, Abuna Paulos, is seen as having a degree of political affinity with the EPRDF. This combination of factors has, amongst certain constituents, damaged his reputation. Such controversies, however, are the concern of a rather small circle of Church leaders, and do not reflect a reality perceived at the grassroots among village parishioners. Here issues such as the venality and reported capacity for extortion of local priests are much more significant causes for concern. Meanwhile, the new patriarch has shown himself to be a shrewd political operator, doing much to build the profile and resources of the church both domestically and internationally.

The Muslim community has also been put under a stronger political focus in recent years, due to armed political resistance from various Islamic organisations, most notably *Al-Itihad Al Islamiya*. Since there seems to be a growing politicisation of Islam in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government observes closely the activities undertaken by organisations with an Islamic constituency. Sharia law is followed within the area of the civil code, guiding the practice of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

In the last few years, Ethiopia's older established and 'indigenous' churches⁸⁰ have faced intensive 'competition' from a large influx of foreign capital injected (most notably) into the various evangelical denominations, which have seen an exponential expansion of membership. Consequent disquiet regarding the perceived threat to traditional spiritual allegiance presented by the rapid material expansion of these competitors, is considerable, particularly in areas of the south and of Oromia which have seen mass conversions to the new churches on a large scale. There are (unsubstantiated) reports that the alarm of the older religions, confronted with these dramatic developments, has been such as to bring collaboration between local Orthodox Christian and Islamic bodies in an attempt to keep out the newcomers.

79. Particularly prominent in the diaspora.

80. A year ago the Oromia NRS government accorded EECMY the same 'state recognised' status as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Islam. The Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat is also long established and 'indigenised'.

3.2 Developmental Activity: NGOs as ‘civil society’

The term ‘civil society’ has tended to be used in the development literature of the 1990s (by non-governmental organisations, NGOs, and other bodies) as a catch-all to designate those positive elements of non-state associational life which can be mobilised for social political and economic development. In drawing upon the liberal and neo-liberal traditions⁸¹, analysis has tended to overlook the fragmented and reactionary elements of community organisation, and to assume the negative influence of the state, as something which can desirably be curbed or ‘rolled back’ through support to ‘peoples’ organisations’ within civil society. Implicit in this understanding have often been what Friedman has called a ‘widespread set of doctrinal beliefs about alternative development’ (1992:6): that the state is a negative, and civil society equally a positive actor; that state-civil society relations are hostile and zero-sum; and that ‘genuine community’ action is sufficient for development, whilst political activity is to be avoided.

In Ethiopia there have been particularly compelling reasons why the polarisation of state and civil society has been seen in starkly crude terms. A modern history of state autocracy, oppression, totalitarianism, and coercion reached its nadir under the Dergue regime, when ‘civil repression turned into all out warfare’ during the Red Terror of 1977/8, and the manipulation of food aid and enforced relocation or villagisation increasingly became ‘counter- insurgency strategies’ wielded against starving and recalcitrant populations⁸². In response to this situation, and – perhaps more significantly – in view of the government’s pro-Soviet alignment, international emergency assistance during the crisis of the 1980s was channelled at an unprecedented level through the NGO sector precisely because it was *non-governmental*.⁸³

Observers have argued that this history has left the NGO sector in Ethiopia with an inflated sense of its own importance. National NGOs,

81. ‘The new strategy [of international development organisations] is neo-liberal not because it promotes capitalism, commercialisation, and markets which all liberal strategies do, but because of the redefinition of the role of the state in this process’ (Beckman 1992:3); Muir (1996:5–7) has documented the way in which the ‘favoured child’ status which NGOs have attained in recent years in relation to official donors reflects the ideological rise of ‘gradualist welfare pluralism’ and traces the close parallel between the expansion of the NGO sector in sub-Saharan African and increased official funding of NGOs in the UK in this context.

82. Africa Watch (1991:4–7). This publication provides perhaps the fullest account in English of the negative impact of government policies under Haile Selassie I and the Dergue regime. See also, for instance, Hendrie (1991) and Clay & Holcomb (1985).

83. Successive US administrations, for instance, were subject to legislation, enacted soon after the superpower realignment in the late 1970s, specifically forbidding the provision of all but skeleton emergency assistance to Ethiopia. These regulations were lifted only in 1992.

NGOs, have often been the artificial product of the international need for tool for the delivery of relief assistance, and do not reflect the organic evolution and indigenous consolidation of civil society. Lacking roots in community development, as a result some emerged in the early 1990s with a clearer sense of their rights to special privileges (for duty free import of equipment, for instance) than of their responsibilities to their ‘constituents’. Without the experience of a collective struggle to establish its own legitimate space outside the remit of the state, the voluntary sector has lacked cohesion and solidarity, and been overly expectant of the largesse of state or international bodies in facilitating its activities. With the emergence of new organisations over the last decade, this situation has now shifted in positive ways, but remains an important backdrop to understanding of the constraints and potential of the sector.

3.2.1 NGOs and the EPRDF

The NGO sector in Ethiopia has flourished, grown, and diversified since EPRDF came to power. It has however also felt itself buffeted from all sides since 1991. Bilateral and multilateral governmental funding through the NGO sector dropped off dramatically as the international community has sought to re-establish its government-to-government relations following the demise of the Dergue regime. Additionally, there are three areas in which shifts in government policy have presented challenges to the NGO sector, particularly its international members.

3.2.1.1 Policy directions

Firstly, TGE policies first published in 1993 have required NGOs to shift their activities from relief to development, linking all relief distributions, particularly of foodstuffs, to development activities ‘designed in collaboration with the communities affected’, in practice usually ‘employment generation schemes’⁸⁴. The inflexible and abrupt manner in which this new policy was introduced and enforced caused widespread alarm⁸⁵, and damaged the capacity for food security analysis and research often funded on the back of food aid ‘overheads’. Secondly, the increasingly formal government requirement that NGOs design and implement their programmes in collaboration with (if not through) local bodies – usually local government structures – has significantly curtailed the extensive freedoms (some would say ‘fiefdoms’) they had enjoyed. There are recent indications of a reversal in this policy direction, with government now more willing to tolerate

84. Cf. TGE’s National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, NPDP, published in 1993.

85. ‘Restrictions in the use of food aid in a country in which approximately 55% of the population are food insecure [...] may be less than helpful to local development’ (UN EUE 1994).

and facilitate the independent operation of NGO-run programmes. A third area of change to which the NGO sector has had difficulty responding has been the impact of the programme of structural adjustment to which Ethiopia has been subject since 1991. Debates common in other parts of Africa (regarding, for instance, the need for NGOs to address the causes of poverty rather than simply supplementing the welfare 'safety nets' less and less provided by the state) are little developed in Ethiopia.

3.2.1.2 Government-NGO relations

Government has been, by and large, suspicious of the NGO sector, concerned by what it sees as the undesirable 'inefficiency' and 'competition for hearts and minds' engendered by the establishment of a parallel or plural resource-provision system. This attitude seems to lie at the heart of government antagonism towards a range of voluntary and private sector organisations. It is supplemented by a number of other concerns, including: the fungibility of funds (the view that resources which might otherwise go to the government are being 'lost' to NGOs); NGO corruption (government rhetoric has been indignant on the subject of the 'waste of resources intended for the Ethiopian population'); lack of NGO understanding of, or commitment to social transformation; personnel implications for the civil service of a high-paying competitor sector of employment; and finally, the incapacity (or unwillingness) of many NGOs to work outside the capital and major cities.

As regards its view of NGOs, the EPRDF has not over recent years emerged as an organisation committed to pluralism for its own sake. This has meant that the government which it leads has co-operated with NGOs only in so far as they are seen to contribute additional resources to an economic and social development process the broad parameters of which have been defined by the state: the government has not viewed the existence of the NGO/voluntary sector as a good thing *per se*. As a result, the various (and legitimate) objections it has raised have tended to reinforce one another and coalesce into a generalised and ideologically driven suspicion of an alternative mechanism for socio-economic improvement, drawing on a vision, methodology, and potential for patronage separate from those of the state⁸⁶. The antagonism has been reflected in the establishment of a regulatory environment which many NGOs regard as inconducive and obstructive to their operations⁸⁷.

86. This perspective also undoubtedly derives from TPLF/EPRDF's experience of providing just such an alternative mechanism in opposition during the 1980s.

87. Details of the revised regulatory framework which was adopted in 1995/6, and which shifted legal responsibility for oversight of NGOs from DPPC to the MoJ, are given in Vaughan (1996).

3.2.2 International NGOs (INGOs)

There are around 126 international NGOs (INGOs) out of a total of 270 registered as working in Ethiopia, many of whom commenced operations during the 1984/5 famine, when they numbered several hundred. Many of the larger INGOs have consolidated existing policies of working only through indigenous structures, in line with government directives. Some few are willing to prioritise co-operation with, and strengthening of, government structures at local, regional, and national levels.

3.2.3 Ethiopian National NGOs (NNGOs)

3.2.3.1 Government oriented NGOs (GONGOs) and Development Associations

The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) is well known as one of the largest and best-funded of Africa's 'indigenous NGOs'. Established in 1978 as the *de iure* independent NGO, and *de facto* humanitarian wing of the TPLF, it set out to provide financial and material support to farmers in non-government held areas of Tigray through a cross-border operation, and to Tigrayan refugees in Sudan. As such, its activities completed a picture of NGO domination of funding channels for long-term development (and indeed relief) in all areas of Ethiopia during the Dergue⁸⁸, whilst effectively delivering humanitarian resources into the domain of the *de facto* government of TPLF-administered Tigray. During the latter part of the civil war, REST had a sister organisation in the Tigray Development Association. TDA was established (also by the TPLF) in 1989 as a mechanism for recruiting the technical and material support of the many professional Tigrayans in the Diaspora. Under its auspices many who would have been unwilling to become allied with the political struggle were able to offer their know-how, time, and money to support the 'development struggle'.

Both organisations were formally registered as NGOs in Addis Ababa after the change of government. They have come to represent the twin facets of what has become familiar as an Ethiopia-wide 'development drive', nominally non-governmental, but clearly EPRDF-driven. The pattern of an ethno-national development organisation focusing on the rural economy, complemented by a membership association concerned primarily with social transformation (particularly through skills and technology transfer) has been reproduced in many of the NRSS since 1991. Also

88. REST's activities in TPLF-held Tigray ran in parallel with those of the Oromo Relief Association in OLF areas, and of the Eritrean Relief Association in EPLF-held parts of Eritrea. Whilst ERA metamorphosed into the equivalent of the RRC (now DPPC) in independent Eritrea, ORA operated as an NGO until it was deregistered in late 1995 and its staff imprisoned on charges of OLF activity.

replicated have been the structures through which the boards and management of these organisations have been dominated by senior party members. Examples include the Organisation for Relief and Development in Amhara, ORDA (originally ERO) and the Amhara Development Association, ALMA, as well as the Oromo and Gurage Development Associations – the latter itself one of a number of members of the Southern Ethiopian People's Development Association, launched with a characteristic fundraising 'telethon' in 1998.

The widespread creation of NGOs so closely allied with the government or ruling party is clearly open to abuse and criticism. The creation of what critics consider to be a non-level playing field is justified by board and executive members on the basis of overwhelming popular demands for an improvement in living standards. That the fulfilment of the government's development objectives by means of what is – at least informally – a 'party organisation' would also further its perceived political interests seems apparent. It is a policy which has generated strong resentment from other sectors of civil society (and elsewhere). The majority of NGOs in Ethiopia share a deep suspicion of, and antagonism towards the 'strengths and advantages' seen to be enjoyed by these GONGOS as a result of their EPRDF links. Such feelings militate against the development of a unified voice or platform amongst NGOs in Addis Ababa. More recent criticism, both from other NGOs, and from within the ruling party, has also focussed on the activities and impact of the work of these organisations, with recent debate considering that a more plural and devolved approach to rural development might have been more successful⁸⁹.

3.2.3.2 *Welfarist and traditional NGOs*

There are more National NGOs active in the field of child care and family welfare than in any other sector. The author of a report for PACT (1995) distinguished between **Community Based Organisations**, CBOS (amongst which he included most of the GONGOS, church affiliated organisations, and some 'spontaneous groups'); **Ethiopian development NGOs** ('mid-level indigenous organisations formed by well-meaning Ethiopians to directly help other people whom they have defined as needy with a variety of development programmes to change their lives for the better. They range from top-down service delivery kinds of organisations to participatory catalyst kinds of organisation who see their function as motivating and encouraging CBOS'); and **indigenous welfare organisations** ('who see their role as institutional charity to ameliorate present

89. Interviews with Regional Government personnel, Tigray, July 2002.

problems [and] may have had a history of or may still be involved in relief work').

The main strengths of Ethiopian National NGOs lie in 'relief, rehabilitation and traditional charity' (Clarke & Campbell 1996), which has resulted in a relatively conservative overall approach. This problem has been compounded by relatively low levels of overall staff training, in terms both of technical capacity, and developmental philosophies. Experience of involvement in relief and rehabilitation work over several decades has marked out the church associated development organisations as relatively effective and efficient⁹⁰. Where church affiliated development bodies are successful – as frequently – they work by means of a closely collaborative approach, involving local authorities and communities, and attempting to build links, which integrate their projects' activities with the needs of the wider population. A range of other indigenous NGOs has been able to supplement governmental services to urban and rural populations, including in specialised sectors not reached by the state; and many have a considerable capacity and potential for fundraising within Ethiopia.

During a period of tightening of government control of NGOs following the establishment of the FDRE in late 1995, a high proportion of Islamic Welfare Organisations were seized upon as constituting little more than formal fronts for projects which had either not materialized or not met expected potential. The renewal of government caution towards this sector since September 2001 builds on a pre-existing concern about the scope of regional networks for radical Islam⁹¹.

3.2.3.3 *Community-based organisations*

In Ethiopia (as elsewhere) the search goes on for the utopian 'autonomous' Community Based Organisations, CBOs, with whom partnerships can be forged 'in the interests of genuine social transformation at the grassroots'. There are a number of relatively new NGO actors, which can be said to have grown out of social and cultural connections within the communities in which they now work, independently of state or party association. Examples might include such organisations as, for instance,

90. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, and Evangelical Ethiopian Church Mekane Yesus all have substantive relief and development bodies. In the last few years, these 'indigenous' churches have faced intensive 'competition' from large influxes of foreign capital injected most notably into the various evangelical denominations. Consequent disquiet regarding the perceived threat to traditional spiritual allegiance presented by the rapid material expansion of these competitors, is considerable. Where church affiliated development bodies are successful – as frequently – they work by means of a closely collaborative approach, involving local authorities and communities, and attempting to build links which integrate their projects' activities with the needs of the wider population.

91. Cf. EIU report for 2002.

Hundee in western Oromia, and Pastoralist Welfare and Development Associations in Afar and Ogaden. Some INGOs have experimented with the use and development of traditional social structures (the church diocesan administrative unit *got*, the savings and credit associations *iddir* and *equub*) as vehicles for socio-economic development, with considerable success but on a very limited scale⁹².

Opinions differ as to the impact of the Service Co-operatives and Peasant Associations, *kebeles*, (see above) upon pre-existing forms of social organisation. Sections of the development literature on Ethiopia have referred to *kebeles* (and their counterparts in Tigray, *baitos*) as CBOS. During the 1980s, those INGOs funding projects in non-government held areas of the country (primarily through REST and ORA) conceived their support as directed at local communities co-ordinated, in Tigray, through 'democratically elected village councils' – the *baitos*. These structures were understood to administer all aspects of community life (from security and judicial matters, through economic development and environmental protection, to social improvement in the areas of community health and education) and to operate in a highly participatory manner through an inclusive form of 'direct democracy' based upon regular community meetings to draw up, modify, ratify, and implement local project planning.

The *baito* system was thought to provide an astonishing vehicle for development success in one of the most resource insecure areas of the world. It was seized upon by international donors as an admirable and replicable development model. What was perhaps inadequately confronted in this analysis was the fact that these structures did not materialize spontaneously from Tigray's rural communities. They were the product of explicit and exhaustive social and political mobilisation by the TPLF, in a process which provided the pilot for the subsequent campaign by which EPRDF sought to widen its sphere of influence throughout southern Ethiopia throughout the transitional period. As is discussed elsewhere in this report, the political mobilization activities of the EPRDF have been aimed at the development of community-based structures which fed directly into the administrative and developmental systems of local government and party. They were not, *per se*, directed at the encouragement of independent associational life at local level, as is commonly understood in connection with CBOS.

3.2.3.4 Advocacy, lobbying, research and consultancy outfits

These are areas in which NGO activity barely existed in Ethiopia prior to

92. The innovative, small-scale, and long-term activities of Farm Africa and SOS Sahel in these areas are of wide interest and potential application.

1991. A small range of vigorous organisations is now active in the areas of advocacy and lobbying, civic and other education and training, and professional membership interests. Donors have prioritised this group of young actors as instrumental in the furtherance of ‘democracy and good governance’. This emphasis is reflected in a funding scenario in which generous resources have been chasing a limited number of organisations with similarly limited absorptive capacity.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, EHRCO, has now worked for seven years in the field of researching, documenting and publicising human rights abuses, and conducting public debates on democracy and human rights. It has adopted a robust and confrontational stance vis-à-vis the government, which has on more than one instance responded with heavy-handed ill temper⁹³, characterising the organisation as operating like a political party⁹⁴. Interview with senior EPRDF member, Addis Ababa, April 2002). Despite these difficulties, the organisation has recently obtained the renewal of its operating registration. Whilst a number of other human rights monitoring organisations have briefly operated and faded (most recently based out of the Law Faculty at Addis Ababa University)⁹⁵ this organisation continues to expand the boundaries of the degree and style of criticism which the government can be pushed to tolerate.

An organisation recently briefly threatened with deregistration in 2002⁹⁶ is the vigorous and high profile Ethiopian Women Lawyers’ Association, EWLA. This body has lobbied for the introduction of a new family code and (not entirely successfully) to influence the provisions of the draft. It also provides effective legal help to individual women, taking up crusading cases designed to illuminate the shortcomings of a court system, which often fails to take proper account of the modern legal instruments, which have changed the legal position and status of women. Other organisations committed to the provision of legal advice and protection include the dynamic lawyer group APAP, and the pro-government Anti-Red Terror Committees established to defend the rights of alleged victims of the previous regime. Other significant membership bodies include the National and Addis Ababa Chambers of Commerce, the Women Entre-

93. Its flamboyant chairman, along with Chairman of the Ethiopian Economics Association, was arrested in 2001 following public debates at Addis Ababa University which the government (implausibly) claimed had inflamed subsequent disturbances. The resultant court case was pending at the time of writing in mid-2002.

94. In addition to this complaint from the government, concerns have been raised within the donor community regarding the accuracy of EHRCO reporting.

95. A Human Rights Centre is reported to have been established recently at the Ethiopian Civil Service College.

96. The decision to suspend the organisation for ‘operating outside its mandate’ was overturned upon the replacement of the Minister of Justice in the latest reshuffle of the Federal cabinet.

preneurs' Association, and the Ethiopian Economics Association (on which more below).

NGOs dealing with civic education and information-sharing include DKT-Social Marketing (focusing on AIDS/HIV), AD-NET (an ad hoc group of indigenous NGOs all with interests in the sphere of voter and electoral education and regulation; following successes in the mid-1990s, the group failed to consolidate a useful role during the 2000 and 2001 elections); Waag Communications and Press Digest (media information, translation and training services); AIDWO and Abugida (civic education). InterAfrica Group works on information dissemination, and dialogue, research projects and NGO networking, operating at an elevated political level.

Perhaps the most exciting new developments in the voluntary sector are the research-focussed institutions which have emerged in the last three or four years from the cross-over between academic, policy-related, and NGO activity. Primary actors in this sphere are the Forum for Social Studies and the Ethiopian Economics Association, EEA, which have emerged respectively from the Institute of Development Research, and Economics Department of Addis Ababa University. Whilst EEA has cultivated a more combative tone, both organisations have engaged in valuable independent and critical research on core issues of socio-economic development⁹⁷. Both have been major contributors to (and beneficiaries of) the recent PRSP consultation exercise.

A new capacity-building/educational reform was initiated by the government in 2002, which promises well for the development of the education and academic sector in the country. As a consequence of increasing the capacity of the academic sector,⁹⁸ more people can be expected to become aware of their rights as citizens and the workings of a modern democracy. The enhancement of knowledge and awareness of human rights and democracy in the country should have a positive effect on the process of political liberalisation in the medium to long term. In a similar vein, the Prime Minister recently reported that a public dialogue initiative would be launched, and InterAfrica Group organised a series of open fora for dialogue between various sectors of Ethiopian civil society (the commercial sector, academics, NGOs), and the authorities beginning in late 2002. One of these took place between the opposition parties and the government, eliciting much public discussion and interest.⁹⁹

97. EEA, for instance, is currently engaged in the analysis of data from a survey of 5,000 households regarding land tenure arrangements.

98. The Addis Ababa University aims to quadruple the intake of students to their graduate programmes by 2006.

99. Interview with Prime Minister, January 2002.

3.2.3.5 Networking

A culture of collaboration and co-operation has never been the hallmark of the voluntary sector in Ethiopia¹⁰⁰. The Christian Relief and Development Association, CRDA, was established around the same time as the governmental RRC, and fulfilled a vital role in the co-ordination of NGO relief efforts (and their protection from hostile government interference) during the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s. In the early 1990s it was suggested that it should take on the role of 'co-ordinating government lobbyist'. A number of factors have curtailed the potential for this to happen. CRDA's membership is disparate in terms of profile and interests, and it seems unclear that a unified position on many issues of concern to the voluntary sector could be elaborated. The failure of the alternative Consortium of Ethiopian Voluntary Organisations, CEVO, within two years of its establishment in 1992 points to the difficulties of civil society co-ordination and collaboration, even within the capital. Perhaps the most important benefit to accrue from the recent process of public consultation on the PRSP has been its value as an exercise in experience sharing and capacity building for the voluntary sector at the national level. It certainly represents the first opportunity that many have had to engage in (what was formally) a dialogue with the government on matters of socio-economic development policy. It is to be hoped that regular repetition of the process will consolidate these advantages.

3.3 Information: The media

From 1974 until 1991, all media of communication in Ethiopia were state owned. A legislative framework to provide for the 'freedom of the press' was introduced by the EPRDF soon after it came to power. However, the close and blurred relation between state and party during the 1990s, gave the ruling party *de facto* control over the state media apparatus and resources. This proved an overwhelming advantage over the opposition. Whilst the Ministry of Information fulfils technical functions of registering journalists and publishers, for instance, its major role is to act as mouthpiece for government. New personnel have been appointed to the Ministry during 2001¹⁰¹, and a shift of style seems to have resulted, with

100. It is to be noted that the MoJ has recently emerged as reluctant to countenance 'networking activities' within the remit of NGOs. This has presented a particular problem in relation to election monitoring and civic education activities in 2000 and 2001. (Interview, Donor, Democracy and Governance Officer, June 2002).

101. The minister at the time of writing is senior in the ANDM, and the Minister d'Etat is a journalist long associated with the TPLF, which she joined in Germany after leaving the EPRP in the early 1980s.

clearer policies adopted in the vigorous dissemination of information, and the improved presentation and range of ETV programmes.

3.3.1 Slowness in the privatisation of radio

The party has further extended the scope of its domination by means of its *de facto* establishment of the major (only) extant formally non-governmental radio station (Radio Fana) and news agency (Walta Information Centre, WIC) from its own pre-existing organs. The considerable appeal of the populist and widely-listened Radio Fana has been a highly effective tool in EPRDF's mobilisation strategy. WIC continues to provide more comprehensive and accessible information than the state sector Ethiopian News Agency, and its website provides an important resource for the domestic, international, and diaspora communities.

Legislation passed in 2001/2 provides the legal framework within which radio stations can now be established by private organisations. A range of licensing applications has been submitted for consideration by the Ministry of Information. None has yet been approved, although WorldSpace's satellite-based digital radio service has been available for some time. Were private radio stations to be established in advance of forthcoming elections, they could be expected to have a significant effect on its conduct, if not its outcome.

3.3.2 The explosive emergence of the private press

After EPRDF came to power, a private press in the form of weekly and monthly newspapers and magazines mushroomed overnight. Ironically, these publications were almost unanimously hostile to the new regime, and all too eager to find fault. A climate of mutual hostility resulted. Inexperience, political passion, and a culture of political exclusion led to exaggeration and misinformation, and give the government reason to crack down with fines, the imprisonment of editors, and closure of newspapers, on the all too recognisable charges of 'dissemination of false information', 'inciting racial hatred' or 'damaging the national interest'. From a peak of 128 publications registered in 1994, there are now fewer than several dozen, a reduction which at least in part must also reflect a level which the market can realistically support.

Those publications which have survived do, within certain limits, criticise the government. The space for such criticism has been seen to widen following the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war. Provided only (as all did) that they gave full support to the government's prosecution of the war, the private press has enjoyed unprecedented freedom to attack both government and ruling party on a range of other issues. Although these papers

were, for much of the 1990s, distributed only in the capital, hardly reaching the major towns where they were often selectively suppressed by the authorities, their circulation in regional towns now seems to be increasing. There are clear indications that this circulation has a significant impact upon the ability of the small-town intelligentsia to follow, and become engaged in, opposition politics¹⁰².

3.3.3 Review of freedom of expression

Critics complain that the lines of press freedom are not clearly drawn in practice, and are currently subject to highly controversial review. Many complained that the Press Law which was drawn up during the Transitional Period included clauses allowing imprisonment of journalists for 'loosely defined and arbitrarily applicable crimes' (including, for instance, that of spreading false accusations against the government). A new draft law has been even more severely criticised, and remained under discussion in early 2003. Meanwhile, private newspapers often face a degree of judicial investigation sufficiently high as to inhibit their normal operations. *The Reporter* newspaper, for instance, has been the subject of a variety of legal proceedings for a range of alleged transgressions, large and small. At best, such cases drain the financial and human resources of the private press. At worst they result in imprisonment and bankruptcy. As a result, independent journalists live under a constant pressure, not a good climate for moderate and modern journalism and a democratic press, nor for a public opinion holding politicians (and newspaper editors) accountable.

3.4 Commercial Activity: the Private Sector

3.4.1 The role of privatisation in economic policy making

The international financial institutions now have little doubt that 'the Government of the FDRE is committed to ensuring that private capital plays a significant role in the economy' (us Department of Trade 2000). To this end, in the mid-1990s the government adopted a Five-Year Development Plan designed to 'enhance agricultural productivity, improve rural infrastructure, encourage private investment, promote participation of the private sector in the economy, mobilize external resources, and pursue appropriate macroeconomic and sectoral policies'. It established the Ethiopian Privatisation Agency to implement a phased privatisation program, issued new laws opening banking and insurance to the domes-

102. Interviews, SNNPNRS and Amhara NRS, June/July 2002.

tic private sector, and, in 1995, started selling state-owned retail shops, hotels, and restaurants. It has 'eliminated discriminatory tax, credit, and foreign trade treatment of the private sector, simplified administrative procedures, and established a clear and consistent set of rules regulating business activities' (*ibid.*).

In June 1996, the government issued a revised investment code which, *inter alia*, 'provides incentives for development-related investments, reduces capital entry requirements for joint ventures and technical consultancy services, creates incentives in the education and health sectors, permits the duty free entry of capital goods (except computers and vehicles), opens the real estate sector to expatriate investors, extends the losses carried forward provision, cuts the capital gains tax from 40 to 10 percent, and gives priority to investors in obtaining land for lease' (*ibid.*). The investment code has been further revised and liberalised on a number of occasions since then.

Ethiopia has privatised approximately 180 properties, mostly small enterprises in trade and other service sectors (including the Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola bottling plants, and the St George Brewery), but also the larger Lega Dembi Gold Mine. Private companies have been involved in protracted negotiations with the government over a range of tenders related to the Kenticha Tantalum Mine, the Calub Gas Company, and the Wonji-Shoa Sugar Factory. In November 1998, the Ethiopian privatisation agency published a list of 114 firms it planned to put up for privatisation in the near future, including breweries, hotels, textile and garment factories, construction and building materials industries, food factories, tanneries, and cotton, tea, and cereal farms. These are being offered for sale, lease, management contract, or joint venture with the Government, although progress since the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war has been slow. None of Ethiopia's utilities has been privatised to date, though the government is looking for foreign investor partners in telecommunications.

3.4.2 Trends in the ownership of assets

The government retains complete ownership of all land. A relatively new legal framework allows the leasing of urban land, the value of which is established by public auction or via pre-set rates established partly in response to the market. In the agricultural sector, the government has abolished pre-existing state marketing boards, which has enabled farmers to sell their crops to the highest bidder¹⁰³. Parts of the market for agricultur-

103. The widely despised fixed prices of the Dergue era have, of course, been equally widely lamented following the widespread collapse of grain prices over the last two years.

al inputs have been liberalized, and coffee marketing has been opened to competition.

The manufacturing sector is dominated by about 150 public enterprises, which account for more than 90 percent of its value. Production from state-owned enterprises is concentrated in food and beverages, textiles, clothing, leather products, tobacco, rubber, plastic, and cement. Private sector manufacturing activity follows a similar pattern. Most of the 165 private sector manufacturing firms are involved in bakery products, pharmaceuticals, textiles, footwear, and furniture production. Only those businesses associated with the ruling party have undertaken investment in 'heavier' manufacturing sectors. In the short term at least, the sustainability of the manufacturing recovery is likely to be influenced by how well the private sector responds to market incentives, as well as by the capacity of public enterprises to adapt to the recently more competitive market environment.

Clearly, the state retains its dominant position in the ownership of key assets. The emerging private sector, resulting from liberalisation and privatisation over the last decade, however, has played an increasing role, particularly with respect to service enterprises and sectors. What critics have called the 'genuine' private sector, however, has been dwarfed by the emergence of two powerful blocs: the so-called 'party-associated enterprises', the activities and role of which are documented in the following section, and the Midroc business 'empire' owned by the Saudi-Ethiopian business magnate, Sheikh Mohammed Alamoudi. Beyond these two areas, it seems clear that the private sector has not grown to the extent that it represents an effective voice in the political arena. It has, for instance, been little able to lobby to effect change in policy making, with the possible exception of the case of land lease arrangements which were substantively revised soon after their initial promulgation¹⁰⁴. Forthcoming battlegrounds are likely to relate to new taxation legislation, which requires investors and private citizens to make a complete register of their assets, and to the introduction of a system of VAT. It is noteworthy that the National Chamber of Commerce was involved in the consultations regarding the formulation of the PRSP, to which process it made a submission.

Midroc has emerged as a disproportionately large player both in establishing new ventures, and in the purchase of privatised state enterprises¹⁰⁵. It is noteworthy that of the large-scale privatisations so far conducted, all have been bought up by Midroc – the best known being the

104. Although one may suggest that the lobbying of the international community, in particular the World Bank, is likely to have been more influential in this case.

105. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the Midroc group accounts for some 60% of foreign direct investment since 1991.

Lega Dembi gold mine. In addition to a range of privatised enterprises, Midroc has been active in construction, service, and manufacturing sectors, with the construction of the highly visible Sheraton Hotel a flagship, and apparently loss-making, prestige project. Much speculation has focussed on the generously financed Midroc investment programme. It now operates on a sufficiently large scale as to have resulted in the adoption of an unofficial government and party decision against joint ventures which might (be seen to) further encourage its dominance.

3.4.3 Party-associated enterprises

3.4.3.1 EFFORT and Endeavour: structures, strategies, and sectors

The Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) was established in 1995 as ‘a means of co-ordinating the effective developmental use of the material and cash resources in the possession of the TPLF at the end of the war with the Dergue’¹⁰⁶. The foundation, registered in Tigray under the regional Bureau of Justice, is governed by a 32-member Board of Directors elected from the TPLF and its mass associations; it is managed by an Executive Committee whose seven members have also been members of the TPLF Central Committee¹⁰⁷. The resources deployed by the Foundation have included machinery and equipment either purchased or captured by the TPLF during the war, as well as some equipment supplied through REST cross-border programmes, including vehicles and spare parts.

Resources have, according to EFFORT Board member interviewed March 1998, been used firstly to support the families of TPLF fighters who lost their lives during the war, or fighters who received rehabilitation at the end of the war (some 35,000 initially received such support), and secondly to establish commercial enterprises designed ‘to kick-start key sectors of economic development and industrialisation in the region’. This second element of the strategy was reportedly designed to ‘fill a gap’, on the assumptions that: typically small and cautious local private investors were likely to shy away from the new agro-industrial sector; neither regional nor federal government had the resources to establish an industrial base in the country, and state-led investment would in any case be frowned upon by the international community; a poor peasantry would

106. Interview with EFFORT Board member, Addis Ababa, March 1998.

107. In the wake of the corruption allegations pursued by the Anti-Corruption Commission, ACC, some of which have been levelled at EFFORT executives, it has been decided to restrict TPLF oversight to the Board, making separate professional appointments to the Executive Committee in an attempt at improving control through the separation of management and oversight functions (interview, Addis Ababa, April 2002).

produce only meagre savings; and, finally, NGOs were ‘unreliable’.

Sectors of activity include, but are not limited to: agriculture (Hiwet Mechanisation), with particular emphasis on the rehabilitation of the Humera area¹⁰⁸; trading (Guna Trading House) reportedly to improve supply to remote areas, ensure a market for crops such as cotton and sesame, and seek to loosen traditionally existing monopolies; cement production (Mesebo Cement Factory, authorized capital 240 million birr as at August 1996) to reduce the regional costs of this critical resource and promote spin-off industries; textiles and garmenting (Almeda Factory, authorized capital 180 million birr) to maximize the processing of locally available resources for the domestic and export markets; livestock and leather (Sheba Tannery, authorized capital 40 million birr; proposed meat factory) also to concentrate on the processing of materials for export within the local economy; mining and exploration (Meskerem, Ezana) for base metals and industrial minerals; transport and public transport (Trans-Ethiopia Share Co., TESCO, authorized capital 100 million birr; Selam Bus Co.) to ensure adequate servicing of remote areas; engineering, construction, and consultancy (Mesfin Engineering; Sur Construction, authorized capital 100 million birr; Addis Consultancy, Addis Engineering); and the finance sectors (Wegagen Bank, Africa Insurance), where EFFORT’s investment is complemented by that of parallel structures from other regions, notably Endeavour in Amhara NRS¹⁰⁹.

EFFORT management claims a range of laudable development objectives. For instance, that one of its primary objectives is the recruitment of new investment to the region, and many of its initiatives – including some of those listed above – are joint ventures: the best known of these is the Addis Pharmaceuticals Factory in Adigrat (authorized capital, 180 million birr) the controlling share of which is owned by an Amhara entrepreneur. For this reason EFFORT has not been involved in the purchase of government enterprises under privatisation. Other strategies for the recruitment of capital have reportedly involved opening up new sectors, geographical areas, and markets for others to follow, and establishing a core of skilled workers and experienced consultants/supervisors. As a result EFFORT

108. Which had been abandoned during the Ethio-Eritrean war, and is regarded as critical to food security in the region

109. Whilst this review enumerates the activities of EFFORT in Tigray, these are paralleled by less advanced operations in Amhara, Oromia and SNNPRSS. In Amhara NRS the parallel endowment fund ‘Endeavour’ was established in 1996, and owns a substantial stake, or majority shares in the following companies: Ambasel Trading House; Blue Nile Transport Company; Zeleke Agricultural Mechanisation (commercial agriculture in the Metemma area); and Dashen Brewery, a joint Franco-Ethiopian venture in Kombolcha. In Oromia, Dinsho Trading House acts as an ad hoc umbrella for party-orchestrated commercial activities, including those of Biftu Trading House. In the SNNPRSS, Wondo Trading house deals in coffee and fertilizer.

claim that many of their supported ventures incorporate technology transfer, skills development and training, with most external suppliers of equipment also required to take on responsibilities in these areas. To date, projects are estimated to have generated around 6,000 permanent, and around 13–14,000 temporary jobs, with EFFORT headquarters employing around 40 staff.

3.4.3.2 *Political and economic implications*

The large scale, selection of key sectors, and strategic integration of these activities have been emphasised by EFFORT and Regional Government sources keen to spell out their socio-economic potential. They are, on the other hand, precisely the causes of the anxiety of those many observers who fear the political and economic implications of the concentration of such economic power in the hands of a body effectively controlled by the TPLF. These critics allege the emergence of new monopolistic and unfair trading practices by the ruling party¹¹⁰. The policy of aggressive development of non-governmental as well as governmental channels for socio-economic development in Tigray lies squarely within the tradition of TPLF strategic thinking which sees the strength of the movement as intrinsically bound up with the socio-economic advancement it can (be seen to) offer its constituents.

Little formal research has been carried out to measure the impact of activities of party-affiliated companies upon the sectors where they are active. A recent exception is a study commissioned by the federal Ministry of Transport and Communication¹¹¹ (RTA 2000), which comments adversely on the impact of the large party operators upon market competition. The report concludes bluntly:

[t]he road transport market is today almost completely deregulated [but] in fact characterised by a situation of imperfect competition. [...] In particular in freight transport, the presence of three large conglomerates of operators [...] in different ways exert some oligopolistic influence in the market. [...] Only 11 private companies have been registered after deregulation. New individual companies may be discouraged to enter the market because of the presence of share companies deriving from regional development associations [namely TESCO and Blue Nile], which could be poten-

110. In its defence EFFORT sources are quick to claim that the organization does not have a monopoly in any of the sectors in which it operates, and that, unlike most businesses it is motivated not by the desire simply to make money, but by the mandate continually to move on to develop new sectors which others would otherwise be unwilling or unable to work in, because of existing levels of underdevelopment.

111. Hardly an obvious opponent of ruling party policy.

tially favoured for public tenders. There is a rather pervasive discouragement to owners operating independently.

The extent of the competition and monopoly/oligopoly-related problems emerges yet more clearly, when one considers the nature of the freight moved by the transport sector, with most work carried out either for the state sector, or (in the case of major volumes of fertilizer) for other party-associated companies such as Guna, Ambasel, and Dinsho. It seems unlikely that, unless it undergoes a radical transformation, the party will take on board these concerns, given its attitudes towards pluralism, and its insistence that these enterprises benefit ‘all of the people of their respective regions’. It needs little imagination, however, to envisage the difficulties which might beset the timely distribution of fertilizer, for instance, to weredas or zones which, after election, were administered by representatives of political parties *other* than those with which these key trading and distribution companies are so closely, if non-formally, associated.

A new focus of criticism has however been directed at the strategy in view of the economic downturn in the wake of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict. In addition to concerns that the party’s strategy has concentrated too much economic power in its own hands, and that it has worked against the development of open competition, observers now additionally question the quality of the economic decision-making upon which the strategy was formulated and pursued. A number of flagship projects in Tigray¹¹², for instance, are now roundly criticised as having been ‘over ambitious’, and designed beyond the possible scale of regional, let alone local, markets. It seems clear that the ongoing stand-off between the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments radically changes the market environment within which many of these projects were initially designed and drawn up¹¹³.

3.5 Implications and trends ‘beyond the state’

3.5.1 Participation in associational life

The period since 1991 has seen the dramatic growth of organisations in many parts of the non-governmental sphere. Private newspapers, Ethio-

112. The Mesobo Cement, Almeda Textiles/Garmenting, and Addis Pharmaceuticals factories foremost amongst them.

113. Although the regional government maintains that of the projects implemented, all are expected to bring benefits in the medium to long term, with the possible exception of Addis Pharmaceuticals, from which the local value-added is insignificant. (EFFORT Board Member, interviewed Mekelle, July 2002).

pian NGOs, Chambers of Commerce, and Churches and Mosques have mushroomed. Commercial activity, particularly in the construction and service sectors, has also been visible in the new urban centres of decentralised government. Nevertheless, a range of constraints also operates. Primary amongst these is the fact that the state still has a bulky presence in the commercial, developmental, and media sectors, often leaving relatively meagre and difficult space, for private competitors.

3.5.1.1 *Women*

Since the fall of the Dergue, a number of women/gender-focused NGOs have been established in Ethiopia.¹¹⁴ A recent study of these organisations shows that 80 percent of them were involved in some kind of micro-enterprise, micro-lending or income generating work for their beneficiaries.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the study reveals a number of observed weaknesses with these NGOs, notably: donor dependency; absence of networking among themselves; insufficient access to media; urban concentration or operational areas; lack of organisational and management efficiency; and absence of effort to work for political participation of women. In the sphere of professional associations, however, a number of women's bodies have emerged, to represent, for instance, women lawyers, and women entrepreneurs.

3.5.1.2 *The business community*

As discussed above, the business community has felt itself to be squeezed on two sides: firstly by the two big commercial empires; and secondly by the threat to local manufacture represented by cheap imports. As domestic shoe and garment production, for instance, has been threatened by imports from Asia, producers have felt the government to be insufficiently supportive. The government, meanwhile, regards the private sector as insufficiently creative or entrepreneurial. These issues have encouraged the formation of more combative Chambers of Commerce, which have proliferated with several being established in the regions.

3.5.1.3 *Those beyond the reach of NGOs*

As noted above, Ethiopian NGOs tend to concentrate their activities in and around urban centres and the major road network. This means that those communities described in the previous section as marginalised often lie

114. There were 19 women/gender NGOs registered with the Minister of Justice in 1999. Among the most visible are: Women Aid Ethiopia (WAE), Ethiopian Women Entrepreneurs Association (EWEA), Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), Women Industrialist Association (WIA), Women Empowerment and Assistance Forum (WEAF), Women in Development (WID), and Women in Self-Employment (WISE).

115. "Women-focused NGOs in Ethiopia", by Meron Genene, InterAfrica Group, Addis Ababa.

beyond their scope. Whereas in a number of countries, the NGO sector tends to focus on ‘peripheral’ and marginalised communities, in Ethiopia this remains more true of the international than the national NGO group.

3.5.2 Human rights and the space outside the state

Perhaps the most pressing issue concerning the various non-government actors is that of adequate legal protection. NGOs feel themselves encumbered by an oppressive regulatory framework; meanwhile private investment is curtailed – particularly in rural areas – because of perceived inadequacies in the protection of investments, assets, and commercial rights provided by the local courts and police. Most controversial of all, of course, has been the legal protection of private journalists and editors, a number of whom have faced summary imprisonment as well as multiple proceedings and crippling fines through the courts.

3.5.3 Prospects for the future operation of power in the sphere of civil society

It seems likely that the state and party will gradually withdraw further from commercial and developmental activity, leaving greater space for private actors, whilst retaining firm control over regulatory frameworks, and resources such as land leases, and licenses. In the NGO sector, the international NGOs, and donor communities have operated as models and facilitators of indigenous development, such that many Ethiopian NGOs have emerged as copies of their international brothers. In some instances those links to role models and funders have served to erode the strength of local NGO commitment to the communities they are designed to serve. Meanwhile religious institutions, also receiving significant flows of funds from outside Ethiopia, seem likely to continue to flourish, strengthening their links with devout communities.

‘ye mengist’: state and government

CHAPTER 4

4.1 The nature of the Ethiopian State

4.1.1 *The imperial and military past*

The Ethiopian Empire has been called a classic example of an ‘ethnocratic state’ (Markakis 1987). On this account, the distribution of power in the imperial state was based on an ethnic calculus that gave a near monopoly to the Amhara, or Amharicised, ruling class. The class dimension needs to be emphasised, because the Amhara peasantry belonged to the dominant group in cultural and psychological terms only, having no share of power or economic privilege. Invariably, access to state power controls access to economic privilege and social status. The main economic resource in Ethiopia being land, control over it was the foundation of the imperial political economy. The defining features of that system were the exclusion of the mass of the population from the process of government, and the economic exploitation of the producers by an ethnically defined ruling class, into which some other elites assimilated. Furthermore, the imperial regime practised a crude form of cultural suppression that sought to deny, if not erase, the identity of all subordinate ethnic groups in its domain.

The imperial state was founded on an explosive conjunction of antagonistic class and ethnic divisions that made it inherently unstable. To stabilise it, the state administration during the long rule of Haile Selassie I (1917–1974) became highly centralised and bureaucratised, and Ethiopia built the largest army in black Africa with material support from the United States. The third quarter of the twentieth century was marked by a series of violent conflicts in which subordinate groups challenged the imperial regime. The military was used against ethnic and regional rebellions in Tigray, Eritrea, Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo and Gojjam provinces, until the army itself rebelled and overthrew the Emperor in 1974.

Ethnicity in Ethiopia reached political maturity during the reign of the military regime, and all political forces that emerged during that troubled period were obliged to take account of this phenomenon. The main reason was the growth and politicisation of the intelligentsia among subordinate ethnic groups. One of the Dergue's unheralded achievements was a rapid expansion of the state educational system, and increased participation of minorities in it with the help of special programmes and quotas. The tenfold expansion of the military establishment at the same time made its own contribution to the growth and politicisation of the intelligentsia. Other factors also contributed. The collapse of the imperial regime revealed the fault lines in the foundations of the Ethiopian state and called forth visions of other geopolitical arrangements among those who had no reason to be committed to its preservation.

The Dergue's promotion of ethnic cultural emancipation, its denunciation of Abyssinian chauvinism, the reiterated proclamations concerning the equality of all groups and the right of nationalities to self-government, the introduction of local languages in the literacy campaign, the accounting of linguistic and religious diversity in the population census, and the constitutional provision for autonomous regions, all tended to sharpen the political profile of ethnicity. The regime's omission, however, was to ignore the political significance of this factor. Initially, it chose to confront ethnicity as a cultural issue, and set about redressing the wrongs of the past. Subsequently, the rise of militant regional and ethnic opposition movements gave the issue a political urgency that could not be ignored, and compelled the regime to seek constitutional solutions. Futile though it turned out to be, the Dergue's constitutional exercise raised the nationality issue to the constitutional level, and linked it intrinsically with the principle of decentralisation of state power. It had become clear by this time that any future resolution of this issue in Ethiopia would have to be based on this principle.

Twelve years ago, then, the incoming Transitional Government of Ethiopia inherited a centralized, authoritarian state, and the ruins of a command economy. Conflict had engulfed much of Ethiopia and the Horn for several decades by the time the Dergue was overthrown in 1991. It had centred upon control of the state, since the state exercised a virtual monopoly over access to all kinds of resources and decision-making. Conflict precipitated very large movements of refugee and internally displaced populations in and around Ethiopia. Each of the various sets of reforms on which the regime embarked was justified by it as a means of reducing conflict. The most dramatic, perhaps, was process of constitutional change.

4.1.2 A federation of nine regional states

The constitution must be regarded not only as a legal document, but also as a political statement of purpose, which must therefore be interpreted realistically in the context of political power relations pertaining. (Vice-President of the Federal Supreme Court, interviewed March 1998).

The Constitution of the FDRE was drawn up by a Commission established by a conference of political and ethnic groupings convened after the departure of the Dergue regime in 1991. Adopted in mid-1995, it established a federation of nine National Regional States (NRSs) drawn along the lines of Ethiopia's major language groups and enjoying full rights of 'self-determination up to and including secession', along with two cities (Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa) administered by the Federal Government. The nine States (Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Harar, Oromia, Somali, SNNPRS (in full the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' National Regional State, or Southern Region), and Tigray) are dramatically asymmetrical in terms of every social indicator, with vast differences in demographic distribution and profile, developmental indices, resources, and so on¹¹⁶. In constitutional terms, the federation is itself asymmetric, with slightly different administrative and political arrangements marking the representation of populations notably in Harar (where elections to part of the legislature are, exceptionally, open to an electorate living beyond the State's borders), and in the SNNPRS (which forms a federation within a federation, with legislative, executive, and representative bodies existing at sub-regional levels¹¹⁷).

4.1.3 The nature of the federation

During the Transitional Period it was clear that regional and national governments were subordinate to the central Transitional Government, TGE (Proclamation 7/1992, Art.3(3)). This changed abruptly with the adoption of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, FDRE, which specifies that 'all powers not given expressly to the Federal Government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States, are reserved to the States' (Art.52(1)). Over and above debate about the political reality the constitution frames, there is also disagreement as to the formal significance of this arrangement. Brietzke's view is that the

116. A useful review of developmental and political indicators is given in Hawes, et al. (1998) 'summary report', 'federal context' and 'statistical tables'.

117. This situation is also replicated in those other regions which include 'Special' Weredas or Zones for ethnic representation, such as, for instance, Waag Himra, Agew Midir, and Oromia special zones in Amhara NRS.

combination of residual powers to the States, and the 'right of secession of nations and nationalities' (Art.39) constitutes something 'more like a transnational treaty such as the Treaty of Rome [...] than a nation-state' (1994:18–24)¹¹⁸. The constitutionally enshrined fiction that the arrangement reflects the spontaneous coming together of pre-existing nationality-based polities is, of course, fundamentally at variance with the history of the process which was, as in Cohen's analysis, 'a product of the centre which could [also] reverse [it]' (1995:165)¹¹⁹. This contradiction parallels the bizarre combination of circumstances at the outset of the Transitional Period. In 1991 different ethnic groups had clearly sought self-determination to a highly asymmetrical degree, such that a number were – in a striking conceptual contortion – effectively 'granted' a 'right of self-determination' which they had not previously claimed (cf. Andreas Esheté 1992:11). This marked an attempt to translate iniquity of political history and demands, into equity of future provision. The asymmetries which characterised the transition continue to be of significance in the political power structure in Ethiopia; meanwhile struggles over the autonomy and identity of the self-determining 'selves' increasingly define the territory of contemporary political, administrative, and economic conflict¹²⁰.

4.1.4 Self-determination and secession

FDRE Constitutional Art.39(5) defines 'a nation, nationality or people [...] as] a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory'¹²¹. The arti-

118. Although he goes on to stress (1994:33) that 'in jurisprudential terms the apparent absence of an Ethiopian attachment to westernised positivism or natural law is actually an advantage because it facilitates purposive (unionist) interpretations of modifications of the [then] Draft Constitution'. Thus also Lister (1998:16) 'a legalistic approach to implementation could throw up all sorts of difficulties in precisely defining the power and jurisdiction of the of Federal and Regional Government. Disputes over jurisdiction would need to be settled in the courts or by the Federal Council [HoF]. But this is only one possible scenario. The constitution provides for reciprocal delegation of power, and it may equally be possible for Federal and Regional Governments to work together within the Constitution on the basis of common interests and consensus'.

119. This was also Brietzke's analysis.

120. Ethnic self-determination elicited virulent opposition and accusations of 'dismemberment of the mother country' in 1991. By 1998 this anger had become a common dismissal along the lines that 'EPRDF has not done anything new: the history of the Zemana Mesafent (or so-called Era of the Princes) demonstrates that Ethiopia has always fallen back into its regional components, because it breaks into its natural entities in times of trouble' (interviews, March 1998). By the time of the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, for instance, the locus of intellectual dispute had shifted to the question of 'what constitutes a natural entity?' The impact of the war has again shifted the terms of the debate both within the opposition and at the level of the party.

121. It adopts precisely the criteria famously set out in Stalin's treatise *On Nations and Nationalities*, reproduced in Hutchinson & Smith (1994).

cle goes on to spell out the right of self-determination pertaining to these units in linguistic, cultural, and political terms. The most controversial component of the article, however, is of course the unconditionality of the right of self-determination which provides for secession (sub.Art.(1)) following carefully specified procedures (sub.Art.(4)). Most commentators, including Brietzke *op.cit.*, now agree that the attainment of secession has been constitutionally circumscribed in ways as to render its achievement exceptionally difficult¹²². Parallels have been drawn with a 'tradition' of Marxist-Leninist regimes which, having offered self-determination to minority communities to gain their support for revolution, have subsequently ensured that it cannot be used as a means to escape the post-revolutionary orbit (cf., for instance, Walker Connor 1994). On the other hand, it seems that the inclusion of the right to secession was intended as far more than a psychological sop to the apprehensions of those communities or movements still smarting in 1991 from a history of marginalisation. Those who interpreted the incorporation of the right as a device simply to secure the participation of the Oromo Liberation Front, OLF, in the TGE, underestimated the strength of feeling on this issue amongst EPRDF organisations and particularly their older constituencies.

4.1.5 Division of powers and functions between State and Federal Governments

It is important to note that, in comparison with the more specific Proclamation 7/1992 of the TGE, which first established the National Self-Governments, the FDRE constitutional provisions establishing the NRSS give a skeleton framework only. The *status quo* established by the Transitional Proclamation had, until relatively recently, seen little adjustment since 1995, with State constitutions (and legislation) demonstrating little or no variation from the Federal model. This situation has been heavily influenced by the unmitigated dominance of the ruling party, bureaucratic inertia, and relatively greater capacity constraints within the regions. The essential legal point is that its perpetuation is not necessitated by constitutional provision¹²³.

Formally, States enjoy residual powers under the Constitution. In addition to Art.51, which enumerates the powers and functions reserved to the Federal Government, however, the major effective check upon NRSS' power is embodied in its Chapter 10, which sets out National Poli-

122. Secession requires a two-thirds majority vote of the legislative council of the nationality concerned, followed by a majority vote in a popular referendum, and can follow only upon the transfer of federal responsibilities to the seceding unit, and the division of assets between the two.

123. Constitutional detail seems to have been deliberately avoided with a view to facilitating the graduate evolutions of NRSS along individual paths, as has to some extent been seen in Harar and SNNP/NRS.

cy Principles and Objectives binding on Federal and State Government bodies alike. In combination with Art.51(2) (which reserves to the federal government the power to 'formulate and implement the policies, strategies and plans in respect of over all economic, social and developmental matters') and Art.51(3) (regarding the establishment and implementation of 'national standards and basic policy criteria for health, education' etc.), these vague and overarching principled provisions offer the Federal Government scope for extensive policy leverage – effectively even veto – over the States. The constitutional framework is, of course, bolstered in favour of the federal government, by a financial balance of power decisively tipped towards the centre: no more (and often much less) than 10% of revenues of the Regional States are generated by them.

Reactions to developments during the 2000 (federal, state) and 2001 (*wereda, kebele*) elections have begun to suggest the potentially far-reaching implications of this complex constitutional sharing of powers and responsibilities. To date, opposition candidates elected to office at *wereda* and *kebele* levels (particularly in the SNNP/NRS) have sought to do little in terms of formulation or implementation of distinctive local policies¹²⁴. In principle, however, it would be possible for a future Federal government (whether or not dominated by one political organisation) to use the constitutional provisions described above as a basis for withholding Federal subsidy from localities administered by alternative parties, on the basis that the policies pursued by those organisations were not in accordance with the framework set out by the Federal Government¹²⁵. On the other hand, the calculation of the federal subsidy is supposed to be made on the basis of a combination of factors including population, development indices, revenue generating capacity, etc., under the jurisdiction of the HoF: it makes no reference to federally-agreed policy frameworks. On the face of it, this apparent clash of constitutional principles could make a mockery of pluralism in devolution.

124. Recently, for instance, in weredas around Tepi town, Sheka zone of SNNP/NRS during March/April 2002, controversy has focussed around the newly elected Sheko-Majengir Party's determination to disarm militia and police within the *wereda* in which its officials were elected, apparently intended as a means of securing their authority, rather than on any radical departures in socio-economic policy-making.

125. This point was made by a senior EPRDF politburo member, interviewed in April 2002, a fact which only increases the potentially extraordinary politico-economic significance which this issue could assume. The move to a system of budget block grants to weredas in a context where some additional weredas might be administered by the opposition following new elections, could make a spectacular political battleground of the development budget. It is more than likely that Federal Ministries might invoke the binding character and moral authority of their agreements with donors (the major source of federal subsidy being, of course, multilateral and bilateral development funding, negotiated between the Federal government and donor community) as a further safeguard against loss of control of resources to localities outside the ruling political orbit.

Two points of friction have already emerged over the last decade, regarding the relative authority of Federal and State governments and judiciary, one of which directly concerns jurisdiction over the federal subsidy. The Office of the Federal Auditor General, OFAG, was established by Proclamation 26 (March 1997), and is appointed by, and accountable to, the HPR. It is responsible *inter alia* to carry out (or have carried out)

- audits of all Federal Offices' accounts;
- audits of all accounts involving budget subsidies or special grants extended by the Federal government to the States.

The closure and auditing of accounts of national ministries were, at the outset of the TGE up to nine years behind schedule in some instances, and the OFAG made great progress towards closing the backlog by 1999, with resident auditors operating in the MoF (now MoFRED)¹²⁶. Regarding the second area of OFAG's mandate, however, that of auditing the expenditure of Federal subsidies and grants transferred to the States, the office has experienced what it calls 'a disparity between what the law says and the reality'¹²⁷. To varying degrees States have been resistant to federal auditing powers which, whilst set out in Proclamation 26, are not specified in constitutional Art.101 as pertaining to budget subsidies and grants to the States. Resistance does not seem to have been uniform, with – interestingly – the better-established NRS governments refusing access outright, whilst the weakest administrations petition OFAG to send additional personnel and resources to support their almost non-existent auditing capacity. Up to 1998, no overall audit of budget subsidy had been carried out in a number of key States, with only partial work completed in other States.

The second point of friction arises in the judicial arena, and relates to Art.10 of Federal Proclamation 25, which gives the Federal Supreme Court power of cassation over final decisions of the Regional Supreme Courts in cases where they contain a 'fundamental error of law'. This federal legislation is not clearly supported by constitutional provision, and has been challenged by the State courts¹²⁸. It seems unlikely that this issue will be resolved in advance of pressing practical need.

126. More recent information was unavailable in April 2002: it seems still to be that case, however, that federal accounts fulfil primarily historical functions rather than informing decision-making.

127. Interview, Addis Ababa, 5 March 1998.

128. According to the Vice President of the Federal Supreme Court, interviewed March 1998, the matter was discussed in early 1998 by the Plenum of the Federal Supreme Court (or Council of Courts) comprising the President, Vice-President and Judges of the Federal Supreme, High, and First Instance Courts, and the Presidents of the State Supreme Courts.

4.2 The (re)organisation of the Executive under federalism

Many of us thought the Ethiopian state on the verge of collapse in 1991: well, far from it! The state is stronger and stronger and, as throughout its modern history, Ethiopia's problem is not too little government but too much. (International observer, interviewed February 2000).

In the wake of the split in the ruling party in 2001, and coincident with the 'renewal process' subsequent to it, a number of steps have been taken to reorganise and consolidate the executive. A point of overall importance concerns the decision by the ruling party to abandon the policy of appointing technocrat ministers, now making only political appointments to ministerial portfolios. This is discussed in further detail in the section on state-party relations below.

4.2.1 *Federal Ministries and Superministries*

A series of new federal 'superministries' has been established during 2001/2, a number of which have been replicated at regional and local levels. This step seems to have been designed to rationalise responsibility for oversight of a range of priority areas of socio-economic development by placing them under the remit of the newly created:

Ministry for Capacity Building
Ministry of Infrastructure Development
Ministry of Rural Development, and
Ministry of Federal Affairs

The oversight and co-ordination functions of these new ministries (a full list of federal ministries, superministries, and the executive agencies reporting to each is given in Appendix) had previously been undertaken by a series of political advisors to the Prime Minister, PM, or by departments within the PM's Office, PMO. The establishment of these new structures can be interpreted as a move to expand, entrench and strengthen the institutionalisation of state executive structures, establishing 'accountable' civil service bodies to replace more personalised political advisory functions. It also represents a clear move to divest the PMO of large tracts of its oversight responsibilities, spreading these between the four new senior ministers who, together with the PM, can be seen to constitute a new core leadership of the government's development programme.

It is worth noting the close parallels between the mandates given the new ministries, and the preoccupation of ongoing discussions to advance

the elaboration and adoption of a series of party, and thus government, policy frameworks. New policies on Human Resource Development, and Rural Development were finalised in 2002, and their Amharic texts are publicly available. Party policy on Urban Development and Industrialisation remained on the agenda for discussion, along with two other areas of policy-making of more than average interest: democratisation and security¹²⁹.

It is currently difficult to establish how these structures will develop, since much of 2001 and 2002 was spent in discussions about their establishment, and the policies which will guide their activities. They existed in skeleton form only, with personnel only beginning to be assigned in mid-2002, or to move from evaluation and planning into operational activities. It is to be hoped that these last will now start to gather speed. The lengthy period from late 2000, since when senior political personnel have been effectively mired in meetings, seems to have had a detrimental effect both on political psychology and on state sector implementation capacity at all levels.

A few tentative comments and observations may be made regarding the Federal Ministries.

The Ministry of Federal Affairs is perhaps of particular interest to Sida in terms of the critical roles it plays in the areas of decentralisation, urban/rural relations, inter-state relations and conflict resolution, and support to the weaker peripheral regions. The Ministry of Federal Affairs comprises two divisions, dealing with Regional State relations, and with Urban Development. The latter, with which the Minister seems to be primarily pre-occupied, bears direct responsibility for the activities of the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city administrations, and plays the lead (facilitatory) role in the development of new policy directions in relation to municipal/urban development throughout the states¹³⁰. The other wing of the Ministry is involved in conflict resolution within and between regional states, and includes departments dealing with, amongst other things 'democratisation', 'decentralisation', and support for the four weaker regions of Afar, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella¹³¹. Recent

129. Interview with EPRDF politburo member, March 2002.

130. New focus in this area of policy development seems to represent a significant shift in EPRDF thinking which had, until recently, given almost exclusive emphasis only to rural areas. The apparently disappointing results of Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation, ADLI, together with concerns about the agricultural marketing infrastructure in the wake of recent price collapses may have contributed to a radical re-think. For further details see 'Municipal Decentralization in Ethiopia: A Rapid Assessment', World Bank, February 2002.

131. One of the changes of policy adopted by the Federal government in the last year relates to the status of federal advisers to these four regions: whilst technical advice is still offered by the federal government to the NRS bureaux, the category of political advisors to the NRS Executives has been formally removed.

conflicts between the Afar and Somali Issa¹³², which disrupted traffic along the main Djibouti road in the Gewane area in April–May 2002 and at various points since then, have elicited the attention of the Ministry, with the Minister issuing stern statements regarding the severity of the consequences of any escalation of conflict¹³³. The Ministry is also directly responsible for the activities of the Federal Police and for Federal Prisons. Finally, because of its role in supporting those peripheral regions, which are home to the majority of Ethiopia's pastoralists, the MoFedA has been given responsibility for the elaboration of new policies on pastoralism and pastoral development¹³⁴.

The Ministry of Rural Development is headed by the former President of Amhara NRS. His appointment has been welcomed by those who saw Amhara NRS as unusually effective, ambitious, and receptive to innovation and devolution in rural development¹³⁵. Also established is a Ministry of Capacity Building, to which the Ministry of Education reports. Whilst at the time of writing it remains too early to assess the role of this pivotal body, some concerns have been voiced regarding the 'co-ordination role' this ministry is beginning to exercise over the allocation of resources to other government offices. The government's failure to fill the vacant post of Minister for Women's Affairs has generated some concern that it plans to abolish the office¹³⁶.

Much speculation about the reorganisation of the executive at federal level concerns possible evidence of the decline of Tigrayan influence. Observers disagree about the overall impact of the change, some noting that a core of ministries and agencies key to the security and stability of

132. Such conflicts, which have traditionally governed access to shrinking grazing lands at this time of year, have been exacerbated by the fact that demarcation of State borders implies the replacement of overlapping and shifting access with a series of mutually exclusive ethnic jurisdictions. This is only the newest instance of a problem which first confronted the lowland areas of the Horn of Africa at the time of its partition by the colonial powers, including Ethiopia, in the late 19th century.

133. The federal government has been exasperated and angered by evidence that the government of Afar NRS has been involved in the provision of (at least) logistical support in the conflict, for instance in the form of vehicles to transport dead and wounded Afar fighters from the conflict areas.

134. Interest in pastoralism, from government, NGOs and donors, has recently increased dramatically. It seems likely that government concern is at least partly caused by political and security considerations to do with disaffection amongst the porous, mobile, and marginal communities on Ethiopia's borders, particularly in the wake of EPLF-backed agitation since 1998. Whilst the recent growth in discussion and debate regarding pastoralism is to be welcomed, concerns still focus upon continuing government enthusiasm for 'voluntary' settlement as a primary strategy.

135. One example of such openness and responsiveness is Amhara's adoption in 1996/7 of a policy to lease hillsides to individuals or groups for income generation from environmentally sustainable tree-planting, an idea first developed and piloted in the NGO sector.

136. Whilst many who followed developments regarding gender issues remained largely unconvinced of the effectiveness of the role, the potential importance and usefulness of the office is widely agreed upon.

the state are still controlled by Tigrigna-speakers loyal to the Prime Minister. The point is of some interest, although the value of extended analysis in these terms is doubtful.

4.2.2 Developments in the National Regional States

In common with the policy change at federal level, cabinet members of the EPRDF-controlled regional executives are also now all political rather than technical appointments. A further development of the recent period has consolidated the formal separation of powers of State executive and State legislature by means of the constitutional provision for, and appointment of, NRS Parliamentary Speakers. The change means that the States now enjoy a structure similar to that of the Federal Government. In the absence of the office of NRS Speaker, the lack of separation of powers, and the *de facto* dual role in the parliamentary leadership of NRS Executive Officers was regarded as problematic.

If concern is currently felt about the extent to which federal government activity has been curtailed by political and policy meetings, worries are significantly more serious regarding State (NRS) government activity. Although such periods of suspended animation are not entirely new in EPRDF-administered Ethiopia, this one has been of more than usual concern. In so far as evaluations and dismissals within the various components of the party structure continue in the coming months, this kind of paralysis can be expected to continue to be a feature of NRS government life. Two related changes have been recently effected in the structure of government within the States. The first is the abolition or curtailment of the zonal level of administration; the second is the move to a system of block grants, which (as of the Ethiopian Financial Year beginning July 2002) pass directly from the States to the weredas¹³⁷.

The idea of *wereda* block grants, and devolution of budgeting, expenditure and accounting, has been a stated objective of government decentralisation for much of the last decade. What is new is the abrupt shift to this system, which had been expected to be phased-in over a significantly more extended period. In Tigray, for instance, this kind of approach had been piloted in the UNICEF-supported *Wereda* Integrated Basic Services, WIBS, and Irish Aid Community Development Fund, CDF, programmes. Plans for a gradual expansion of the approach following phased evaluations of these projects have now been short-circuited, and there are

137. Zones will still be involved in the budget process in the SNNPRNS, and in the case of 'special zones' where in accordance with the constitution zonal representatives are elected rather than appointed, and have a political as well as an administrative function, such zones constituting 'units of nationality-based self-determination'. The levels of discretion and resources at their disposal however have been significantly curtailed.

concerns regarding the capacity for a rapid outward shift in financial responsibility.

The sudden change of policy seems to be related to a second change: the government's determination to demonstrate a loosening up (in fact, a curtailment) of central and zonal control within the regions, in parallel with a diminution of the relative influence enjoyed by central party officials (influential at federal, NRS, and ethnic zonal levels) as opposed to local officials. The change can be expected to have a convulsive effect on local development processes, either galvanising them into new life, or potentially effecting a paralysis. Developments in this area over the immediate and mid-term periods will constitute perhaps the single most important aspect of the Ethiopian state's political, social, and economic evolution. Sida's extended period of engagement with the development process in a number of weredas in Amhara NRS where this devolved approach had previously been most advanced, is an invaluable resource. It seems imperative that the Agency now seek a programme of collaboration which will consolidate and expand upon its knowledge of progress in this critical development arena.

Wereda-level administration capacity, especially in the north of the country, suffered a great jolt at the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in 1998, with the call-up of large numbers of more experienced personnel, including a large majority of those holding elected office. The effect of the temporary removal, or permanent loss, of this key human resource has never been quantified. If progress is to be made towards the developmental objectives shared by Sida and the Ethiopian government, the capacity building programme which might reverse the effects of these great losses will be essential.

Dispensing with zonal involvement in the administration of local government budgets will have a dramatic impact. It does not, however, seem to involve the abolition of those zones per se, with many zonal offices now re-constituted as 'branches' of NRS government bodies. New personnel have recently been assigned to the zones in the EPRDF-administered regions, and their relatively senior political profile suggests that the zone remains an important political locus. Quite what this means had not yet been publicly elaborated in mid-2002, and as they will henceforth play no executive role, there has been some tension and confusion as to how they will function. There is considerable speculation that the diminution of the role and resources of the zones in the SNNP NRS is intended not least to remove the budgetary 'carrot', which had encouraged the educated members of a number of ethnic and language groups to seek a well-resourced ethnic zone of their own. The corresponding reduction of per-

sonnel also at NRS level has been plausibly interpreted as a means of reducing the capacity, but also the power, of the Regional State governments, with federal and *wereda* levels of government now emerging as most significant in terms of the allocation and deployment of the resources of the state¹³⁸.

4.2.3 Public Administration

The Ethiopian state employs a total of 308,950 civil servants, of whom 43,752 are employed by the Federal Government¹³⁹. Whilst 55% of federal civil servants are from the Amhara ethnic group¹⁴⁰, the majority of the more than a quarter of a million new positions in the regional civil services created in the last decade are effectively open only to those willing and able, firstly, to work in local languages other than Amharic, and secondly to move and live outside of the capital. Both requirements have excluded and antagonised many existing civil servants and their families. The antagonism has been mutual, and in the early period of the TGE many EPRDF officials openly expressed the view that the 'moribund' civil service was 'the next enemy we have to fight now that we have overcome the Dergue'¹⁴¹. This view was, if anything, reinforced by the findings of the Civil Service Reform Task Force, which reported in 1996 a series of serious and fundamental problems dogging public administration¹⁴². A large-scale four-year reform programme was adopted in 1997 with the support of donors, and a second phase has recently been agreed upon¹⁴³.

The federal restructuring has also created an urgent need for additional civil servants – particularly those trained in law, accounting, and

138. Interviews with local government officers, SNNP/NRS, Tigray, and Amhara NRSS, June/July 2002.

139. 1998 figures from the Ethiopian Civil Service Commission.

140. According to figures from the Civil Service Commission: it is unclear whether these statistics refer only to members of the Amhara ethnic group, or to all mother-tongue Amharic speakers, likely to be a higher proportion. Whichever is the case, the statistics clearly indicate a percentage which is disproportionate with the national demographic distribution.

141. Interview, Addis Ababa, December 1991.

142. The civil service was reported as 'concentrating on inputs and activities, rather than achieving policy, more a hindrance than a facilitator; where management systems exist they are frequently outdated and unable to respond to the changing environment; the service is under-resourced, with expenditures one of the lowest in the world, and relatively few civil servants; the culture gives managers little scope to manage their commands; the service is unnecessarily hierarchical with little delegation; staff are ill paid and lack skills; they have been isolated from developments and training, and are demoralised; there is concern that unethical practices are on the increase' (Lister 1988:35).

143. It is suggested that a full review of relations of power would require some evaluation of the impact of this programme which is not possible here; cf. the summary given in Hawes et al. (1998:Annex1:64–70). The programme consists of five components: Expenditure Management and Budget Control; Human Resource Development; Top Management Systems; Service Delivery; and Ethics. The first phase of the programme was funded primarily by USAID and EU, with the UNDP playing a co-ordination role, which is likely in future phases to be taken over by the World Bank.

economics – from the country's less developed ethnic groups. The Ethiopian Civil Service College, ECSC,¹⁴⁴ received its first intake of students (186 for the LLB in law, and 190 for the BA programme in economics) in January 1995. Its rapid establishment¹⁴⁵, high-level reporting mechanisms¹⁴⁶, and high-priority treatment in terms of the allocation of resources and premises¹⁴⁷, reflected the determination of the government to implement its key policy objective of establishing NRSS staffed by personnel trained in what it saw as a 'constructive' atmosphere. The ECSC's heavy recruitment of former EPRDF-fighter students, and adoption of the EPRDF-favoured technique of collective evaluation by 'criticism and self-criticism' (the so-called *gem gema*) rapidly earned the college the nickname 'cadre school'. The college has however no formal relation with the ruling party, and its day to day management is conducted by academics and professionals.

Whilst it is clear that, in the early period, the majority of ECSC students were EPRDF members, its academic and administrative staff were, and are, not. They are keen to stress that the curricula which form the basis for ECSC degrees do not encompass political education of any kind, and bear comparison with those of other institutes of higher education, including Addis Ababa University, AAU, from where some have been adopted. That this government college, like any civil service college the world over, is keen to foster a sense of loyalty amongst civil servants goes without saying. ECSC is formally mandated to respond to the demands placed on it by the governments of the NRSS, accepting the students they put forward, and stipulating only that the prospective students should be twelfth-grade complete, and pass an entrance examination¹⁴⁸. In addition to the original degree programmes in Law, and Business & Economics, programmes in Technology, and Public Administration & Management have now been added.

144. Which was established by Council of Ministers' Regulation 3 in 1996 as 'an autonomous higher education institution having its own legal personality [and] accountable to the Prime Minister', an arrangement exceptional amongst Ethiopia's higher education bodies which are otherwise accountable to the MoEd.

145. Well in advance of the proclamation that gave it legal status

146. Its board has been and remains chaired by a senior EPRDF official, and includes a number of ministers; it is also accountable to a committee of the NRS presidents who represent its 'major stakeholders' (Dr Haile Mikhael, President, Ethiopian Civil Service College, interviewed March 2000).

147. The ECSC is the recipient of priority funding from the World Bank, and enjoys premises at Kotebe outside the city.

148. Problems have been encountered with the Somali NRS government, who have been accused of putting forward student candidates from neighbouring Somalia in large numbers. In a number of other cases – Afar, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz, entrance requirements have been lowered in order to fill candidate quotas.

Public administration in Ethiopia faces two core problems, one arising from the external context, and the other reflecting its internal culture. Firstly the public sector has for some years been crippled by the heavy haemorrhaging of professional personnel, as a result of the gross disparities in public and private sector remuneration and opportunities. In many instances, public sector bureaucracies face chronic and critical staffing difficulties, with up to 50% of senior positions frequently remaining vacant. The difficulties of recruitment experienced by Oromia NRS, for instance, reached crisis proportions following the review of federal civil service salary scales in 1999. The Regional State's inability to compete with marginally higher federal salaries, let alone with commercial and international sector Addis Ababa-based employers, seems to have contributed to the decision to relocate the capital of Oromia NRS to Adama (Nazareth).

The second problem besetting the public sector is an overwhelming culture of inertia and 'lowest common denominator self-preservation'¹⁴⁹, which has apparently only been fostered by the decline in living standards and job security experienced by state sector workers over the last few years. It seems more than likely that the problems of the prevailing culture are exacerbated by issues of political and economic confidence explored in the introductory section of this report. It is also the case that few Ethiopian civil servants see themselves, or observe their fellows, rewarded for industry or initiative. Further, whilst it is not set out as a constitutional requirement, most federal government institutions have interpreted their responsibilities regarding 'equitable representation' as extending to the achievement of 'ethnic balance' in the appointment of senior officials, civil servants, and committee members. This policy has been criticised as being wasteful of the country's meagre skilled human resource. It is alleged by opponents that what they claim is a 'policy' to recruit personnel on the basis of ethnic quotas *and* political affiliation or sympathy means that the many able and efficient functionaries are continually overlooked.

4.3 Representation and Recourse to Justice under federalism

4.3.1 The Legislature

The administrative and management structures which support the activities of the House of People's Representatives, HPR, and the House of the Federation, HoF, have recently been subject to extensive review, and new

149. 'What is the business that makes the Ethiopian state go round? *Ye hod gudaie new* – it is the business of the belly!' (Interview, senior civil servant, Addis Ababa, April 2002).

arrangements remain to be finalised at the time of writing. The parliamentary secretariat which, under a powerful Secretary General, used to serve both houses, is to be replaced with separate facilities for each. One effect of this change seems to have been the consolidation of authority of the Speaker of the HPR. The HPR will be managed by a House Affairs Commission of MPs, including opposition representatives, to be chaired by the Speaker¹⁵⁰.

In addition to radical changes to the civil service that supports the parliament, there has also been a heavy turnover of personnel amongst MPs, with 243 of EPRDF's 481 MPs reported deselected in advance of, or at, the last elections¹⁵¹. Such a widespread change of personnel has encouraged a more outspoken critique of the situation amongst those remaining in position. A number of MPs interviewed cheerfully explain a parliamentary voting procedure which, following regular weekly meetings of the parliamentary 'leadership' each Friday, relies on a series of individuals for each EPRDF party group who sit at the front during debates so as to lead consensus.

The system of public hearings regarding prospective legislation, organised by the committees of the HPR, has been a highly successful aspect of the development of parliamentary activity and capacity. These now attract considerable publicity, participation, and media coverage.

Since the elections of 2000, the HPR has included 25 non-EPRDF, and non-allied MPs, both from opposition parties, and independent candidates. In principle, the submission of draft legislation by means of a private member's bill requires the signatures of 20 MPs, and is therefore within the reach of this group. In practice, however, they have not worked as a cohesive group, and the opposition has not been able to table either legislation or agenda items for debate. Indeed, the HPR has not initiated any single piece of legislation in this parliament (it had initiated nine bills of minor or administrative import in the previous parliament), with all proposals to date coming from the Executive.

Two pieces of new legislation in this category have proved particularly controversial. These are the proclamations establishing and providing for the activities of the Federal Anti-Corruption Commission, and the proclamation restricting the political activities of outgoing Heads of State. Both have attracted widespread media coverage, and speculation as to their overwhelmingly political rationale, as means of muzzling members

150. The secretariat of civil servants will be further subject to the oversight of MPs' committees for members' services, and house liaison. The Speaker is supported by a former senior MP turned advisor, with extensive experience of financial management and the budget cycle.

151. 11 from Tigray, 59 from Amhara, 104 from Oromia, 60 from SNNPRS, 9 from Addis Ababa (MP interviewed April 2002).

of the EPRDF dissident group. (The work of the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the legal proceedings which it has initiated, are discussed further under Judiciary, below)

Whilst the House of the Federation remained relatively moribund since the defection of its Speaker in May 2001, there are plans that the three committees established by the House, dealing respectively with its major responsibilities of constitutional oversight, adjustment of the federal subsidy/budget allocation formula, and nationalities' relations, will become standing committees, thus expediting their work. It is important to stress that, outside these three major areas of oversight, the HoF has few responsibilities, and specifically does not play the general role of 'upper house' regarding legislation.

4.3.2 The Judiciary

The judiciary in Ethiopia is constitutionally independent of both legislature and executive. This independence nevertheless remains functionally constrained in a number of important respects. Recourse to the law has, for a century, been an important component of the commercial, social, and political life of middle class Ethiopians, along with sections of the peasantry, a tradition which has now thrived and developed under three regimes¹⁵². As a result, in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia's major towns, the viability and credibility of court proceedings remain matters of widespread social concern.¹⁵³

4.3.2.1 Questions of capacity and independence

During the 1990s, perceived bottlenecks and alleged incompetence in the court system were for some years a focus of vitriol amongst the urban middle-class. Before the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict it was a primary cause of anger towards the government, which was often perceived as having either deliberately or neglectfully under-resourced and staffed the judicial system, and circumscribed the rule of law. In fact the judicial system at all levels remains subject to intensive judicial reform and capacity building efforts on the part of the government. The most serious bottlenecks in the federal court system seem to have been eased in recent years by the establishment of benches dealing separately and exclusively with the cases compiled by the Special Prosecutor's Office, SPO, against members of the former regime.

152. It is a widespread view that Abyssinian society ranks as one of the most litigious in the world.

153. This discussion focuses on the urban and middle-class experience of the judicial system. It must be stressed, however, that the preoccupation with court proceedings is not the prerogative of the middle-class alone. The enthusiasm of Ethiopia's highland peasants for the settlement of land-related disputes by means of litigation is legendary.

The TGE legislated in 1992 to establish a Special Prosecutor, who was given wide powers to detain and arrest individuals on *suspicion* of human rights abuses only, without presenting evidence at the time of their arrest. Several thousand people were thus arrested in the period of 1991–93. Charges were brought against about 5,200 individuals, of whom 2,200 remained in prison (the rest being charged *in absentia*). A relatively small number of individuals have been detained for longer or shorter periods by the SPO, still without explanation or charge¹⁵⁴. Nevertheless, overall, the international community supported the government's move to bring to trial the officials of the former regime. These numerous and complex cases had blocked much of the rest of the judicial system until separate court benches were instituted. Both sets of proceedings now seem to have been progressing more quickly than was the case several years ago, with the special prosecutions recently producing a spate of judgements and sentencing¹⁵⁵. A bottleneck briefly developed within the purview of the labour courts in 2001/2, largely triggered by a spate of redundancies from private and privatised enterprises.

In the rural areas, the condition of the judiciary is of great concern. The federal decentralisation that started in 1991 demanded the recruitment of a large number of lawyers and judges, at the same moment as experienced older judges were being dismissed for involvement with the previous regime. The extreme shortage of legally trained personnel in the more remote areas was overcome by giving primary teachers, or even school leavers, four to six months' intensive training at the Ethiopian Civil Service College, after which they became judges or attorneys in their home areas. Reports suggest that their adjudication has not been efficient: queues and delays have become notorious, and in some instances people have simply withdrawn from a court system that had become impractical because of long deferrals and uncertain results. A promising donor programme of support to the judicial training programme in the States was cut in 2000/1, following the recruitment of the majority of its early graduates to the armed forces for the war with Eritrea¹⁵⁶. Whilst such frustration is understandable, it seems essential that donor support for judicial reform, and for the independent resourcing of the local social court system, is sustained and expanded.

The building of independence, capacity, and respect for the rule of law within the judicial sector (including the police), particularly at the levels

154. Interview, Ministry of Justice official.

155. Extreme delays to these proceedings had led international observers to call attention to the right to a speedy trial, with many defendants having been detained for over a decade.

156. Interview with the funding agency, Addis Ababa, March 2002.

closest to the rural majority, is perhaps the single focus of donor assistance most likely to foster the attainment of development objectives in the sphere of democracy and governance. As such it is an important core component of programmes of public sector capacity building.

If the capacity of the judiciary remains sufficiently fragile to compromise its functioning, questions also remain as to its independence from government interference. Given the overwhelming dominance of the ruling party, the judiciary operates in an atmosphere in which the pressure of government influence is unmistakable, unidirectional, and in rural areas, often backed up by at least the latent threat of force. In view of the inexperience and incapacity of the judiciary described above, this political context undoubtedly constitutes a powerful influence on judicial decision-making, potentially rendering judges unwilling to reach decisions which might be seen to mark them out as critical of the government. In rural areas, judges and social court arbitrators have usually been initially selected by the local administration, in each area. Many are – unsurprisingly – tempted to prove their worth through loyalty rather than by judicial autonomy.

Despite such pressures, however, a few judges in Addis Ababa have indeed passed court decisions which are not only independent of, but indeed counter to the interests of, the government. Such decisions seem often to have attracted exultant private media attention, and active governmental irritation in equal measure. When, in 2001, the Minister of Justice was sentenced to one month's imprisonment¹⁵⁷, he was pardoned by the Head of State (at the request of the government), in order to allow him to carry out his official duties.¹⁵⁸

The proceedings brought by the Special Prosecutor against members of the former regime for alleged crimes against humanity and genocide have occasioned a range of criticisms of the process which go wider than the central question of the freedom from interference of the members of the judiciary itself. The impartiality of both judges and process has been less a matter for concern¹⁵⁹ than such wider associated issues as, for instance: the exclusive focus on WPE and Dergue members in the selection of defendants in the mandate of the SPO; the compromise of the right to speedy trial (and disregard of *habeas corpus* provisions) involved in the slow preparation of charges; the apparent dropping of charges against two

157. For failing to allow a prisoner to appear in court.

158. *The Reporter* Newspaper. 2001. "Minister of Justice sentenced for refusal to aid justice." Article dated 30 May 2001.

159. Although it is important to note, for instance, that the judges did not call for the immediate release of SPO defendants following the lapse in 1993 of the six-month suspension of *habeas corpus* provisions governing their detention. Any such call would have had little public support.

senior members of the Dergue's military apparatus following the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war; and the occasional failure of the prison and security authorities to effect the release of those acquitted or against whom charges had been dropped or dismissed. Many of these issues affect defendants and court proceedings beyond the remit of the spo.

4.3.2.2 *Corruption proceedings: a surrogate arena for political competition?*

The work of Africanist political scientist, Morris Szeftel¹⁶⁰ has recently focussed on the incidence of allegations of corruption, and related court proceedings, as a means commonly adopted by governments in Africa to marginalize political opponents – particularly those with sufficient personal popularity for their detention to be a desirable precaution for the ruling group. Developments in Ethiopia since early 2001 seem to provide material for this discussion. The arrest on corruption charges in 1994 of the then Prime Minister and Chairman of the Amhara National Democratic Movement, ANDM, Tamrat Layne¹⁶¹, was a dramatic episode in the politics of the transitional period, which at the time elicited considerable speculation as to the reasons for his removal. Such speculation has been fuelled in the last 12 months by the arraignment of the much larger group including ruling party Central Committee and politburo members from the dissident group, private businessmen, and senior civil servants (primarily former ministers and managers of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, CBE, and Privatisation Agency), on a similar series of corruption-related charges.

The government maintains the position that these proceedings have no bearing on the divisions within the political elite, relating exclusively to the misuse of public funds, which has always been a concern of the government, and reflecting the establishment in 2001 of the government's new weapon in the fight against public sector corruption, namely the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, ACC. Few in middle-class Addis Ababa circles believe this to be true. Most point to a range of coincidental factors as undermining these claims, and suggest that 'corruption is very much in the eye of the beholder – and the beholder here means the ruling group'¹⁶². Critics of the government complain that corruption charges have been levelled exclusively at those on 'the wrong side' of the political divide; that the allegations on which the cases are based are relatively trivial or empty – and such as could be levelled at almost

160. See the range of recent editorial pieces in the *Review of African Political Economy*, e.g. Szeftel (1998), (2000a) and (2000b).

161. Together with a small group of alleged associates from the commercial sector.

162. Interview, private observer, Addis Ababa, May 2002.

anyone in a position of authority; that legislation establishing the ACC, and modifying *habeas corpus* provisions for those subject to its investigations, was rushed through explicitly in order to keep political 'dissidents' out of circulation, and was in any case 'unconstitutional'.

That the opposition to the government, and in particular the private media, should relish the dissection in court of formerly inaccessible details of the less savoury activities of the political elite is of little surprise. More worrying, however, is the serious concern that the all-important ethics element of the civil service reform programme, of which the Anti-Corruption Commission, ACC, is the spearhead, might be compromised in the longer term, if the ACC's first actions are regarded as politically motivated. It seems clear that a widespread belief in the subversion of the ACC's long-term credibility in the service of short-term political ends would further serve to consolidate a civil service culture of inertia, and reluctance to take initiatives. On the other hand, observers have also *applauded* the apparent relocation of political competition from the extra-legal sphere of armed struggle and assassination familiar under previous regimes, into the legal framework offered by the ACC and the courts. Whether that framework will prove robust enough to withstand these new pressures is a matter of concern and importance.

4.4 The Security Apparatus, Military, and Police

After the fall of the Dergue, the EPRDF forces and security apparatus were widely understood to have carried out a radical disarmament and demobilisation of both the Dergue's and their own forces. For radical critics, however, the police and the security forces remain 'politicised instruments of control'. They form part of the state machinery of repression, and are rarely seen as 'friends and helpers' or guardians of public order, particularly in the rural areas, away from paved roads and urban centres¹⁶³. Although the federal police drew some institutional support in the early 1990s, the training of police and militia at local level is an area that has received inadequate attention and assistance from donors concerned with democratisation, and will be an important component of future reforms.

There has been speculation regarding the likely reorganisation of the military, and its lines of command since 2001 following the replacement of the widely-liked Chief of Staff in 2001. A National Security Council and Policy were being established during 2003, along with plans for the reform

163. Cf. Pausewang & Tronvoll (2001) for detailed accounts of the extra-constitutional activities of the police during the elections of 2000 and 2001.

and professionalisation of the security sector. The military had been scaled back to around 160,000 men in the wake of the end of hostilities with Eritrea, with provision for the training of an unarmed reservist force of up to 200,000 under planning. Head of the Security and Immigration Agency has been, since 2001, another veteran of the so-called *bado shewate*¹⁶⁴ of the TPLF. Such connections raise concerns about the structure of accountability of the military and security.

Over and above concerns about the official and formally 'sanctioned' activities of the military and security, allegations persist as to the existence of a parallel system of detention (and indeed torture) operated outside state systems of accountability by security officers carrying over a system applied by the TPLF during the armed struggle. According to the reports of international human rights monitoring organisations, two categories of prisoners (political opponents, particularly those internal to the Front, and 'international terrorists' notably those linked to radical Islam) continue to be held outside the purview of the state, in significant numbers. Whilst few states can be expected to be transparent regarding the organisation of their secret and security services, the implication that the system remains effectively in the form evolved by the ruling party for use in an earlier period of civil war has particularly disquieting resonance.

4.5 Trends and implications

4.5.1 Participation

4.5.1.1 Women

In 1993 the EPRDF-led government developed a national policy on women in Ethiopia that aimed to create appropriate structures within government offices and institutions to establish equitable and gender-sensitive public policies. In the new constitution of 1995, the Ethiopian government renewed this commitment to gender policy. Article 25 states that all persons are equal before the law, irrespective, *inter alia*, of their sex. Moreover, article 35 in the Constitution elaborates on the rights of women, granting them equal rights as men across the board, including rights to land and property. The Constitution spells out the idea that "the purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in po-

164. Meaning, in Tigrigna, 07, i.e. the security division of the TPLF during the Dergue period; the front's main divisions were referred to by numbers, thus 01 cultural affairs, 02 training, 05 logistics, etc.

litical, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.”¹⁶⁵

A Women's Affairs Office with the rank of minister without portfolio within the office of the Prime Minister was also established to follow up the EPRDF government's policy on women. The national policy acknowledges that “the discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of their labour”. The first priorities of the government are thus: to improve the level of income of women by facilitating opportunities and women-friendly conditions in the workplace; to improve the health and nutrition of mothers and their children; and to upgrade and improve their education.

The national policy has three overall objectives:

to facilitate conditions conducive to the speeding up of equality between men and women so that women can participate in the political, social, and economic life of their country on equal terms with men, ensuring that their right to own property as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision makers;

to facilitate the necessary condition whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their workload;

to eliminate, step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices, that are based on the idea of male supremacy and to enable women to hold public office and to participate in the decision making process at all levels.

A World Bank initiated study conducted in 1998 to follow up on the implementation of the National Policy on Women in Ethiopia, in co-operation with the Women's Affairs Office in the Ethiopian government, identifies several shortcomings and weaknesses in the policy and its implementation.¹⁶⁶ Firstly, it suggests that the new ethnic federal system of governance in Ethiopia is in itself an obstacle to an effective implemen-

165. See Annex for a full citation of Article 35 “Rights of Women” in the Constitution.

166. *Implementing the Ethiopian Policy for Women: Institutional and Regulatory Issues* 1998, The Women's Affairs Office, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, The World Bank.

tation of the women's policy. The local administrative units do not have the capacity to undertake the policy, whilst the central government lacks knowledge about the constraints and issues at the regional levels. The main findings of the study are that interventions for women largely consist of ad hoc and unconnected self-standing projects, which, if continued, will remain gender neutral and ineffective in delivering benefits to women. In addition to the lack of capacity at the regional and sub-regional levels, the report shows that the development plans for women were not demand-driven and therefore failed to recognise substantial variation across regions. This resulted in women being 'disconnected' from all development interventions.

Work for women's rights in Ethiopia faces cultural, legal and institutional problems which operate as obstacles to the effective enhancement of gender equality. The Women in Development Report by the World Bank/Ethiopian Government identifies several cultural/legal issues working against the National Policy on Women:

- The use of patriarchal customary laws constrained women's access to resources.
- The legal framework prohibited poor women from entering informal labour markets.
- Prevailing traditional gender biases exist against women in the allocation of land.
- Women's access to resources is limited due to biases resulting from the family arbitration system.
- Women have no access to legal aid and are severely constrained in seeking remedies from civil courts.
- Lack of women's grassroots organisations prevents their participation in development activities.

Moreover, the report identifies several political and institutional factors as impediments to the implementation of the women's policy.

- The responsibilities and roles of the Women's Affairs Office are unclear and inadequate.
- Regional governments lack the requisite institutional capacity to successfully implement development policies.
- Women's Offices are dependent on donors or NGOs due to the lack of a capital budget.
- There are constraints on the preparation and implementation of appropriate development plans.

- Lack of regional gender-desegregated data limits the formulation of gender-sensitive development interventions and responses.
- There is an absence of women's groups because of cultural taboos.
- There is weak collaboration with non-governmental or private entities.

Evidently the government's policies on women have failed to deliver substantial and radical progress towards change. Women in Ethiopia are still a heavily disadvantaged group, in terms of social, cultural and structural discrimination. Indications of this are, for instance, the adult literacy rate which shows that only 29 percent of women are literate, compared to 41 percent of men.¹⁶⁷ And moreover, in the records of formal employment at all levels in government, women occupy only nine percent of the jobs.¹⁶⁸ In the Cabinet, at the top of the hierarchy, we only find one woman heading a line ministry (Education). Meanwhile, at the grassroots, this marginalisation of women is still being reproduced, since girls do not enjoy anything like equal access to formal education. In primary education enrolment in the multi-minority SNNPNS, for instance, 63 percent of the boys are enrolled, in contrast to only 31 percent of the girls,¹⁶⁹ although it is true that recent statistics show some improvement in these ratios.¹⁷⁰ The girls are generally kept at home in order to assist in the practical chores of the household, fetching water and firewood.

The government seems to have resigned in the fight against female genital mutilation, FGM, (see 2.3.1.1) and leaves the initiative to local and international NGOs and organisations. The National Committee on Traditional Practices (the Ethiopian wing of Inter Africa Committee), UNICEF and UNFPA are the main actors in the combat against FGM. However, other traditional practices are considered just as important to combat as FGM, as for instance child marriage. FGM is not explicitly prohibited in the Ethiopian penal code, as child marriage is. Although it is prohibited to marry under the age of 15, nevertheless it remains a widespread practice in many regions that girls are married from the age of eight or nine years old.

167. See UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*, p. 141.

168. Cf. UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*, p. 241.

169. See Bekele, S., 'Implementation of new education policy in the south', *The Monitor*, 15 June 1999.

170. See article on wainfo.com, 2 May 2002: "Number of Girl Students in Hadiya Zone on the Rise", indicating a seven percent increase in girls student enrolment in junior schools in 2002 compared to 2001.

4.5.1.2 *Ethnic groups*

As noted above, the decentralisation of the state apparatus has given a new elite from each of the country's ethnic groups a degree of access to the resources and offices of the state which had not been previously available. As further discussed in the following chapter, however, this involvement has been constrained in political terms: whilst those from a much wider range of ethnic backgrounds are now involved and active in local administration and government, this broadening of access has not extended to those from a wider range of political viewpoints, but remains, in practice, largely tied to ruling party associates and constituencies.

4.5.2 *Issues for the future: resource conflict*

A range of commentators on the Horn of Africa has traced a relation between iniquitous distribution or scarcity of resources, and conflict¹⁷¹. In Ethiopia, the majority of resources continue to be administered by, and at the disposal of the state: the state, therefore, remains the locus of conflict. After a decade of ethnic federalism, there are initial indications that the transformation of the structures of the state has resulted in a concomitant shift in the patterns of resource-related conflict which had brought civil wars to the region for two decades, and which were brought to an end by the 1991 settlements.

Of particular concern is the proliferation of increasingly localised conflict over administrative boundary-making in the ethnically diverse SNNPRs. Since the allocation of government budgets (still overwhelmingly the major resource in rural areas) is made on the basis of such administrative units, their terms are matters of great significance for those seeking control of the resources in question. Under FDRE constitutional arrangements, for instance, it matters very much whether a given town is chosen as the capital of a region, zone, or special *wereda*, or whether it loses out to a neighbour. The relatively educated and urbanised elites of small groups in the south have learned quickly that a successful claim to separate language, history, culture, and identity can provide the key to separate allocation of budget, and elevation from *wereda* or *kebele* status to that of 'special *wereda*' or zone, with its correspondingly enhanced budgetary provision. It is no surprise then that such claims have proliferated, particularly in cases where a right which had initially been granted is seen to have been removed or curtailed¹⁷², and indeed that they have often led to

171. The most prominent is John Markakis, whose views are synthesised in his 1998 publication *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa*.

172. This could apply to a range of recent cases in the southern region, as for instance, disgruntlement at the merger of Bench-Maji and Kaffa-Sheka zones after 1995, failure to reinstate what had under Haile Selassie been an awraja around Sheka (comprising six weredas from what

bloodshed, as ambitious 'ethnic entrepreneurs' have mobilised their ethnic compatriots to resistance. Whilst such conflicts remain on a much smaller scale than the civil wars of the past, their proliferation and persistence have tested the new arrangements.

It is worth noting that conflict has often focused either around the fate of towns and cities, or over grazing and water resources where pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, and agriculturalists are in close proximity and competition. This can be seen to reflect the interests of those in positions of social and political influence in the various communities in question. Amongst pastoral communities, clan and lineage leaders are primarily concerned with the maintenance (and expansion) of access to livestock-related resources¹⁷³. Amongst settled communities, by contrast, educated elites are primarily concerned with control of the resource concentrations to be found in towns, and associated with the state.

Thus arguments have been presented by Oromo nationalists laying claim to the vast revenues of Finfinne (Addis Ababa, itself); three NRSS have laid claim to the resources of Dire Dawa (which, as a result, remains subject to a Provisional Administration, reporting to the Federal Government); and Sidama nationalists have recently opposed moves to remove SNNPNRS regional capital Awassa's municipal administration from the purview of the Sidama zone in which it is situated. On the other hand, ethno-nationalists have been equally concerned to win recognition for home towns seen to have been neglected under current federal arrangements: thus Jimma's inhabitants complain of its precipitous decline following the removal of a large proportion of its former coffee trading to neighbouring SNNPNRS, and its reduction to mere zonal capital, complaints also echoed in Gondar; Welaiyta elders lobbied (successfully) not only for recognition of their language but also that Sodo might not lose out to Arba Minch; and recent disturbances in and around Yeki *wereda*, in Kaffa, Sheka and Bench Maji zones, seem to involve a combination of calls for the instatement of Tepi as capital of a separate zone, and attempts to control the lucrative coffee trade which centres on the town.¹⁷⁴

are now Gambella, Oromia, and SNNPNRS), discussions regarding the removal of Awassa the SNNPNRS regional capital from the ambit of Sidama zone, etc.

173. Markakis, in a recent study for USAID (forthcoming) has also drawn attention to the increasing importance of contraband trade in driving conflict amongst pastoralists, in this case the Afar and Somali Issa.

174. If there is one instance of conflict which does not involve pastoralists which nevertheless also does not focus on the fate of an urban centre, it is perhaps the Silte case. In this instance, the situation is distorted by the influence on the Silte autonomy campaign of the large Silte mercantile community in Addis Ababa. This influential constituency has been less interested in the establishment of an urban centre in Silte area from which they could operate (since they are already effectively established in trading networks in the capital, and throughout the country), than in securing a separate government budget for their own zone. See particularly Markakis in Mohammed Salih et al (eds) (1997), on the peculiarities of the Gurage/Silte case.

Whether one considers these developments to be the unfortunate consequence of 'ethnicising' federalism, or the dynamic flourishing of local level political competition, reflecting the greatly enhanced access of local communities (or at least their elite members) to participate in politics, and 'eat' from the government table¹⁷⁵, is a complex question. What seems important in this analysis is that such conflicts are not remotely 'senseless', and cannot be explained by reference to ethnic difference. Rather they are the logical reactions of communities seeking to secure what they perceive to be their interests in the context of current circumstances (where ethnic difference has been rendered constitutionally salient), and on the basis of the information at their disposal. (Note once again that the distribution of knowledge is at the root of the relations of power). The recent government decision to reduce the relative scale of budgetary resources available to NRS, ethnic zonal, and special *wereda* government strata, in favour of *wereda*-level block grants, seems designed to remove an important incentive which has fed this trend over the last decade, whilst at the same time effectively reducing the relative importance of ethnically defined units.

If these conflicts are the result of calculative action on the part of communities seeking to extend their control of resources, they are likely to prove increasingly problematic in a probable context of population growth, depletion of natural resources, and uncertain expansion of the economy relative to demographic developments. If, as suggested above, the dynamics of local administration (e.g. conflicts over border demarcation, access to budgetary, human, and natural resources, etc.) are already conceived in terms of resource conflict, it can only be expected that this will escalate as pressure increases. There are indications that the government is increasingly considering the likely implications of this situation, beyond its new emphasis on *weredas*. The impact of two important new policy initiatives, for instance, will be relevant here. These are: the new and additional emphasis on pastoralism and the pastoral economy; and the development of decentralised municipalities, and exploration of infrastructure to enhance urban-rural linkages. It is noteworthy that both new areas of policy focus relate to areas associated with the emergence of conflict.

The key point here is that these conflicts continue to centre upon the state, its offices, budgets, and centres, which overwhelmingly dominate the control of resources, including – crucially – land. Whilst the patterns of state administration have been radically changed and decentralised,

175. Cf. for instance Bayart (1993).

with privatisation introduced since the demise of the previous regime, this central factor remains unchanged. Unchanged also, therefore, is the central dynamic of conflict – the essential need to win control of state bodies in order to gain access to resources of any significance.

The EPRDF's policy on ethnic federalism is no doubt an intriguing and bold attempt to solve some of Ethiopia's inherited contradictions of ethno-politics. However, a decade of practising this system has also unveiled some new problems and contradictions. Some of these are in particular related to the two contradictory elements of the Marxist approach to 'nationalities' and 'self-determination', discussed elsewhere in this report. On the one hand is the positive idea that it is possible to mobilise a community more effectively and get it engaged in its own political development if done from the inside, deploying its own members, in its own language, based on its own cultural traditions and knowledge system, etc. This conflicts with the notion that a 'vanguard' elite is (or should be) in a position to grant self-determination to a community, defining the ethnic criteria which constitute the group and demarcating geographical borders around it, from the outside.

The political party system

CHAPTER 5

The political parties in Ethiopia can be divided into three categories: the parties belonging to the ‘democratic front’ of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF); the *EPRDF-affiliated* parties, which are ethnically defined (or regional) parties; and the opposition parties, which are both ethnically defined parties and ‘nation-wide’ parties. The opposition bloc can be further sub-divided into a legally registered opposition, and unregistered (and thus illegal) parties, many of which are, at least partly, based in the Diaspora, and involved in armed opposition to the government.

This section will briefly outline the background to the most prominent parties within each category, and subsequently discuss different aspects of power relations both internal to and between the parties. The section will consider the electoral landscape, and the experience of multi-partyism.

5.1 Dynamics of the political party system

5.1.1 Asymmetry

The political party structure in Ethiopia is characterised by the extreme asymmetry between the power of the ruling parties, and the weakness of the opposition parties. For instance, out of the 547 seats in the House of Peoples Representatives, the EPRDF holds 481, or 88 percent.¹⁷⁶ Members of the parties of government may be tempted by their access to the infrastructure and resources of the state, whereas the opposition relies solely on private donations and minimal membership fees. In particular the older members of the EPRDF emerge as apparently the most powerful

176. For a full breakdown of political party representation in the House of Peoples Representatives, see annex.

organisational parties, both in terms of membership (direct party members and affiliated members through the mass organisations), and in terms of access to resources. Both are connected with a range of commercial enterprises, further discussed in the section on the private sector above.

5.1.2 Few women in leadership positions

The Ethiopian constitution puts women on an equal footing with men, and women are free to run for political office at all levels. However, when it comes to female representation in party politics, the government and the opposition parties are equally dominated by men. During the armed struggle, the TPLF was enthusiastic about female representation both in the party and military structure. However, after it came to power in 1991, equal gender representation has not been given priority. The only woman to have held a powerful position within the Front's leadership was expelled amongst the dissenters in 2001. In the Ethiopian Federal cabinet there is only one woman heading a line-ministry. Among the opposition parties, no women hold leadership positions. Moreover, only one party, the Ethiopian Democratic Party, EDP, endorses affirmative action as an appropriate strategy to enhance female representation in politics.¹⁷⁷ (See more on the role of women in politics below).

5.1.3 A return to single national party politics?

There are some indications that EPRDF is planning a shift of emphasis away from the coalition of ethnic parties, moving in the direction of a single pan-Ethiopian party (keeping the EPRDF component parties as regional representatives only). The Prime Minister recently confirmed that the manner Ethiopian society is developing and integrating means that the need for a peasant-based ethnic coalition is waning, and might disappear over a period of ten to fifteen years.¹⁷⁸ Seen in connection with the ongoing debate over Revolutionary Democracy, EPRDF might be positioning itself ahead of an emergent willingness to tone down the prominence of sub-national ethnicity in political life, in the wake of the nationalism created by the Eritrean war. If this is happening, the ethnically fragmented opposition will again get a slow start in order to prepare a national bloc to compete in upcoming elections.

177. Dr Konjit Fekade: "Existing Political Parties in Ethiopia", paper presented at *Gender Forum: Women and Politics*, 20 April 2000, Addis Ababa.

178. Interview with the Prime Minister, 19 January 2002. This issue should also be seen in connection with a Marxist-Leninist approach to the national question. The 1991/2 rhetoric focused on 'independence and autonomy of member organisations of the front', while in 1997/8 a shift of emphasis was noteworthy to the idea of 'single party with regional organs to mobilise and implement its programme'.

5.2 The EPRDF parties

The **Tigray Peoples Liberation Front**, TPLF, was established in 1975, very soon after the Dergue took power¹⁷⁹. The Front grew out of the student movements at Addis Ababa University. The Tigrayan University Student Association was established in 1971 with an objective of mobilising Tigrayan students and intellectuals to the cause of strengthening Tigrayan cultural identity. This group inspired the formation of Tigray National Organisation, TNO, in 1974, the precursor of the TPLF. The TPLF was originally formed as a resistance movement with the objective of establishing an independent Tigray, although this 'narrow nationalist' agenda was early modified, in favour of a programme seeking the cultural and political autonomy of Tigray within a democratised Ethiopia. Although the founders of the organisation all were intellectuals, they based their resistance on peasant mobilisation against what they defined as the authoritarian, centralised and ethnocratic regime governing Ethiopia.

In its formative years, the TPLF also had to fight other Tigrayan/Ethiopian resistance movements, most notably the royalist Ethiopian Democratic Union, EDU, and the pan-Ethiopianist Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, EPRP. Towards the end of the 1970s, the TPLF had managed to oust their competitors from Tigray, and could concentrate on their struggle against the Dergue regime.

The internal structure of the front is similar to other Marxist-Leninist fronts. The highest formal body is the Congress, composed of elected members/fighters and, until 1997, representatives from mass-organisations. The Congress elects a Central Committee which, between Congresses, operates as the highest political organ, as well as an Audit Committee which monitors procedural regularity. At the most recent Congress in September 2001, the Central Committee was expanded from 31 to 45 members. Many of the new Central Committee members are regarded by the party as 'intellectual' representatives from 'civil society' in Tigray, included in a move to create a sort of internal system of checks-and-balances.¹⁸⁰ The expansion of the Central Committee may also signal its waning political influence, beside what some see as the increasing influence of the Executive Committee. The Central Committee elects the nine members of the Executive Committee (former Politburo), who manage the day-to-day activities of the Front. The Chairman of the Central Committee, is also the Chairman of the Executive Committee and of the Front as such.

179. See John Young (1997) for an elaboration on the origins of TPLF.

180. As interpreted by one Central Committee member, interview.

The party structure has been firmly established throughout Tigray, with local units/cells in every village. This cadre-network facilitates a firm representation by the party and presentation of its ideology at the grass-roots, on the one hand, and on the other, it supplies the party with grass-roots information and (less positive observers claim) ‘intelligence’.

In tandem with the organisation of the Front operate mass associations. During the struggle to overthrow the Dergue, the TPLF established separate organisations for peasants, women, youth, merchants and workers. Membership in these organisations was voluntary, and they were used in raising consciousness about the overall TPLF ideology and policies. Apparently, at the 1997 Congresses of the TPLF and EPRDF respectively, a decision was made formally to disassociate the mass associations from the party/parties. However, in spite of this decision, the effective linkage between these associations and the party structure continues.

This organisational structure of the TPLF outlines its official decision-making bodies. In the past, however, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, MLLT, has also been significant, particularly in the six or seven years after its establishment in 1984/5 as a vanguard party within the Front. The ‘party within the party’ has always been a highly secretive organisation, but was designed to guide the Front towards the implementation of a ‘maximum programme’ which would establish a socialist system¹⁸¹. Its development has been in turn widely associated with the dramatically increased military and organisational effectiveness of the front during the 1980s.¹⁸² The MLLT was not officially disbanded in 1991, although the EPRDF economic policy shifts of that year marked significant moves away from the ML perspective. A decision regarding the future of the MLLT seems simply to have been deferred, subject to further study, with the organisation going into suspended animation, and the actors involved agreeing that no comment would be made publicly until the matter was resolved at some future date¹⁸³.

TPLF’s initial partner within the EPRDF coalition was the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM), forerunner of the **Amhara**

181. Whilst the Front itself was committed only to the more modest ‘minimum programme’ for equitable social transformation.

182. See e.g. Young (1997:134–40). Interviews with members from the late 1980s suggest that the organisational effectiveness, and high degree of discipline associated with the MLLT were at least as important to the TPLF’s consolidation in this period as the ideological content of its programme.

183. Interview with TPLF Central Committee member, October 1998. This deferral, in common with the postponement of resolution of various of the issues to do with policy towards Eritrea and the EPLF, re-emerged as a bone of contention during the 10 year evaluation of the Front which culminated in the split in March 2001. The manner of handling the MLLT could thus be seen as one of the factors contributing to the split of TPLF.

National Democratic Movement, ANDM. The ANDM's history goes back to the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party's war against the Dergue and the TPLF in 1977. One faction of the disintegrating EPRP entered into negotiations with the TPLF and with their facilitation, collaboration, and extensive support formed the EPDM. This organisation, later re-named ANDM, was until the late 1980s a relatively small operation. Many of the prisoners of war captured by the TPLF/EPDM/EPLF in the series of battles in the late 1980s were recruited into the movement, radically increasing its ranks. Since the TPLF has long been perceived as having been instrumental in the establishment of the EPDM/ANDM, after 1991 the organisation had some difficulty to be recognised as an independent representative of the Amhara.

The TPLF and EPDM formed the umbrella **Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF**, in 1989, in order to extend their campaign against the Dergue from their northern base-areas¹⁸⁴. In 1990, the **Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, OPDO**, was organised by the TPLF and EPDM as an EPRDF member party. The first members of OPDO were prisoners of war, and EPDM members, of Oromo origin. At that time, however, the Oromo Liberation Front, OLF, had already been operating for 15 years, organising Oromo resistance against the Dergue regime, initially in the east, and later in the areas neighbouring Sudan. TPLF had collaborated with the OLF for several years in the early 1980s, before the two organisations drew apart in mutual distrust. EPRDF suggested the formation of a 'united front' with the OLF in the late 1980s, but these negotiations failed to produce results¹⁸⁵. As a result of its long history of struggle, the OLF is viewed by many as the primary repository of Oromo nationalist sentiment, enjoying a greater 'Oromo mythos' than the OPDO. However, this does not translate into concrete support for the organisation OLF (in terms of membership, and political programme backing), and from the period of the struggle against the Dergue the organisation has frustrated observers with its failure to consolidate through effective mobilisation. Nevertheless, the mythology which clings to the OLF has been sufficient to cause serious difficulties for the OPDO to create a popular base in many parts of Oromia. OPDO has had severe internal problems during 2001 and 2002: a series of members of its leadership has defected and applied for political asylum abroad during the last few years.

184. In addition to TPLF and EPDM, the Ethiopian Democratic Officers' Revolutionary Movement, EDORM, was the third organisation in EPRDF. The EDORM was composed of prisoners of war with officer's rank. The organisation was dissolved in 1994, with its members absorbed into the other ethnic parties.

185. OLF sources regarded the EPRDF offer as tantamount to one of 'join us now so that we can crush you later at our leisure' (interview OLF Representative, London, August 1998).

Prior to 1991, the EPRDF planned for the transfer of power in the southern region of Ethiopia. Southern POWs were trained and organised within the EPDM/ANDM well over a year before the fall of the Dergue. Fighting units were then designed in such a way that specially trained cadres from the various areas of the south were ‘pre-positioned’ to move in to mobilise their home areas within days of the change of power in the capital, and establish ‘peace and stability committees’. These subsequently formed local ethnic political parties, commonly referred to as PDOS, or People’s Democratic Organisations. These various PDOS then joined together to form the **Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Front, SEPDF**, in 1994 and it became the last member party of EPRDF. The party’s organisation was facilitated by the elder members of the EPRDF, and young teachers and government employees from the south flocked to join the new parties of government. At the time of SEPDF establishment, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Coalition, SEPDC, an umbrella for many small opposition parties in the southern region, had just been established. Thus, although the SEPDF enjoyed the benefit of the relative popularity of ethnic federalism in the south, it also faced competition.

Within the EPRDF coalition, the TPLF has always been considered to be the strongest party, both in terms of political weight and organisational capacity. The ANDM is ranked as the second strongest party within the coalition, and its political importance and power seems to be increasing (see below). OPDO and SEPDF have been widely considered less influential and autonomous, characterisations which continuing dismissals of members would do little to reverse.

5.3 Ideological tools & resources: revolutionary capitalism, pluralism, democratic centralism

This section briefly reviews the ideological tools and influences which have a bearing upon the outlook, culture, structures and strategies of the EPRDF and its members.

5.3.1 *Revolutionary v liberal democracy*

A point of primary importance is that donors and the EPRDF have not meant the same thing by ‘democracy’. The ruling party has its own understanding of democracy, which differs significantly from the type favoured, and ascendant, in the west; the institutions it has created accordingly function differently. Its conception of democracy is not the liberal bourgeois variety based on individual participation, a diversity of

interests and views, and plural representation. Indeed liberal democracy is considered to be a sham under conditions in Ethiopia:

‘As long as democracy is an instrument in the hands of the few it cannot strike roots. For our democracy to be guaranteed and to strike roots it should be based upon the all inclusive participation of the people.’ (EPRDF Action Plan 1995:12).

What the Front calls ‘popular democracy’ is based on *communal collective* participation, and representation based on consensus. Its perception of democracy is shaped partly by ideological conditioning, and partly by historical experience, fusing class theory with ethnicity. The Marxist and Maoist precepts of mass political mobilisation were apparently confirmed by the TPLF’s success in Tigray, where the peasantry was mobilised on an ethnic basis, which became also the mode of political participation and representation (see below).

Following land reform and other ‘levelling’ measures adopted by the Front, the peasantry was regarded as an ‘homogenous mass’ with common needs, interests, and political outlook. Political participation in these ‘mass’ terms presumes such commonality, which makes pluralism irrelevant. It does not rule out debate for the purpose of arriving at the information, clarification and persuasion required to reach consensus. Once consensus is achieved, however, the community speaks with one voice, and dissent is ruled out – or rather does not ‘objectively’ emerge since decisions are not made until consensus is achieved. The same holds true for the unanimity expected of community officials, and those who represent it at higher levels (cf. Markakis 2001).

Such a perspective generates ‘all the right language’: it emphasises all of the factors thought desirable by most liberal democrats (decentralisation, participation, inclusiveness of discussion, etc.). It also invests each with a markedly different meaning, premised on the certainties of historical materialism, rather than the vagaries of plural interaction.

5.3.2 The ‘national question’

It seems likely, then, that EPRDF and the international community have not either meant the same thing by national ‘self-determination’.

Social scientific approaches to ethnicity increasingly focus upon the ‘social construction’ of ethnic identity, the importance of the culture and interaction of the collective in the production of the norms and ‘social institutions’ associated with ethnicity, and the key role of *self*-definition/constitution of ethnic groups. Since they regard the components of

collective identities as the intrinsically shifting products of continuous collective reinvention (in response to changing circumstances and perceived interests), these accounts therefore stress the inherent difficulties of incorporating them as the fixed basis for the permanent demarcation of administrative boundaries. Meanwhile, Stalinist approaches to the national question, in which EPRDF thinking is firmly grounded, have a more ambiguous attitude to the potential utility of the 'nation, nationality or people' as a unit of governance. Marxist-Leninist understanding of the so-called National Question incorporates two contradictory elements in thinking about 'nationalities' and their 'self-determination'. The first is the (laudable, and demonstrably true) idea that you can mobilise (indeed even define or create) a community more effectively and get it engaged in its own political development if you 'get at' it from the inside, i.e. with its own members, in its own language, using its own cultural traditions and knowledge system, etc. This is clearly in tune with the social-constructivist position. The second element of Stalinist thinking is not: this is the view that the criteria for the establishment of 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' are objectively and externally identifiable, and verifiable independently of the views of their members. It is this component of Marxist thought which has resulted in the notion that a vanguard party may legitimately 'grant self-determination' to a community from the outside, in that process identifying and prescribing the ethnic criteria to define the group, and demarcating geographical borders around it¹⁸⁶.

This issue merits a full study in itself. In sum, however, it seems possible to interpret shifts in EPRDF policy regarding the implementation of ethnic federalism as reflecting tension between these two competing urges – to prescribe from above, or to facilitate from within the groups in question. The changes of policy in 2000, for example, which allowed separate organisation and special zones for Silte, and Welaiyta, can be seen as instances of a (belated but welcome) move from the former to the latter. It should be remembered, however, that Marxist-Leninist advocacy of nationality self-determination is intended to neutralise, and not to foster, ethno-sub-nationalist sentiment (seen as the result of economic iniquity), as a means eventually to achieve greater national integration and cohesion (once economic access is democratised and expanded). Whilst EPRDF has been willing to give in to a number of demands for separate organi-

186. In the view of the authors this difficulty reflects a fundamental flaw in the tradition of Marxist-Leninist or Stalinist approaches to the 'national question', which incorporate contradictory and mutually incompatible elements both of primordialism (such as the notion of the intrinsic 'naturalness' of certain nations and nationalities, and corresponding idea that a 'correct' map of their location can be drawn up) and of instrumentalism (suggestive of the political mobilisation and construction of a malleable ethnic identity).

sation and administration, therefore, it is highly unlikely that this strategy is regarded as a desirable end in itself. The underlying urge to *voluntary* integration and unity remains at the core of party ideology. This desired outcome is, of course, understood by Marxist-Leninists to be contingent upon levels of expansion, integration, and security of the national economy which have yet to materialise in Ethiopia.

5.3.3 *Pluralism, dialogue and the development process*

The TPLF and ANDM (former EPDM) were originally and for the most part of their existence Marxist guerrilla movements not political parties. They were organised and trained to fight for state power in the bush, not to compete for it in a democratic arena. Their structure and conditioning have not altered greatly since 1991 and they have a bearing on the political behaviour of the EPRDF. Democratic centralism is the principle to which both movements adhered. Its purpose is to prevent factionalism and ensure discipline. Needless to say, it is not conducive to pluralism. (Markakis 2001:51)

We do not seek coalitions with elites. The only coalition we seek is with the people; and the democratisation we seek is the democratisation of society and social relations. (EPRDF Chairman, interviewed August 1994)

EPRDF has never appeared as an organisation committed to pluralism for its own sake. This has been particularly visible in terms of its attitudes to resource distribution and the delivery of services, views entrenched by experience gained during the cross-border period of the 1980s. During this period, the organisation consolidated its clear understanding of the value and potential of the coincidence of interest between peasant populations benefiting from socio-economic development, and the party consolidating its support base as a result of being seen to provide the means of such development¹⁸⁷. As a result, it has been resistant to the emergence of parallel (competitor) systems of local resource delivery, as for instance welfare provision by religious and other civil society institutions.

This said, there is some evidence of shifts in the public pronouncements and apparent thinking of the party leadership, seemingly on the basis of experience since 1991. It would perhaps be important to under-

187. de Waal (1998) has given a favourable (if underdeveloped) account of these dynamics, stressing the importance of a 'political contract' between party and population, as forming the basis for mutual advantage and socio-economic benefit, and elaborating the Tigrayan case as a rare positive example.

stand these developments in detail. During the 1997 Jimma congress of the EPRDF, for instance, the formal disassociation of the party's mass associations (for farmers, women, and youth) was agreed upon, albeit with the considerable reluctance of many rural delegates. The rationale given for this step was the importance of harnessing local affiliation, initiative, and even competition into the development process, by opening it up to alternative groupings. The formal decisions taken in 1997 were followed in 2001 with party agreement to foster local development initiatives. This marked a reversal of the policy which had previously endorsed activities only at the Regional State levels, through the identikit twin structures of development association (TDA, ALMA, SEPDA, etc.), or regional NGO (REST, ORDA, OSHO, etc.).¹⁸⁸ Whilst practical results of the change of policy have not yet been seen, it represents a dramatic shift of party rhetoric, potentially impinging in a fundamental way on the ideological positions discussed above. It will be important to monitor developments in this respect.

If there is one area in which ruling party ideology is infuriating for outside observers, particularly those accustomed to a plural approach, it relates to an ideological unwillingness to engage in dialogue with alternative political perspectives, a sense that 'if you are not with us, you are against us'. A dominant view in EPRDF is that disagreements in policy and perspective should generate political competition rather than dialogue. Thus, 'if people disagree with our programme, that is their right, and we also don't have to take on board their views: let them set up a political party of their own and lobby for support for their ideas from the people – this is what democracy means'¹⁸⁹.

5.3.4 Transparency

It is worth noting in passing a new focus in party publications, and government rhetoric on the issue of transparency, which seems to dovetail with the prevailing language of openness and 'renewal'. Until recently the party had effectively rejected even a principled commitment to the idea of transparency, with faith invested in secretive systems of democratic centralism. A different note of *mea culpa*, and the public acknowledgement of mistakes, has been sounded by the new party English language publication *Tehadso* (Renewal), with 2002 articles detailing mistakes made, for

188. This shift of party policy to encourage a plurality of organisations is seen by those involved as 'seismic': it has certainly involved the reversal of strong public statements on the part of senior politicians. In the past, for instance in Tigray, calls to organise development work in – and in the interests of – specific localities, and outside the 'national' framework of REST and TDA, were denounced as 'narrow nationalism'. (Interview, TPLF Central Committee Member, December 1991).

189. Interview, EPRDF member, April 2002.

instance in relation to the *Gurage/Silte* claims for separate autonomous status. Such articles mirror the infuriating, and widespread, tendency of interlocutors in all spheres and at all levels to acknowledge past failings whilst insisting uniformly that they are 'now resolved'. What is of interest, however, is the public acknowledgement that transparency had not previously been a principle to which the party was committed¹⁹⁰.

5.4 'Renewal' and the TPLF/EPRDF crisis of 2001

The TPLF leadership crisis in 2001 directly affected the political power relations in Ethiopia. It falls beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the origins and background to the crisis, but a few comments on the crisis' impact on power relations are warranted.

One of the factors reported to have driven the division within the TPLF central committee was disagreement over the handling of relations with the Eritrean government. The dissenters assert that they argued for a stronger stand against Eritrea prior to the outbreak of the war, and after the outbreak they pushed for a more radical military strategy to beat back the invasion and to eliminate the political and military capacity of the Eritrean regime. It is widely believed that the party chairman was keener to engage in negotiations than in military options to settle the war. Disagreement over the handling of relations with Eritrea has clearly been a catalyst for the breakdown of relations, as well as a temptingly emotive vehicle for the dissident faction subsequently to attempt to garner support. It has exacerbated the dispute (and continues to be an inflammatory issue inside and outside the party), but cannot be understood as its primary cause. Interviews conducted with both sides suggest rather that the primary cause of the division was a breakdown of trust, and consequent power struggle, between the leaders of two groups whose day-to-day interaction was no longer close enough to sanction and overcome divergence.

Later, when the internal discussion of the party moved to an evaluation of the previous 10 years, debate centred on ideological differences, and divergence of development strategies. The original dissent group, composed of twelve senior TPLF cadres in central positions within the party and regional government, challenged the framework put forward for evaluation of the organisation. The dissenters rallied support for their move against the chairman and his supporters both internally within the

190. Interview, EPRDF member, April 2002.

TPLF and from the other EPRDF-partners. In the initial phase, the chairmen of the OPDO and the SEPDP supported them, whilst the ANDM leadership kept a neutral stand, or came out in support of the Chairman¹⁹¹. In the intense power struggle that followed, the dissenters made the key political mistake of withdrawing from Central Committee meetings, and were subsequently expelled from the organisation. Following the expulsions, the party political and military apparatus underwent 'evaluation and discussion', and individuals supportive of the dissenters were ousted, including the leaders of the OPDO and the SEPDP.

The 2001 process of dissent seems to have altered power relations within the TPLF, within the EPRDF, and between the TPLF and its constituency. First, senior and well-known TPLF cadres, regarded as 'liberation heroes' from 17 years of struggle have been ousted from official party/government power positions. Since a number of the dissenters were popular in Tigray (not least for their war record both during the struggle and during the war with Eritrea), some Tigrayans, including supporters of the party Chairman, have been frustrated by the handling of the internal dissent. This has resulted in the alienation of some parts of the Tigrayan constituency, although most seem to have resigned themselves to the existing situation. Although the party still enjoys support amongst a large proportion of Tigrayans, the TPLF can no longer claim to have the unified backing of its home constituency as before. It seems, for instance, impossible that Tigrayans will continue to speak of 'our organisation' (*wedibna*) in the remarkably uniform way that was prevalent until recently. Consequently, many observers have concluded that the party's power base has waned, which may in turn have an influence on the TPLF's position within the EPRDF coalition. ANDM's role within EPRDF and the government seems to have been strengthened as a result of its unity in deliberation, whereas the heavy expulsions from OPDO and SEPDP suggest that they remain weak and relatively marginal to the core of the federal power structure.

191. The initial 'division' within EPRDF was the vote against the adoption of the Technical Arrangements Agreement presented by the OAU/UN negotiation team on the Eritrean-Ethiopian war at the end of 1999. OPDO were 100 percent against, ANDM also 100 percent against, and the SEPDP two for and the rest against, whilst the TPLF split 17 against and 14 for. This defeat for the position favouring a negotiated settlement with Eritrea, probably led the TPLF dissenters to think that they would also have support for a general vote of confidence against the Chairman. This move failed, and those who did support the TPLF dissenters from the OPDO and SEPDP seem to have been those with whom the TPLF party liaison people (between TPLF and OPDO and SEPDP respectively) had best connection. Their failure to garner support within the ANDM suggests that this kind of influential liaison relation did not operate in the same way between TPLF and ANDM.

5.5 EPRDF-affiliated ('alliance') parties

EPRDF's strategy from the transitional period seems to have been to win political control of the core of Ethiopia's federal system, namely the four key regions of Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and SNNPRS. In terms of the establishment of parties, therefore, it has adopted a different strategy towards the peripheral regions lying outside this core area, facilitating the establishment of organisations which have become allies rather than members of the Front. Thus in the regions of Afar, Somali, Harar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella, the governing parties are affiliated to the EPRDF-umbrella. The respective parties are **Afar National Democratic Front**, ANDF, **Somali People's Democratic Party**, SPDP, **Harari National League**, HNL, **Benishangul/Gumuz Peoples Democratic Unity Front**, BGPDUF, and **Gambella Peoples Democratic Party**, GPDP. The looser organisational ties to these parties also signify a lesser degree of control by the EPRDF in these regions, as well as a distancing of the Front's responsibility for the visibly erratic activities of these organisations.¹⁹²

5.6 Decentralisation and ruling party dynamics

A useful recent World Bank report, 'Wereda Studies' (2001) concludes that Ethiopia's federal system involves the deconcentration rather than the devolution of power to regional and local government structures. It seems important, however, to give an indication of the significant regional variation in the capacity and context of decentralisation.

5.6.1 The 'peripheral' regions

Of the four so-called 'weaker regions', **Somali NRS** seems to be emerging as the most problematic in terms of a range of criteria, notably security, stability, and corrupt use of budgetary resources. Nine months into the 2001/2 financial year, no budget had been agreed by the Regional government. Since 1991, no *wereda* elections have been conducted in Somali region, and it is only in 2000 that new mobile registration procedures seem to have facilitated the involvement of a significant proportion of the

192. The EPRDF's political leadership is, in line with its commitment to democratic centralism, wary of forming coalitions with other political parties, recognizing only reluctantly that there are circumstances where this cannot be avoided. One factor which has influenced EPRDF's willingness to co-operate with the leaders of other organizations is its recognition of the constraints it faces in pastoral areas, where the dynamics of clan affiliation override its capacity for popular mobilization through the cadre system (Prime Minister, interviewed August 1994).

electorate in federal and State elections. The primary dynamic of political activity in Somali NRS involves the balancing of Ogaden and non-Ogaden clans, with attempts at achieving equilibrium repeatedly failing.

By contrast, **Afar** region seems to have been experiencing greater stability following the unification of five of the main political forces into the ruling Afar People's Democratic Party¹⁹³; it seems likely that the Ethio-Eritrean conflict has served to concentrate minds in the region, and a number of elements originally opposed to the EPRDF and federal arrangement have now been persuaded to join the new party which is a member of the EPRDF-alliance constellation¹⁹⁴. Major conflict dynamics now focus on the demarcation of the border with Shinile zone of Somali NRS, and jurisdiction over, and access to grazing lands and contraband flows in this area (Vaughan & Markakis 2002).

Dynamics in **Gambella** and **Benishangul** have long been affected by events across the border in Sudan, and the conflict between Khartoum and the south has regularly spilled across into these regions. There are additionally widespread reports of EPLF/OLF infiltration through Asosa area, probably facilitated from an enclave held by a southern Sudanese faction with close links to Asmara.

5.6.2 The EPRDF-administered core

This section briefly reviews the major dynamics of state-party relations and decentralisation in the four EPRDF-controlled regions, which bear a remarkable degree of similarity, with primary differences of degree only.

The EPRDF is, of course, longest and best established in **Tigray**, in parts of which the movement had operated as an effective government for 12 or 13 years before 1991, i.e. a period as long as that during which the party and state have been formally separated. Tigray is experiencing a period of substantial political turmoil and confusion in the wake of the political 'bloodletting' of 2001. In this context a more realistic critique of state-party relations seems to have been emerging than was previously possible. Observers have suggested that Tigray suffers primarily from the inadequate emancipation of party and state structures from society, which has resulted in the prevalence of deeply personalised politics based on close-knit patronage systems around a small group of key individuals and

193. Created from the unification of the Afar Liberation Front, ALF, a long-standing liberation front associated with the conservative family influence of the Awssa Sultanate; the Afar National Democratic Front, ANDF, drawn from amongst Afar intellectuals; the Afar Revolutionary Democracy Unity Front, ARDUF, for some time opposed to the EPRDF; the Afar People's Democratic Party, the EPRDF-associated party; and the Afar National Liberation Front, ANLF.

194. Although significant elements still remain outside, including part of ARDUF, and Uguguma.

families. This is trait commonly associated with politics in Africa¹⁹⁵, and widely regarded as a primary cause of its instability and apparent 'disorder'.

Critics of the situation in Tigray, including party insiders, draw unfavourable comparison with the situation in **Amhara** NRS. Here, they suggest, a wider and more varied constituency has called for the more elaborate balancing of interests, and institutionalisation of structures through which they can be pursued. As a result of the need to mediate competition between, for instance, Gojjam and Gondar, Wello and Shoa, state and party structures may have become better emancipated from the society.

Another difference between the two regions can perhaps be traced to the relative willingness of the professional classes to join the regional governments and party structures of each. Whilst in Tigray in 1991 the middle classes flocked to join their ethnic compatriots in the incoming regime (and, many observers suggest, have recently flocked away equally easily), in the case of Amhara many professionals were deeply resistant to regionalisation, having had in many instances 'something to lose' at the centre (see section on Public Administration above). Amhara professionals were persuaded to join the NRS executive and civil service only after a much slower and more intensive lobbying process, which some have suggested now provides a more stable and mutually respectful basis for collaboration and trust than is the case to the north¹⁹⁶.

If the party in Tigray has recently faced problems to do with complacency, because of its relative strength, security, and lack of opposition, those confronting the EPRDF organisations in the SNNP NRS and Oromia are much more straightforward: they stem from relative lack of capacity, and lack of popular support.

In the SNNP NRS, the programme of federal decentralisation has been able to harness the enthusiasm of many populations for the principle of self-government, and recognition of diverse languages and cultures. Problems have arisen in relation to the emergence of an ethnified version of clientelism, and the perceived need of each group to 'get their feet under the regional table'¹⁹⁷. Increasingly, political competition has centred upon control of government budgets and local resources, a situation in which the separation of party and state structures can hardly be expected to be

195. See for instance, the recent account of Chabal & Daloz (1999) which hangs great explanatory weight on this key factor.

196. It is certainly the case that senior civil servants in Bahr Dar interviewed in 1998 and 2000 had enthusiasm and praise for the relationship of trust they enjoyed with senior members of the regional executive.

197. Interview, Awassa, November 1999.

maintained. Since the major provider of resources at the local level remains the state, control over state structures remains the major locus of conflict, whether between groups arrayed as competing political parties, or between local factions using the local structures of the ruling party as a framework within which to compete. The situation in the SNNPRNS is of course further complicated by an underlying dynamic of competition between groups for influence at the regional level.

In **Oromia** popular interpretations see similar shifts in the balance of power within OPDO, for instance from the extensive influence of Ilubabor and Wellega¹⁹⁸, in favour of Bale and Arsi. OPDO's problems, however, are as deep and widespread as any facing EPRDF, not least because it seems to have been unable to draw on the residual ethno-nationalist sentiment from which the other EPRDF parties benefit. By contrast in Oromia, expressions of cultural and linguistic pride risk dismissal as 'narrow nationalism', in a demonstration of caution which seems effectively to have played into the hands of the nationalist OLF. Deprived of this potential spur to development, the OPDO recruitment has drawn on the only motivation remaining – that of joining the party of government and resource distribution. Prospects for separation of party and state in such a negative and cynical context must be regarded as slender. The extreme weakness and incapacity of the party structure in most parts of Oromia means that it is more than usually reliant upon the structures and capacities of the state to maintain its position.

5.7 Opposition parties

After the fall of the Dergue in May 1991, the EPRDF invited all political forces within and without Ethiopia (with some few exceptions) to participate in a transitional national conference. In July 1991 a broad-based Transitional Government of Ethiopia, TGE, was established, with representatives both from the EPRDF and opposition parties (most notably the OLF). However, soon after its establishment, the spirit of co-operation within the TGE began to decline, as opponents began to claim the TPLF/EPRDF were using their military forces and party apparatus to gain political control over Oromo and southern areas. The opposition complained about the lack of a level playing field, and just prior to the 1992 local elections the OLF withdrew from the cabinet and boycotted the elec-

198. A range of those who have defected or been dismissed from the organisation in the last year were from Wellega or Ilubabor zones in the west – also long seen as a stronghold of OLF activity.

tions, declaring their intention to return to armed opposition. EPRDF forces encircled and disarmed the majority of the OLF army, although some contingents went to the bush and some members of the leadership went into exile. Later, other opposition parties withdrew or were expelled from the cabinet (most notably representatives of the SEPDC) and prior to the 1994 Constituent Assembly elections, the co-operation across party organisations had all but ceased and the political party landscape in Ethiopia was firmly polarised.

There is a wide range of legally registered opposition parties in Ethiopia.¹⁹⁹ However, the majority of them are registered as regional parties, confined to rally for support within one ethnic group only. Thus, only a handful of registered opposition parties may have the potential to play a role influencing existing power relations at the national level.

Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition, SEPDC, is a multi-ethnic coalition, composed of a dozen smaller ethnic parties from the Southern region. Its strongest bases are in Hadiya zone, Kambata zone, Gedeo zone and in Awassa. The party was a strong competitor for EPRDF in the 2000 and 2001 elections, and international election observers reported EPRDF intimidation and manipulation in the region, both during the 2000 federal/NRS parliamentary elections and the 2001 local elections²⁰⁰. The present chairman is also chairman of the **Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia**, CAFPDE, an umbrella organisation originally for five political organisations representing both southern and northern constituencies in Ethiopia.²⁰¹ However, after an internal disagreement, several of the northern-based representatives withdrew from the coalition in the run-up to the May 2000 elections. Consequently, today, the SEPDC effectively dominates CAFPDE, and the CAFPDE label is used more out of convenience (since it is registered with the National Electoral Board) than as signalling any different political platform than SEPDC. The **All Amhara People's Organisation**, AAPO, had its main support base in the regional towns of Amhara region and in Addis Ababa, with offices in Gondar and several other towns in Amhara NRS. AAPO was striving to get a foothold in rural Amhara, but reported that government intimidation and harassment of supporters created dif-

199. See annex for a full list of registered parties in Ethiopia. On the difference of party programme and constituency, see the report prepared by Aklilu Abraham, Asnake Kefale and Taffesse Olika: "An Inventory of Ethiopian Opposition Political Parties in the May 2000 National and Regional Elections", submitted to the Royal Swedish Embassy, March 2000, Addis Ababa.

200. On the conduct of the 2000 and 2001 elections, see Pausewang & Tronvoll (2000), Pausewang et al. (2002), whose initial reports were for the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights.

201. Joint Political Forum, Ethiopian Democratic Union Party, Agew People's Democratic Movement, National Democratic Union, and the SEPDC.

difficulties for the expansion of the organisation; it also claimed that EPRDF was actively infiltrating the organisation²⁰². AAPO was reconstituted as the **All-Ethiopia Unity Party**, AEUP, during 2002, in a bid to secure the appeal of pan-Ethiopian nationalism thought to have grown in the wake of the Ethio-Eritrean war. **Oromo National Congress**, ONC, was established by an academic (its current chairman) as a third Oromo alternative, between OPDO and OLF. ONC tries to attract Oromo intellectuals and moderates, arguing for peaceful co-existence of Oromos within Ethiopia. ONC is still a very small and weak party in terms of organisational structure, and it is an open question if they would survive if the OLF were to return to the legal process sometime in the future.²⁰³ They do however have something of a constituency in the surplus-producing areas around Ambo in Western Shoa, and they might capitalise upon grievances regarding the impact of government economic policy in the wake of the collapse in food prices. Before the elections in 2000, a new non-ethnic party, **Ethiopian Democratic Party**, EDP, appeared on the scene. Some of its leaders had previously been members of AAPO, but wanted to create their own party to provide a genuine non-ethnic alternative. EDP took part in the 2000 and 2001 elections and obtained relatively many votes in the capital Addis Ababa. Their natural constituents are the urban populations of mixed ethnic origin, the intellectuals and the commercial sector, in addition to the Amhara middle-class. Since they argue on a national platform, they have the potential radically to increase their support as their organisational capacity expands²⁰⁴. EDP have been strongly buoyed up through 2001–2 by their willingness to capitalise on the emotive issue of Assab, and Ethiopia's access to the sea. It remains to be seen what effect the decision of the boundary commission (and its implementation) will have on this momentum, and their ability to consolidate support.

The difference in political programme between the EPRDF parties and the opposition parties centres on two issues: land, and ethnic federalism. Some of the opposition parties criticise the primacy of the ethnic federal model, and are arguing for either a modified geographical federal system, or a unitary state model. Most object to the EPRDF policy on land, which disallows private ownership, and call for one form or another of land privatisation. With this stand they have earned the approval of much of the international community.

202. Interview, AAPO Chairman, January 2002.

203. As this is written, ONC's only MP has reportedly defected abroad and joined the OLF (confirmed by Lencho Bati, OLF foreign spokesperson, 27 May 2002).

204. Something apparently not unconnected with the decision of AAPO to re-establish itself as AEDP.

The opposition parties are very weak in terms of organisational capacity, numbers of members and outreach (particularly amongst the rural peasantry), and material and human resources. Consequently, their prospects as individual parties are weak. However, if they succeeded in forming some sort of consolidated coalition/bloc, their individual bases of support might merge into a more significant power base that could play a small role in influencing the policies of the government in the medium to long term. There are ongoing talks among the key opposition parties with the objective to form some sort of co-ordinated co-operation.

There is currently no permanent arrangement for external support to the financing of political parties. All parties speak with enthusiasm about the fund for this purpose which was established under the administration of the NEB during the 2000 elections at national and regional state levels. The fund, provided by donors, and administered by the NEB with an advisory/supervisory committee drawn from the various interested parties, was deemed to have been deployed effectively, equitably, and to good purpose. Most express the hope that such a procedure can be instituted on a less ad hoc basis for the future²⁰⁵.

The Head of Government has asserted that since the 2000 elections, the parliament has been functioning as an arena of public debate, where the opposition leaders frequently challenge him on the EPRDF government policies before open camera.²⁰⁶ The PM is further of the opinion that the parliament will have an instrumental role to play in broadening the democratic culture in Ethiopia. A prominent opposition MP, on the other hand, has dismissed this, arguing that parliamentary debates are just 'window-dressing'.²⁰⁷ These contradictory positions were aired in a widely cited exchange upon the opening of the new parliamentary session following the elections. Such exchanges demonstrate the extent of the gulf of bitterness between ruling and opposition parties, and how far Ethiopia remains from enjoying the benefits of a 'loyal opposition'.

5.8 Diaspora/armed opposition

Adding to the confusion of the political landscape in Ethiopia are several external political parties, and armed resistance groups operating in the country. They try to mobilise the people against EPRDF on the grounds

205. The Netherlands Embassy, in co-ordination with others of the donor group has recently commissioned the drawing up of recommendations for an action plan relating to the 2004/5 elections. The report is available as of July 2002.

206. Interview with Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, January 2002.

207. Interview with opposition MP, Addis Ababa, January 2002.

that EPRDF lacks a democratic legitimate basis in the population, and that Ethiopia is still run as a dictatorship. The best-known Diaspora political party is the legendary **Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party**, EPRP, major heir to the Ethiopian Student Movement, although its potent historical profile greatly surpasses its contemporary capacity. After the almost complete annihilation of EPRP by the Dergue during the Red Terror of 1976–77, several EPRP members fled abroad to re-consolidate the organisation. The current leadership is spread in several countries, but a focal point is Iyasou Alemayehu in Paris. EPRP claims to have an extended cell-network within Ethiopia, in addition to some armed units (although they are not currently engaged in active armed resistance). Their political constituency is the urban leftist intellectuals and middle class, among whom the EPRP legacy is still felt. The EPRP has added importance since a number of high-ranking EPRP cadres and ministers are former EPRP members.

An opposition party that is symbolically important, although numerically insignificant, is the **Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy**, TAND. Hailu Mengesha, one of the seven founders of the TPLF, established TAND in 1995. In 1998 a former TPLF leader, took over the chairmanship. The fact that this is the only political organisation so far to claim to challenge the TPLF on its home territory, and that a number of ex-TPLF cadres are members, gives TAND a symbolic significance.

Of the armed resistance movements, the most significant is the **Oromo Liberation Front**, OLF, although the Ogaden National Liberation Front, ONLF, also wages an active armed struggle.²⁰⁸ The Oromo Liberation Front, as mentioned above, claims to be the single legitimate political representative for the Oromo people and it seeks support from all Oromos: rural and urban, peasants and intellectuals. The Front's predecessor was formed during the time of Haile Selassie, so that the OLF has a longer active, political history than the TPLF itself. The OLF claims today to be at its strongest in terms of military capacity since 1991²⁰⁹. Some observers estimate that they have between two and four thousand men under arms²¹⁰. The front itself claims as many as 1,200 fighters in western Oromia²¹¹. Whatever the true scale of the movement's strength, all sides agree that there was an upsurge in military activity along the Sudanese border area over the early months of 2002.

208. There are also armed resistance movements in Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regional-states.

209. Information provided by OLF Chairman Dawud Ibsa, August 2001.

210. Their main base area is in the eastern lowlands of Eritrea, reflecting the greatly improved fortunes of a number of Ethiopian and Eritrean armed opposition movements following the outbreak of Ethio-Eritrean hostilities in 1998: this saw the resounding reinforcement of the Horn of Africa's long-standing regional credo 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.

211. Government sources suggest the figure is more like two to three hundred.

OLF's traditional objective was to liberate Oromo areas from central Ethiopian control (Amhara/Tigrayan dominance), and establish an independent state of Oromia. However, after the shift of leadership a couple of years ago, the objective of independence has again been modified.²¹² The ideas of the foremost Oromo political thinker have gained ground, stating that the Oromo question has to be solved within the confines of Ethiopia's borders.²¹³ As long as current federal principles apply, and Oromia can be administered by 'the true representatives of the Oromo people', the current OLF leadership has signalled that they will abandon their avowed goal of full independence for Oromia. There continue, however, to be internal disputes over this issue within the Front, and the current chairman's leadership is challenged on this ground. The 2002 flare-up of fighting in Wollega and other parts of Oromia, for instance, should thus not only be interpreted in terms of the OLF-EPRDF dichotomy, but also understood against the background of internal OLF dissent. Post-September 11 doctrine on international terrorism has also had a direct impact on the OLF, who are themselves afraid of being labelled an international 'terrorist' organisation by the US administration or 'international community'. EPRDF and Oromia NRS authorities by contrast have been quick to use this label in their political rhetoric against OLF, in order to give legitimacy to their handling of the Oromo question.²¹⁴

Two other armed movements are worth mentioning. The **Ogaden National Liberation Front**, ONLF fights for control of the Somali Ogaden part of Ethiopia. It operates over substantial rural areas of Ogaden, and has challenged EPRDF control of rural areas in this region. ONLF has a military coordination agreement with, *inter alia*, the OLF and EPLF. It is difficult to estimate the popular support of the ONLF, since very few field data are available²¹⁵, but the ONLF is able to draw upon clan ties amongst the Ogaden. The **Ethiopian Peoples Patriotic Front**, EPPF is a much smaller 'hit and run' outfit made up of a mixed group of pan-Ethiopian nationalists, mostly Amhara based. They oppose the ethnic federal system, and want to restore a unitary Ethiopia. The EPPF has conducted some raids on military targets in the highlands, and is mentioned here as a representative of the 'new' organisations established in the wake

212. It was of course first put on hold when the OLF agreed to participate in the TGE in 1991. Some interpret this recent change in the leadership as marking a shift in favour of the eastern and more Islamic wing of the nationalist movement, at the expense of the largely protestant-educated Wellega/Illubabor wing. However, Dawud Ibsa himself is from Wollega.

213. See the personal political manifest of Leenco Lata (1999).

214. See the recent student demonstrations in Oromia, and the highly publicized response of the OPDO and regional government as examples of this.

215. Although see Vaughan & Markakis (2003).

of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war, all heavily supported by the Eritrean regime. It is difficult to estimate its popular support or constituency (if any at all), and it is usually viewed as a terrorist organization without any particular political platform.

5.9 Multi-party democracy and governance

The Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 provides for a full liberal democratic structure of government in the country. This is an important innovation in the history of the Ethiopian state that should not be underestimated. However, during the ten years since 1991, the government seems to have established a two-track structure of governance at all administrative levels. It has built up a formal structure of democratic institutions to keep in line with the constitutional premises. On the other hand, a range of recent studies suggests that, in parallel, the regime has built a party structure that retains a degree of control to the extent that in practice it would be difficult to use these democratic institutions effectively to challenge the power of the ruling party. These were problems of which the elections of 2000 and 2001 provided numerous examples.²¹⁶

5.9.1 Electoral practice

Political parties have been allowed, even encouraged and facilitated, to register for elections. However, Pausewang et al. (2002) suggest that, at the local level, opposition parties face difficult conditions. Where they present no challenge to the ruling party, they are relatively free. But if they are considered to pose a challenge, it has been the experience of repeated international election observer missions that they find their offices closed, their potential candidates harassed or arrested, their supporters warned against voting for them. Reports on such events were gathered from Amhara, Oromia and SNNPRs by the Norwegian research group to follow the election processes in 2000 and 2001, and the following observations summarise their impressions²¹⁷.

As well as parties, individual candidates also face severe hurdles. Commonly, prior to elections, there is intimidation, with family members getting warnings and threats, and being instructed to discourage the candi-

216. Pausewang & Tronvoll (2000); Pausewang et al. (2002).

217. These are detailed in Pausewang & Tronvoll (2000), and Pausewang et al. (2002), as well as a further series of reports from the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights: *Ethiopia 2001, Local elections in the southern region*, and *Withering Democracy: Local Elections in Ethiopia, February/March 2001*, both authored by Pausewang and Aalen, and available on the institute's web-site: <http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/publikasjonsliste.html#nr>.

dates from running. Just before the elections, the candidates may find that some of the signatures endorsing their candidacy are refused, so their candidacy is cancelled because of insufficient numbers of signatures. A candidate may also find himself disqualified as being ‘under police investigation’ for an unspecified offence. On voting day, candidates may see substantial pressure on their voters, and if they so much as talk to people in public, they may be arrested for “illegal agitation” on voting day. After the election, they may face revenge from the authorities, they may feel discrimination in public services or even be arrested, or dismissed from their jobs.

The conduct of elections in Ethiopia has reportedly been hampered by government interference, and manipulation. The federal and NRS parliamentary elections of 2000 showed widespread government intimidation, harassment, detentions and even killings of opposition party members and sympathisers.²¹⁸ The difficulty of assessing the nature and extent of the democratisation process in Ethiopia lies the fact that violations occur only in areas/regions where opposition parties pose a challenge to the EPRDF hegemony. In Tigray, large parts of Amhara and Oromia, where EPRDF has been the only party on the ballot, the elections have been conducted in an exemplary manner. In the SNNPRs, and in parts of Oromia and urban Amhara NRSS, however, where the opposition parties have managed to organise themselves at the grassroots, widespread intimidation and manipulation are reported by observers. This is particularly the case where local-level positions are at stake, so that the experience of *wereda/kebele* elections in 2001 was more problematic than had been the case with federal/NRS elections in 2000.

Thus, taking the local elections of 2001 as a benchmark, it is difficult to conclude that the *wereda* or *kebele* administration in Ethiopia is established in such a way as to encourage accountability towards its constituents. Unfair tactics used during the 2000 and 2001 elections, which are acknowledged by the National Electoral Board (as reported by the US State Department) include:

“election officials instructing voters for whom to vote, candidates campaigning at polling stations, and candidates being pressured into quitting. There were also credible reports of ballot stuffing, vote count fraud, voter intimidation or bribery, dismissals from work, withholding of salaries, detentions, abductions, and killings”.²¹⁹

218. Reported by all human rights organisations, also included in the US State Department reports.

219. US State Department Report on Ethiopia (2001), p.18.

5.9.2 Ruling party influence

On a regional state level, five mechanisms have been identified in a range of studies, by means of which the EPRDF has sought to secure influence over the internal politics of the regional states which lie outside their direct administration²²⁰. First, there is direct membership of elected EPRDF representatives on state councils, such as currently exists in Benishangul/Gumuz and Afar states. Secondly, there have been key EPRDF political ‘advisors’ attached to the executive in each of the four peripheral states, who have played an active, and some claim decisive, role in political affairs (although the policy of despatching federal advisors at the political level has been withdrawn²²¹). Third, the EPRDF provides a wide range of seminars, courses and educational functions for state and party officials and bureaucrats, disseminating and streamlining an EPRDF ‘way of thinking’²²². Fourth, the EPRDF seems able directly to discipline members of its affiliated organisations and remove them from their political positions²²³. Finally, the federal armed or security forces have intervened to assume direct control in various ‘unstable’ peripheral parts of the country, such as the Somali, Afar, Gambella and Benishangul/Gumuz NRSS, and within the troublesome Borana zone of Oromia NRS.

The institution of *gemgema*, a regular ‘evaluation’, or criticism and/or self-criticism, of office holders by those over whom they have administrative powers, is in principle a powerful tool of democratic accountability. It was developed during TPLF’s resistance struggle against the Dergue. At that time it is reported to have worked well to ensure that the leaders of the armed struggle would not estrange themselves from the civilian population and would not lose the support of the peasants (Young 1998). Transformed in the context of a peacetime administration, it is today often regarded as open to the manipulation of senior cadres who decide when to hold a *gemgema* and which issues to raise. Though it is still used to expose corruption and remove administrators who use their power for unpopular and selfish ends, it has also been described as working as a ‘tool of party control’ (Aalen 2002). Issues are prepared beforehand, and with the party pre-

220. For elaboration, see Young (1998) Tronvoll (2000) Aalen (2002).

221. This policy of ‘federal assistance’ to the weaker states was initiated in early 1998, in response to simultaneous ‘requests’ from the four NRSS. Whilst technical advisors continue in place, the policy relating to political advisors was revised as a component of the ‘tehadso’ reforms during the upheavals in early 2001.

222. Thus for instance, in addition to technical seminars between regional bodies on programme implementation, the Tatek political training programme educates cadres (and prospective cadres) of the party from all over the country.

223. This is a role which, in relation to state officials, has been recently transferred to the Ministry of Federal Affairs from the PMO; it is unclear whether the party-to-party relations which allowed it in the past will continue.

selecting candidates, it is seldom the popular will that is deciding a *gemgema*, other than if party leaders anticipate that they can profit from allowing a genuine popular scrutiny and vote. Government interlocutors report that, since the renewal of the party, the practice of *gemgema* is under reconsideration by the EPRDF, and that its use may from now on be restricted to internal party business: if it is indeed removed from civil service practice, this will mark a significant shift in thinking.

5.10 The links between the state and the ruling party coalition

Here, as commonly in other areas of Ethiopian political analysis, it seems particularly important to distinguish between the formal arrangements which apply, and what they mean in day to day practice.

Formally party and state in Ethiopia are organisationally and functionally distinct and distinguished, with no requirement that membership in one should either entail, or form a precondition for, appointment to the other. At the formal level, the party in the early 1990s took elaborate steps to divest itself of the many roles and functions of a *de facto* state, which it had acquired during the armed struggle against the Dergue. The fighters and military wing of the TPLF were subsumed in 1993/4 under the authority of the Ministry of Defence, and all of those who remained in the ranks of the Ethiopian Armed Forces at that point were stripped of their party membership and responsibilities. The various socio-economic and administrative activities of the TPLF were either hived off into the public sector (where their line management responsibilities were to state civil service Ministries or Executives at NRS or federal levels), or re-established as 'independent' commercial or voluntary bodies: formally these new entities (be they the companies associated with the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray, gongos like the Relief Society of Tigray²²⁴, Radio Fana, or Walta Information Centre) do not 'belong to' the party, and operate like any other private sector body, subject to the regulation of the state.

The moves which have been taken, in order to bring about even this formal separation, were in many cases arduous, uncomfortable, controversial, and painful. They involved lengthy discussions to overcome resistance and disagreement. They encountered personal insecurity, anger, and frustration at all levels, as when, for instance, the field experience of barely literate TPLF health workers was weighed against the formal qual-

224. Discussed in subsequent sections.

ifications of Ministry of Health personnel, and the two structures amalgamated and integrated²²⁵. The process of reform since 1991, undertaken to regularise the status and roles occupied by the ruling party, so that they accord with the requirements of the constitution, was carried out by its leadership and members with painstaking gravity, determination – and not a little sorrow. Those who were party to it do not doubt that it was conducted with seriousness. Equally clearly, however, the process has *not* brought about the real separation of party and state structures and systems of accountability, or indeed curtailed the influence of the party in non-state sectors, in a manner which would be recognisable as the desirable basis for a liberal democratic system. Given the combination of almost exclusive dominance, and revolutionary determination displayed by the EPRDF, this is a situation which should not surprise us. The situation remains as set out by Markakis in the following passage, as throughout much of the last decade.

The model is, once more, the TPLF experience in Tigray during the armed struggle, where a parallel provincial state administration was founded and staffed by the movement's members. This model was replicated by the EPRDF affiliates in Amhara, Oromo and Southern regions, and an effort is made to do the same in the other regions. Nearly all the officials in the state administration, from the kebele to the federal government are EPRDF members, having joined the party before or soon after election to their post. Government business is discussed and decisions are made in party meetings that precede meetings of state bodies. In view of the party-state merger, it is understandable that Ethiopians have difficulty distinguishing between them. (Markakis 2001: 52).

There are indications that this situation *may* now be undergoing a radical shift.

5.10.1 Realigning state – party relations?

Since the renewal party and state have been separated. This is good. But it is not easy any more to see what the point of the party is, since we no longer discuss anything. Policy decisions go straight from the leadership to the government, and rank and file party members hear about them just like everyone else. (Veteran EPRDF member, interviewed northern Ethiopia, June 2002).

Following the split in the ruling party in 2001, much discussion has

225. The account prepared for UN EUE by Hicks (1992) for instance is evocative of this period.

focussed on the potential for realignment of the relations between state and party, and the possible scope for moves towards a real separation. Supporters of the PM are keen to stress that this was one of the lines of division between themselves and the more rigid ‘dissident group’. They maintain that, consequent upon the party’s new elaboration and understanding of the dangers of bonapartism²²⁶, steps are being taken to demarcate and effectively separate out the structures of party and state, in a manner consistent with the demands of (liberal) democracy. Whilst a range of observers and critics are sceptical about these claims, given failure to institutionalise such changes over a decade, some shifts do seem now to be occurring. These have, in turn, been greeted with concern and dissatisfaction amongst those older members who see them as means of emasculating the party as a genuine political structure.

One line of analysis suggests that the division within the TPLF resulted from and reflected the emergence of the state and the party as alternate power structures, increasingly in competition in the senior echelons, and dominated respectively by the PM and the dissident group. It is possible to overstate this perspective²²⁷. However, it seems that the role of party functionaries is now being modified, to make them accountable also within the state structure, so as to preclude the emergence in future of this kind of ‘faction’ operating outside (indeed over and above) the purview of the council of ministers. This kind of shift is already visible in the new decision of the party that political control of the civil service should be exercised through ministers and vice ministers who will be exclusively political rather than technical appointments of the ruling party, with a corresponding removal of informal ‘political advisory’ positions, and the professionalisation/depoliticisation of the civil service.

The reforms as a result of the EPRDF ‘renewal’ process (*tehadso*) are important steps, which apparently do raise signposts of hope for the separation of ruling party and state, when viewed from a liberal democratic perspective. The government’s ambitious reform programme is also intended to separate powers between the different branches of the regional and local governments, and to establish on all levels an administrative hierarchy ‘independent’ of the political leadership. Amendments of the regional constitutions have already been voted through, to provide a legal base for the reforms, and many new officers appointed. This is an important development, which could indeed establish a new relation of power. It has

226. A concept introduced during the party evaluations last year, embodying the problems of party corruption, complacency and authoritarianism.

227. It was, after all, by means of appeals to the wider *party* structure that the dissident group was eventually marginalized and defeated.

a potential to reduce differential access to resources, and to enable parties to compete and to develop a democratic dialogue. A realistic competition along these lines could eventually lead, not least, towards increasingly democratic elections.

If the executive has been, and continues to be strengthened in this manner, a corresponding gap in the ranks of those responsible for party affairs was certainly left in the immediate wake of the dissidents' departure. Interlocutors acknowledge that this lack was felt particularly by the SEPDP and OPDO at that time, and with some initial alarm and confusion²²⁸. It remains unclear precisely how this gap has been 'closed over'. There is some speculation that the redistribution of various of the functions of the PMO to the new superministries has opened up space for a more 'hands-on approach' to party business by its chairman. What seems to have emerged can be interpreted in two ways. Either it represents an effective 'fusion' of party and state, with the party leadership now identical with that of the government, at federal and Regional State levels (a fusion rather than a separation of the two); or alternatively it implies the downgrading of the party structures in favour of the bureaucratised state executive. Whichever interpretation one adopts²²⁹, it seems clear that below the leadership level, the role of the party is less clear, and the organisation less active, than was previously the case²³⁰. Apparently the political system in Ethiopia now rests more clearly on the capacity of a single structure – the state – instead of the two legs of party and state as has been the case under EPRDF to date.

Political experience from Africa throughout the 20th century suggests that this kind of development has been common, and may in fact be a major cause for concern. Amongst other commentators, Allen (1995) traces two historical trajectories for political systems faced with economic decline, and increasing corruption: either a slide into 'clientelist crisis', and towards what he calls 'spoils politics' or state collapse; or alternatively – as potentially here – the adoption of a classic package of 'centralised bureaucratic reforms'. This latter path involves the retention of a 'clientelist system' but with greater control of its indiscretions, in combination with 'the centralisation of power in an executive presidency, the occupant of which would be able to stand above factional politics and to manipulate it, through control of constitutional, military and financial resources'

228. Interview, SEPDP Central Committee member, April 2002.

229. Perhaps a combination of the two: fusion at the top of the hierarchy and downgrading lower down.

230. Interviews, Amhara and Tigray NRSS, June/July 2002.

(Allen 1995:305)²³¹. Such reforms involve either ‘the displacement of the party and associated bodies as the main distributors of clientelist resources, by a bureaucracy answerable to the presidency’ or the transformation of the party structure itself into a bureaucracy, and its integration ‘with other bureaucracies such as the hierarchy of regional and district commissioners’ (Allen 1995:306)²³².

Of significance is the universal corollary of such reforms in Africa, which Allen also outlines, namely the downgrading of representative institutions within the political system, be they political parties, elections, parliament, local government, trades unions, or co-operatives. The key question for Ethiopia, then, remains whether such reform can be accomplished without centralisation, and without downgrading representative institutions, both key features which have repeatedly enhanced the stability of the arrangement at the cost of entrenched authoritarianism.

5.11 Trends and implications

5.11.1 *The participation of women*

Forty-two women were elected to the parliament (House of People’s Representatives) in 2000 out of a total of 547 seats, that is under 8 percent. The low percentage of representation of women in parliament is also reflected in the low interest of the different political parties towards women/gender politics. A study conducted prior to the 2000 elections of the seven biggest parties²³³ in the country reveals that none of the parties mention the gender imbalance in the country in their political statements.²³⁴ Only one party is even nominally committed to positive discrimination, the EDP. Even the EPRDF’s five-year development plan, on which they campaigned on in the election, does not mention the word ‘women’, or the work of the Women’s Affairs Office at all within its 47 pages, according to this study. Overwhelmingly, Ethiopian political and public life is dominated by men.²³⁵

Although the TPLF/EPRDF’s war of resistance against the Dergue also had as an objective to enhance women’s rights in Tigray and elsewhere,

231. Examples of reform processes in Senegal, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Zaire, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi are given as following this pattern.

232. The latter strategy is associated with Tanzania under Nyerere, a party and context with strong parallels to EPRDF and Ethiopia.

233. EDP, EDU, ONG, SEPDC, EPRDF, CAFPDE and AAPD.

234. See study conducted by Dr Konjit Fekade: “Existing Political Parties in Ethiopia”, presented on Gender Forum: Women and Politics, Ghion Hotel, Addis Ababa, 20 April 2000.

235. See also (Poluha 2002).

this gender struggle had little concrete impact on the lives of women in Ethiopia at large. During the TPLF struggle in Tigray in the 1980s, there were two rights which became almost iconic for women in their struggle for equality with men. One was the right for women to participate in the struggle on an equal footing with men, in other words to be fighters in frontline positions²³⁶. The other was the right to plough the land²³⁷. After the EPRDF came to power, however, paradoxically, the two icons of women's equality – as fighters and ploughers – have vanished. In the recent war with Eritrea (1998–2000), Ethiopian women were prohibited from assuming fighting positions, and women were not recruited into the armed forces. Female volunteers were only allowed to serve in administrative, logistical and medical positions. Many reasons were given to explain what many Tigrayan women saw as a 'set-back' in gender equality.

Since the EPRDF's political position has changed from that of resistance army to formal government, so also apparently have its political priorities concerning the needs of and for women in the 'revolution'. It is no longer necessary to emphasise a transformative ideology of equality in order to recruit members of both sexes to a resistance army; nor one of social revolution and access to equal resources to mobilise against a military regime. As a footnote, it is perhaps worth observing that these changes are not as surprising or radical as might have seemed to be the case from the earlier rhetoric. The TPLF, in common with many Marxist organisations, viewed the organisation and empowerment of women as a tactical means to a more important end – that of enhancing the class struggle²³⁸. Women's emancipation and empowerment was never seen as a legitimate goal *in its own right* – a view which continues to colour the perspectives of the majority of Ethiopia's political class, with its predominantly Marxist background, be they now EPRDF or opposition politicians.

5.11.2 *Shifting perceptions of political life?*

We began this study by commenting on the key relation between culture and power, and the extent to which both are rooted in the pattern of knowledge and beliefs of the communities amongst which they operate. It seems important to conclude a review of the political arena, therefore, with a consideration of recent shifts in widespread perceptions. What sig-

236. Although it should be noted that already in 1988 the policy of recruitment of women fighters into the TPLF had been suspended, on grounds of 'efficiency'

237. Although it must be observed that, despite the colourful rhetoric and powerful imagery, women were never widely involved in ploughing which remained very much a male preserve.

238. Interviews conducted in Sheraro and western Tigray, December 1988, and in London and Khartoum, 1989.

nificant numbers of Ethiopians believe (what they know) about the situation in their country has shifted in important ways since the beginning of 2001. There are two areas in which the perception of many members of socially and politically influential groups has visibly changed. The first set of revised experiences, views, and expectations relates to the economy, which, by mid-2002 was widely believed to have taken a downward turn; the second concerns the political strength and stability of the ruling party, which is also widely believed to have reduced. Regardless of the true extent of decline of economic growth or political stability, the revision of the collective ‘knowledge’ of important sectors of Ethiopian society is sufficient to give cause for concern. These shifts *in themselves* potentially threaten the attainment of Sida’s objectives in Ethiopia, namely poverty reduction, economic growth, liberal democratic development, and increased respect for human rights.

5.11.2.1 *Economic confidence*

The perceived decline of Ethiopia’s economy has been felt at a number of levels. The negative economic impact of the war from 1998 to 2000, and subsequent military stand-off between Ethiopia and Eritrea, seems initially to have been disguised by the high levels of domestic procurement and commissioning undertaken by the Ministry of Defence in the early phase of the conflict²³⁹. Whilst the underlying economic impact of the war has not yet been quantified²⁴⁰, the downturn has been felt all the more harshly in the wake of an initial war-time boom. The trend has been exacerbated by the dive in coffee prices during the last two years. Earnings from this most valuable of Ethiopia’s exports have been slashed, and the implications of Ethiopia’s inability strongly to diversify its exports demonstrated sharply²⁴¹.

A further factor to have depressed the rural economy is the collapse of grain prices following bumper harvests in the 2000/1 and 2001/2 seasons. Hardest hit have been the traditionally surplus-producing areas, which the government’s critics have argued for some years were likely to be disadvantaged by agricultural economic policies apparently better designed to

239. The purchase, for instance, of military uniforms provided an obvious boost to the domestic garmenting industry, with local cargo body manufacturers likewise benefiting from expansion in military transport capacity. This impetus was replicated in many sectors.

240. Although see EIU analysis of the last two years for best projections.

241. Whilst prices seemed, in mid-2002, to be picking up, Wondo Trading reported lows of 0.75 Birr/kg, rising to 1.4 Birr/kg around Yirga Chefe: this contrasts with producer prices of 3–4 Birr/kg in recent years. As a consequence it is widely reported that farmers are replacing coffee plants with quail in an attempt to stabilise their incomes. (Interviews, Awassa, Yirgalem, Dila, June 2002).

preclude food insecurity in less fertile parts of the country. In the area of Western Shoa around Ambo, for instance, the collapse in prices of a range of food grains and pulses has coincided with expressions of anger and demonstrations against the inflexibility of credit repayments in the face of dwindling revenues from production²⁴². The collapse of grain prices was clearly of great concern to Ethiopia's surplus producers. Meanwhile, the heavy drop in the price of staples might have been expected to benefit both the urban poor, and low-paid public sector workers. There are, however, indications that these positive effects have been curbed by the weakness and contraction of a poorly institutionalised rural-urban transport and marketing infrastructure. Prices have in some instances dropped so far that merchants have assessed the proportional increase of transportation costs to be prohibitive of their operations in remoter markets.

Reports from 2002 suggest that local bureaux of agriculture anticipate that some sort of strategy to address these issues is being elaborated, and will be promulgated shortly by the federal government. Meanwhile, a reversal of rainfall conditions during 2002 has created extensive food deficits into 2003. The sharp drop in consumer incomes of the previous several years had already had a dramatic effect on the uptake of credit, fertiliser, and extension packages²⁴³; food shortages will do nothing to reverse this problem for the majority, despite likely increases to incomes in areas which continue to plant and produce surpluses. It is, of course, a major blow to the government's development strategy of Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation, ADLI, where industrialisation is premised on an increase in producer purchasing power, pursuant upon sustained increases in production and incomes.

Investor confidence in urban areas, particularly in Addis Ababa, suffered an acute shock in mid-2001, following public allegations of widespread corruption amongst senior officials of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, CBE, and ruling party. Arrests were made, proceedings instituted by the anti-Corruption Commission, and the issue of further loans suspended for several months. Although the suspension was subsequently lifted, the willingness of the business community to seek fresh loans seems to

242. It is worth noting that the causes of disturbances in this area during the last few months are disputed, the government insisting that it is an urban phenomenon, reflecting localised incitement by the opposition, rather than widespread or 'legitimate' rural grievances. It is certainly the case that OLF infiltration in this area has increased since November 2001 (see the section on political parties below), whilst the grievances about economic policy date back some years (interviews, Ambo area, October/November 1999): here again, however, the twin issues of economic and political confidence are intertwined.

243. In Welaiyta zone, for instance, a mere 3,000 quintals of fertiliser have been sold or provided on credit in the last year, as against an anticipated minimum 50,000 quintals (interview, Awassa, June 2002).

have been eroded, with ‘few willing to stick their necks out given the daily ETV diet of court cases, suspicion and sensitivity about business ethics’²⁴⁴. Shock waves have spread amongst civil servants whose confidence has been marred by the widespread perception that the anti-corruption commission’s charges are in some instances politically motivated, and that even the relatively minor ‘indiscretions’ reportedly common in government dealings to date²⁴⁵ could become a pretext for proceedings of a serious nature²⁴⁶.

Some observers suggest that the deportation of a large proportion of the Eritrean business community is a further factor which has had a detrimental effect on economic activity, both because of the removal of an active sector, but more importantly because of the damage to investor confidence as a result of the very visible confiscation of Eritrean assets. The view is, of course, controversial.

In concluding, it must be remarked that many international monitoring organisations seemed to consider the health of the Ethiopian economy to have been returning by the middle months of 2002. Whilst confidence in macro-economic reform remains high, less optimism relates to government hopes to boost peasant incomes, with poor rains in mid-2002 bringing extensive and severe food shortages and insecurity.

5.11.2.2 *Political confidence*

For much of the 1990s, opposition to the EPRDF-led government came from two quarters. The first was a range of ethnic-based parties and liberation movements calling for autonomy, or in some cases secession, for their constituents, and claiming that under EPRDF the federal arrangement was ‘a sham’ and a means of ‘divide and rule’ rather than of delivering self-determination. Secondly the government faced pan-Ethiopian nationalist opposition from groups opposed to both Eritrean secession and Ethiopian ethnic federalism in principle, regarding both as divisive and destructive of Ethiopia’s natural national interest. Both quarters have had their legal and their extra-legal wings, with both agendas pursued through electoral and constitutional means as well as by means of armed opposition and in the Diaspora²⁴⁷.

To these two wings of opposition has now been added the so-called internal ‘dissident group’ sacked from the leadership of the EPRDF following

244. Interview, private businessman, Addis Ababa, April 2002.

245. Laxity of safeguards, incompetence, or minor irregularities such as might be dealt with by a professional tribunal.

246. This issue is discussed in further detail below, in the section on the judiciary.

247. Further discussion is given in the section on political parties, which are also enumerated in appendix.

the dramatic split within the TPLF Central Committee which emerged publicly in March 2001²⁴⁸. It is unlikely that this group will be able to form an effective *external* opposition to the TPLF/EPRDF. What is significant, however, is the potentially negative *internal* impact that *both* the division *and* some aspects of the subsequent period of 'renewal' seem to have had on the psychology and morale of the ruling party and its members. The division within the party leadership seems to have had a differential impact on different social groups.

Most strongly affected have been the members and associates of the TPLF, where the division originated. The leadership of the organisation, who were party to the disagreement, regard it – and their opponents – with bitterness and anger. On the face of it, it seems unlikely that individuals from the two camps will be capable of future co-operation. Each side accuses the other of trying to undermine it, and it seems likely that the views of both are credible in this respect. Less visible has been the larger group of middle-level cadres either dismissed or demoted from party-related appointments, as a result of the division in the leadership. Apart from those whose loyalty has been called into question, many middle-class Tigrayans who were either members or associates of the TPLF and have witnessed the changes seem to have suffered a tangible crisis of political confidence since March 2001. Their dismay has an undercurrent of ethno-nationalist frustration – almost a sense of humiliation at the public laundering of dirty Tigrayan political 'linen'. The result seems to have been a widespread 'drawing in of horns': an unwillingness to take initiatives, be they in governmental, commercial or political activity; a lapse of commitment and sense of purpose on the part of cadres; and a sense of uncertainty and anxiety amongst the wider public. For those who have seen the party as the driving dynamic behind the implementation of governmental objectives, this combination of demoralisation and withdrawal must represent a serious threat to the achievement of development goals.

The impact of the crisis has been most abruptly and widely felt in Tigray, where the members of the dissident group were well known. Outside Tigray, purges within the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, OPDO, and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front, SEPDF, seem to have been extensive, with some elements of these organisations still failing to attain even a semblance of stability by mid-2002²⁴⁹. The ruling

248. Although the causes and dynamics of the split in the TPLF Central Committee cannot be covered in depth in this report, some further discussion is provided in the section on political parties, below.

249. The Central Committee of the Sidama zonal party, from which the former regional president was removed, for instance, is reported to have been replaced 'almost every few weeks' during early 2002 (interviews, Awassa, May/June 2002).

party's ability to put an end to this instability will be a primary indicator not only of its internal health, but also of the ability of its leaders to concentrate on other matters. Amidst all the gossip of the urban middle-class, however, central questions remain unanswered as to the views of the rural majority. The likely impact of shifts in political confidence in the Ethiopian context is of course difficult to assess. The opening up of the relatively raucous public criticism, which has followed changes since early 2001, would seem, from a liberal democratic perspective, to be in itself a positive development.

Conclusions

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Improving policy dialogue, understanding, and knowledge

Sida should take the opportunity of the ‘renewed’ face that the Ethiopian government presents, to engage explicitly and overtly with the Government of Ethiopia and its ruling party regarding a shared ideational framework, specifically regarding the nature of the relations and structures of power which each would like to see established in Ethiopia. Failure to make explicit and to understand such common ground and differences as may exist (for instance in relation to understandings of ‘democracy’) is likely only to store up frustration and future confusion for both parties. The explicit evolution of shared understandings and perspectives seems particularly important given a context where increasing Government of Ethiopia and donor moves towards co-operation premised on direct budgetary support, remain embedded in a context of political conditionality, and concerns with human rights, poverty reduction, and democratisation.

Of all of the changes being effected in Ethiopia today, potentially the most important is the restructuring and strengthening of *wereda* administration, involving the new structures of cabinet, speaker, and parliament/council, as recipients, managers, and monitors of the new *wereda* block grants. Sida has a long and extensive involvement with the development process at *wereda* level through its Amhara Development Programme. It would seem appropriate that future programming decisions seek to consolidate, build on, and extend this existing knowledge base, for purposes of political as well as (or as a basis for) developmental analysis. The *wereda* level, after all, now seems set to become the most important locus of analysis for most of the indicators associated with the democratisation process. Ethiopia’s next round of federal and local elections will take place

in 2005. By then it should be becoming evident whether and to what extent the ongoing shifts are to be understood as positive.

Since its assumption of power in 1991, the EPRDF-led government has shown little willingness to bow to pressure from the international community to modify its vision and activities in the political sphere²⁵⁰. It is unlikely that this situation should now be expected to change radically, and it will be important that pressure for accelerated democratisation is realistically and constructively applied. The current context, however, is one in which, in the wake of the war, programmes of funding and loans are being reactivated at unprecedented levels. It is also one in which the ruling party has emerged from its renewal process apparently with a greater commitment to openness, transparency, and pluralism. It may be that it is therefore a context conducive to the escalation of political policy dialogue.

In this respect, there is a visible need for improvement in co-ordination of the knowledge base of the donor group (perhaps initially amongst EU missions) in relation to key objectives in the political sphere: co-ordinated activities, such as, for instance, information sharing, and the translation of relevant Amharic documents. There is now a wide range of documentation in the public domain (recently of interest have been internal party discussion and policy papers; court submissions arising from the corruption cases, and so on). There is also an increasing capacity in Addis Ababa to provide translation and summary services. It would seem to make sense to establish a joint standing fund, able to respond as interesting resources in need of translation emerge. The current reticence of the international community regarding overtly political and ideological developments could almost be seen as contributing to a 'culture of secrecy'.

6.1.1 The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper/Policy, PRSP

There is perhaps also a need to think strategically about how to build on the usefulness of the PRSP process, of which the experience of 2001/2 has been mixed, providing most significantly a useful capacity building exercise for the non-governmental organisation sector, and a new line of dialogue for all concerned. Its real value, however, will lie in its more effective institutionalisation in future rounds, and in particular (again) at the *wereda* and sub-*wereda* levels.

An attempt to offer recommendations or prescriptions regarding donor engagement to influence the structures and relations of power as they operate in contemporary Ethiopia lies beyond the scope of this

250. This perhaps contrasts to some extent with the economic sphere where a far more comprehensive and detailed policy dialogue has underpinned the assistance and loans which Ethiopia has obtained.

paper. The various suggestions and comments regarding possible areas of increased focus offered here, however, have one objective in common: the improvement of the political analysis – of the knowledge base – on which Sida's decision-making vis-à-vis Ethiopia is premised. At the outset of this report we observed that the relations and structures of power are inherent in the interactions of the collectivities in question, and that these relations are in turn constituted by the interlocking systems of knowledge operating amongst these communities. Empowerment, thus, depends ultimately on interaction, association, and organisation – on improved systems of collective knowledge. This is true of peasant communities, whose capacity for involvement in democratisation processes (their 'social power') fundamentally hinges upon their 'knowledge' or 'genuine conviction' that (and how) this is a right which is collectively and individually theirs for the taking. It is also true of donors, whose power to engage in these processes of democratisation and development, is a function of the knowledge that they have of the relations and structures of power amidst which they wish to act.

6.2 Promoting democratisation: looking for agents of change

By mid-2002 Ethiopia was potentially beginning to emerge from the calamitous period of the last 4–5 years of developmental constraints arising from the war. The outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in May 1998, marked a disastrous setback for a state and government which had, until then, been thought to be making steady – if slow – progress towards economic growth and administrative and political reform. In addition to the devastating impact of the war in terms of human lives lost, injured, and disrupted, the damage done the economy remains to be quantified. What has further emerged publicly in the period since March 2001 has been the force of the political tremors with which factors associated with the war shook the cohesion and integrity of the ruling party. The dramatic challenge presented by the dissident group within the Tigray People's Liberation Front, TPLF, in early 2001 has had far reaching implications for the reorganisation and restructuring, 'renewal', and remobilisation of both the party, and the structures of the state at every level. These changes have penetrated far beyond the rapid and effective marginalisation and expulsion of the group itself.

It seems likely that the internal political events of 2001–2 mark a greater sea change in the intentions, objectives, organisation, and methods of the ruling party, perhaps than at any time since the inception of the

TPLF in 1975. In this case it is possible that much of what has been described in this paper of the experience of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF, government over the last ten years may not apply to the next ten. Whether these changes are for the good or for the bad now remains to be seen, and Ethiopia stands before a wide spectrum of potential scenarios of the future.

6.3 Indicators of future trends

Periods of change are often also periods of uncertainty and – relatedly – instability. The coming period will demonstrate whether the ruling party has been able to reconsolidate the stability and cohesion it seeks, and whether this capacity will be put to serve plural and inclusive, or authoritarian and exclusive ends. The rhetoric of 'tehadso' ('renewal') marks a series of apparently significant changes in party thinking, many of which have been welcome to the liberal democratic ears of the donor community. It seems to be the case that relations between state and party are undergoing something of a review, and – if they provide extended opportunities for increasingly plural political competition and participation – these changes are indeed to be welcomed.

Any number of scenarios of the future political development of Ethiopia can be envisaged under current circumstances. The following summary details a number of important trends in the political development of Ethiopia which may give an indication of its trajectory. Given what has already been stated about the need to base an analysis of power on the operation of knowledge systems *throughout* the political community in question, and given the paucity of information about the beliefs of the majority in this case, predictions about the future should be treated with great caution. The following notes suggest where one might continue to look for indicative evidence.

6.3.1 The health and capacity of the state

The current Ethiopian leadership has set its face against the neo-liberal 'Washington consensus', arguing that a strong state is a prerequisite for economic and developmental success both domestically and in the globalised context Ethiopia faces.

If capacity building at local levels is not quickly effective, it may be that the urge to build a strong state will increasingly mean that decentralisation is limited or reversed, or that it is restricted to deconcentration of responsibility at the expense of devolution of authority. A sense of the

direction of momentum will require close examination of the implementation of the system of *wereda* block grants, and the investigation of such questions as, for instance: where decisions regarding resource allocation are made, by whom, and how; what the relative influence and capacity of actors is at different levels of the hierarchy; how much recent changes are successful in separating and balancing the powers of the state, and in particular in establishing patterns of restraint on the executive by legislature and judiciary.

The commitment, professionalism, and capacity of administrators and civil servants at local, and particularly *wereda* levels will be of great interest and concern. Whilst a primary focus of investigation is likely to be that of the technical capacity to manage and disburse the new *wereda* block grants, equal attention should be paid to the development of the relations of power at this critically influential new locus of resource control. The extent to which citizens are able to hold their elected representatives to account, and seek redress from those who govern them at local level are always matters laborious and difficult to establish in practice. Sustained research to monitor local dynamics and capacity becomes all the more necessary in a decentralised budgetary environment, where *wereda* administrators wield increasing powers along with their increasing responsibilities.

The reforms of 2002 apparently had the effect of reducing the resources allocated to ethnically defined units at National Regional State, NRS, and zone levels, and of shifting the control of budgetary resources towards civil servants at federal and *wereda* levels, units which are demographically rather than ethnically drawn. These new fiscal arrangements thus seem to reflect a gradual reduction *in practice* of the importance of units designed around Ethiopia's 'nations, nationalities, and peoples'. This may signal a move towards the diminution of the role of political ethnicity as federalism evolves, although no modifications of what remains a radical constitutional arrangement have been mooted. The proliferation or reduction of the local claims for new ethnic autonomous units, which were prevalent through the 1990s in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's National Regional State, SNNPRS, may give an indication of how the reforms are perceived locally: whether or not they are seen as making separate nationality-based administrative units less lucrative, and therefore less desirable.

Promises were made during 2001/2 that the PM and ministers would conduct public dialogue with political and policy opponents, and some televised debates with the opposition took place during late 2002 and 2003. During the 1990s, EPRDF had continued a strong Ethiopian tradition of reluctance to take technical advice from 'outsiders' or those who

disagreed with it: there are indications that this strategy may be changing, and these should be monitored and encouraged, particularly in the run-up to the next elections.

The appointment of a Human Rights Commission and Ombudsman has the potential to become an initiative of great significance. The capacity, and the manner of operation of these offices at each level, will be of importance, and little can be concluded regarding the nature of accountability they may offer, pending establishment. More widely, issues of accountability are closely connected with the health, capacity, and independence of the judiciary.

The federal judiciary faces a tough test of its independence in the proceedings brought by the Anti-Corruption Commission, ACC, against defendants who are also political opponents of the government. Some of these cases seem unlikely to succeed, and the willingness and capacity of the court system to find against the ACC in controversial cases will continue to be widely scrutinised as an important indicator and precedent for the future.

More directly relevant to the lives of the majority of Ethiopia's citizens is the health of the *kebele* centred 'social court' system, and local *wereda* courts, which have both suffered serious problems of capacity, and of independence. It seems essential that monitoring of judicial independence and reform increasingly focuses on these local levels.

The importance of the independence of the judiciary in Ethiopia has often been seen exclusively in terms of securing human and political rights and democratic freedoms. It goes further than this. It is also a critical matter of local and national economic development in a context in which domestic businessmen and wealthy farmers would be reluctant to (re)invest without what they consider to be the adequate legal protection of their assets.

6.3.2 Coercive powers of the state

The modern Ethiopian state was established by coercion, as a result of a process of conquest under Menelik II. Its subsequent history has been one of tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces, with the 'integrity' of the empire state maintained essentially through coercion. Although the departure of Eritrea and the introduction of ethnic federalism at the beginning of the 1990s marked a welcome swing in favour of decentralisation, the point at which coercion can, or is likely to be dispensed with remains far in the future. This is a situation which poses profound obstacles to the development of inclusive and egalitarian systems and practices of decision-making or resource allocation.

The two most recent changes of the Ethiopian regime, in 1974 and 1991, were (in common with a long previous history) undertaken by the military or with military force. In this context, it is significant that the military seems to have been professionalised over the last decade: it is, for instance, much to its credit that it did not step beyond a constitutionally-defined role at the moment of internal crisis within the TPLF/EPRDF in 2001. Nevertheless, the position of the military, and its relations with the executive, will continue to be of critical importance.

There are some indications of increasing moves to hold to account the local police (along with local administrators) for violence and human rights abuses, such as those which took place in SNNPRS during 2002; the conduct and conclusions of related court proceedings will be significant. New initiatives for upgrading the training of police in a range of constitutional issues will be important. Assistance to the police and military to date has tended to prioritise the improvement of equipment and capacity; emphasis is also needed on educational and other concrete initiatives which may help break entrenched cultures of impunity in the various branches of the law enforcement, security, and military.

International human rights monitoring organisations reported a deterioration of the human rights record of Ethiopia with the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war. There is conflicting information regarding the long and medium-term trends in relation to levels of human rights abuses. The evidence documenting human rights conditions in Ethiopia since 1991 suggests that increases in abuses correlate closely with increases in political competition, notably in the run up to local and national elections²⁵¹. National and (in some ethnic localities) local opposition to EPRDF can be expected to be at its best organised to date in the next round of Ethiopian elections.

6.3.3 Elections and the electorate

Capacity building of the local executive has, over the last decade, built a community of political and civil servants whose loyalty to the party and state of which they form a part, and from whom they have benefited, is – unsurprisingly – stronger than their sense of commitment to the public in whose service they are appointed, or to the constituents who have elected them. The key to the future political development of Ethiopia in the context of a strong state will be the democratisation of relationships at these key interfaces. Elections per se should not be taken as a measure

251. Since several of the most important accounts of the human rights in rural areas come from election monitoring activities, it is worth cautioning that the documentation available *may* provide an exaggerated impression of the degree of this correlation.

of Ethiopia's political health, as much as the relations which the electorate enjoy with the three branches of the state with which they interact. It will be important that the assessment of trajectories of democracy drawn from elections moves away from a technical preoccupation, in favour of a consideration of the wider political dynamics: for such analysis to enjoy credibility it needs to draw on substantially increased and improved empirical evidence.

On the evidence of previous experiences, it is unlikely that competition in the run up to the next elections will be entirely 'free and fair'. As suggested above, a probable increase in the seriousness of electoral competition means that those who expect these elections to be fought without incident are likely to be disappointed. A number of government spokespersons have in recent years admitted that the situation to date has been far from perfect. In this context, a realistic and constructive dialogue on matters of concern would seem more likely to avert or reduce the potential for future abuses than misplaced donor optimism.

There have, since the last elections, been a number of changes both in the ruling party organisation and rhetoric, and in the profile of the opposition parties. It may be that these changes will entail changes in their approach to the conduct of future elections.

A factor which can be expected to increase the likelihood of the 'vigorous competition' of elections at *wereda* level, is the incentive to win control of block grants now at the disposal of *wereda* cabinets. As *wereda* office begins to eclipse NRS office in its relative importance, contending parties can be expected to focus their activities at the *wereda* level. This may militate against those political organisations which do not have well-established activities at this level, or against smaller electoral competitors.

The willingness of Ethiopia's legally registered political parties to participate in forthcoming federal and *wereda* elections will be a significant indicator, both of their confidence in the process, and the seriousness of their political intentions. The possibility that (elements of) organisations currently outside the legal framework might also participate is important, particularly in the case of Oromia, where the participation of other groups would greatly change the political landscape, but also in the cases of Somali and Afar NRSS.

In the last few years, Ethiopian national political parties have begun to emerge, notably the Ethiopian Democratic Party, EDP, and the newly reconstituted All-Ethiopia Unity Party, AEUP. The relative support which they are able to garner in comparison with the nationality-based parties (Oromo National Congress, ONC, and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition, SEPDC, members) may give an indication of future

directions. The ability of the two different opposition blocs to overcome differences and work either together or co-operatively will also be significant. A weak and fragmented opposition has been unable to challenge the government, and this is unlikely to change radically without an increase in co-operation.

6.3.4 The health of the ruling party

This discussion has suggested that the EPRDF and its leadership remain, for the foreseeable future, the key ‘agents of change’ within Ethiopia, even in a context where the opposition gained ground. As a consequence, the confidence, vitality, and commitment to constitutional principles with which they and their organisation operate continue to be factors central to political development.

The cohesion of the EPRDF leadership was visibly shattered in early 2001. It was quickly mended in the wake of rapid expulsions, and consolidated with the appointment of a senior core of ministers of the so-called ‘super-ministries’. The most serious threat to the stability of the government might be expected to come not from external pressure, or from a weak opposition, but from any further fracturing of its leadership. Even in a situation where the leadership is united, public and wider government disquiet on this matter could in itself prove corrosive.

In the wake of divisions in early 2001, it has proved difficult to maintain stability in the two southern EPRDF organisations, with multiple sackings, resignations, and defections. If these parties are to gather capacity and momentum for local administration to promote stability and economic expansion, it will be important that this haemorrhaging of personnel is stemmed. These EPRDF parties continue to be widely regarded as the least capable, and most could be gained in these two regions from overtures to those with professional competences, and community-based credibility who are currently outside the ruling party. A key indicator might be the willingness and ability of such individuals to co-operate with the government, or its development agenda.

It is not yet clear whether the *party per se* will continue to play the same influential role as it did throughout the 1990s. On the face of it, relations between the party and the state seem clearer and less ambiguous than has been the case to date; the implications of this new situation are less evident, and there is some speculation as to the likelihood of fundamental organisational changes.

6.3.5 Regional political dynamics

Demarcation of the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains a po-

tential focus for the mobilisation of opposition to the government, particularly in the north of the country. The ability and willingness of the government of the State of Eritrea to continue to support political opposition may be expected to operate as a multiplying factor in relation to domestic grievances. At a more general level, it can be expected that Ethiopian government involvement in the us-led campaign against global terrorism might have a range of effects on regional sources and causes of militant opposition to it.

6.3.6 Conflict patterns

Before 1991, large parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea were engulfed in civil wars which persisted over decades. With the exception of the disastrous Ethio-Eritrean conflict of 1998–2000, conflict has been greatly reduced following the introduction of ethnic federalism. The continued political hostility between Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly in relation to the demarcation and delineation of their mutual border, means that tension between the two countries continues to be high.

Patterns of domestic conflict have not been such as to challenge the state or the government.

Critics have lumped together conflicts of different kinds and levels as a general indication of government weakness, or repression. Such conflicts should be disaggregated and analysed in terms of the specifics of each situation. This is particularly true of instances of so-called ‘ethnic conflict’, which often relate to collective struggles for resources. Whilst a number of the conflicts in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ National Regional State, SNNPRS, can be seen to relate to ethnic federalism, in the sense that they seek to extract maximum potential from federal arrangements, many longer-term conflicts in pastoral areas (OLF, ONLF, for instance), or border regions (Benshangul-Gumuz and Gambella) cannot be seen simply in these terms.

6.3.7 Economic indicators

As described in the section on associational life, the international community has expressed relative enthusiasm regarding macro-economic reform and development indicators.

6.3.8 Living standards

There is less optimism about the capacity of Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation, ADLI, and other policies to improve the incomes of peasant and pastoral majorities. Poor rains in mid-2002 resulted in food shortages by the end of the year and into 2003, which have raised ques-

tions about an increasing underlying trend of food insecurity. The drive to meet the food needs of Ethiopia's various populations during 2003 will place great additional pressures on population and government. The government's success in achieving timely delivery of relief inputs can be expected to have a strong impact on domestic and international perspectives on its record. The UN World Food Programme has suggested that in 2003 a majority of Ethiopia's population will face food deficits or insecurity. Such a situation must have a profound effect on the potential for the political transformation of relations throughout the society: liberal democracy is unlikely to thrive where most of the population is not only poor, but daily confronted with crises of survival.

6.3.9 Social norms, culture, and 'institutions'

It is worth reiterating, finally, that better policy planning might emerge from the intensification of sustained research into socio-political processes at every level, with an emphasis on informal 'social institutions' understood in its widest sense to include the norms, values, customs, concepts, classifications and beliefs of citizens. Whilst the range of indicators listed may give some shorthand means of understanding some developments, it provides no substitute for analysis of this kind.

6.4 Measuring and evaluating change

The last decade has been marked by frantic activity in each of the fundamental areas of reform of government: the decentralisation of the state; the liberalisation of the economy, and the democratisation of the political arena. The decade has witnessed clear, consistent, and persistent expressions of ideological and practical commitment to change from the leadership of party and government²⁵²; and concrete progress in a number of respects that would have impressed observers a decade ago²⁵³. Neverthe-

252. Although critics complain that these expressions have not been widely disseminated, but rather confined to government, party, and diplomatic circles, such that the wider public is often not party to knowledge and discussion about these vision and intentions. In turn one may observe the conscious determination of large sections of the middle class to distance themselves from politics and any interest in the considerable information which is disseminated through the government media.

253. There is disagreement as to the extent of development over the last decade, with a range of critics claiming that 'nothing has changed since the Dergue'. Whilst it is certainly the case that Ethiopia is subject to overwhelming continuities of political culture and context (and that much of this influence is negative), such views fail to recognise extensive and significant developments, which are perhaps most prominent in the areas of infrastructural development (particularly arterial and feeder roads, electrification, and also urban expansion), and the reorganisation of public administration and government.

less, fundamental doubts remain with citizens, observers, and donors. These doubts are not confined to the implementation and progress of the reform processes, to such questions as, for instance: should one, or should one not be satisfied with progress? Is the policy in question adequately designed, and sufficiently flexible in response to setbacks and unexpected implications?

Over and above such universally-shared concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of policy processes for change, questions and doubts also persist in relation to the *intentions* of the ruling party which has been not only architect of the reforms, but also contractor, supervisor, and auditor in their implementation. Questions and doubts, similarly, remain regarding the responses of Ethiopia's various communities. How, for instance, should one understand the various constraints encountered over the last decade? Are they the result of incapacity or lack of political will, accident or design? In the political sphere, for example, does decentralisation mean devolution of power or deconcentration of responsibility²⁵⁴? Does 'popular participation' envisage inclusiveness and pluralism, compromise arising out of fractious debate and conflict? Or should one be thinking of participation in the managed dissemination of the ruling party's programme via a seamless structure of party-fused-with-state; of participation in lengthy 'consultations' through which the sovereign consensus of the party translates into the 'will' of 'the people'?

Other questions include whether observers have been too keen to identify EPRDF's democracy as liberal democracy? Does Ethiopia's ruling party, with its public commitment to 'democratic centralism', also value pluralism for its own sake? Accountability, perhaps of a sort, but diversity, transparency? And what are the views of Ethiopia's various populations? How do they perceive and value representative 'democracy'? What do they want from their leaders? Can a revolutionary party with an evangelical belief in the superiority of its own political programme seek to establish a competitive electoral process as a desired goal in its own right? Could (should?) elections really be anything other than a means to an end, a process useful only for demonstrating anew the virtues of revolutionary democracy and democratic centralism? If the goal is winning at all costs, how can the contest be anything other than zero-sum, how can 'their gain' be anything other than 'our loss'?

In sum, then, key questions regarding the extent of democracy, plu-

254. Devolution of power involves the decentralisation of resources and decision-making (responsibility and authority) whilst deconcentration suggests only the decentralisation of administrative responsibility without commensurate authority over decision-making or resource allocation.

ralism, and inclusion remain. How and where has power really devolved, and how much more can we now expect for the future? If and where it has devolved, has everybody had a chance of access to the process or only certain sections of society? And if new disparity, discrimination, and iniquity are forged in the emerging pattern of change, should we see this as an incidental correlate, or as inherent in the process, an integral function of the interests and objectives of those steering the future course of Ethiopia's structures and relations of power?

Annexes and tables

Federal Cabinet & Agencies Accountable to Each Ministry

Source: Proclamation for Restructuring of the Executive Body, 24 October 2001

| Ministries | Accountable Executive Bodies |
|---|---|
| Prime Minister's Office | |
| Capacity Building | Ministry of Education Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission Federal Civil Service Commission Ethiopian Management Institute Ethiopian Civil Service College Justice and Legal System Research Institute |
| Federal Affairs | Federal Police Commission Federal Prisons Administration National Urban Planning Institute Addis Ababa City Administration Dire Dawa City Administrative Council |
| Federal Revenues | Federal Inland Revenue Authority Ethiopian Customs Authority National Lottery Administration |
| Finance & Economic Development | Central Statistics Authority Ethiopian Mapping Authority National Population Office Office for sale of government-owned houses |
| Foreign Affairs | |
| Health | Drug Administration and Control Authority |
| Information | Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority Mass Media Training Institute |
| Infrastructures | Ethiopian Roads Authority Civil Aviation Authority Ethiopian Road Fund National Depots Administration Ethiopian Postal Service Ethiopian Telecom Agency/Corporation Ethiopian Electric Power Agency/Corporation |
| Justice | |
| Labour & Social Affairs | |
| Mining | Ethiopian Geological Survey |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| National Defence | |
| Rural Development | Ministry of Agriculture Disaster Prevention & Preparedness Commission Ethiopian Social Rehab & Development Fund National Seed Industry Agency National Fertiliser Agency Ethiopian Agriculture Research Organisation Institute of Bio-diversity Conservation & Research Rural Energy Development & Promotion Centre |
| Trade and Industry | Ethiopian Investment Authority Ethiopian Quality and Standards Authority Coffee and Tea Authority Public Enterprises Supervising Authority Basic Metals Engineering Agency Ethiopian Export Promotion Agency Ethiopian Privatisation Agency Livestock Market Authority |
| Water Resources | |
| Youth, Sport & Culture | National Archives and Libraries Agency Ethiopian Convention Centre Research & Cons. of Cultural Heritage Authority Ethiopian National Theatre |

Political parties/seats in House of Peoples' Representatives

| Name of the Party | Number of Seats in the HPR |
|---|----------------------------|
| Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization | 183 |
| Amhara Nation Democratic Movement | 146 |
| Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Front | 112 |
| Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front | 40 |
| <i>(Total Seats Occupied by EPRDF)</i> | <i>481 (or 88%)</i> |
| Afar National Democratic Party | 8 |
| Benishangul-Gumuz Peoples' Democratic United Party | 6 |
| Gambela Peoples' Democratic Front | 3 |
| Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia | 4 |
| Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition | 2 |
| Hadiya National Democratic Organization | 3 |
| Oromo Liberation United Front | 1 |
| Ethiopian Democratic Party | 2 |
| All Amhara Peoples' Organization | 1 |
| Oromo National Congress | 1 |
| Sidama Hadicho Peoples' Dem. Organization | 1 |
| Silte Peoples' Democratic United Party | 1 |
| Harari National League | 1 |
| Private (independent) MPs | 13 |
| Total number of Members of Parliament in the HPR | 547 |

Political Parties Registered at the National Electoral Board

1. Afar Peoples Democratic Organization
2. Oromo National Congress
3. Somali Peoples Liberation Front Party
4. United Oromo Peoples Liberation Front
5. Gambella Peoples Democratic Unity Party
6. Western Somali Democratic Party
7. Hareri National League
8. All Amhara Peoples Organization
9. Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization
10. Gamo Democratic Unity
11. Afar National Liberation Front
12. Amhara Peoples Democratic Movement
13. Zai Peoples Democratic Organization
14. Ethiopian Peace and Democratic Party
15. Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Front
16. Gambella Peoples Liberation Party
17. Ethiopian National Democratic Party
18. Denta, Debamo, Kitchenchla Democratic Organization
19. Selti Peoples Democratic Unity Party
20. Kenbeta Peoples Congress
21. Shekecho Peoples Democratic Movement
22. Kembeta Peoples Democratic Organization
23. Tembaro Peoples Democratic Organization
24. Gamo and Gofa Peoples Democratic Organization
25. Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front
26. Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
27. Donga Peoples Democratic Organization
28. Derashe Peoples Democratic Organization
29. Yem Peoples Democratic Front
30. Konso Peoples Democratic Organization
31. Kore Nationality Unity Democratic Organization
32. Southern Omo Peoples Democratic Movement
33. Gurage Peoples Revolutionary Movement
34. Dawero Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Organization
35. Wolayta Peoples Democratic Organization
36. Sidama Peoples Democratic Organization
37. Hadiya Peoples Democratic Organization
38. Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Unity
39. Basketo Peoples Democratic Organization

40. Ethiopian Somali Democratic League
41. Burgi Peoples Democratic Organization
42. Agew Peoples Democratic Movement
43. Benishangul North Western Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Unity Party
44. Ethiopian Democratic Unity
45. The Joint Political Forum
46. Mareko Peoples Democratic Organization
47. Tigray Worgi Nationality United Democratic Organization
48. Joint Ethiopian Nations and Nationalities Democratic Party
49. Afar Liberation Front
50. Konta Peoples Democratic Party
51. Bench Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Movement
52. Burgi Peoples United Democratic Movement
53. Alaba Peoples Democratic Unity Organization
54. National Democratic Unity
55. Gideo Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Movement
56. Kebena Nationality Democratic Organization
57. Zeisei Peoples Democratic Organization
58. Benishangul Western Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Organization
59. Argoba Peoples Democratic Movement
60. Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia
61. Kenbata Peoples Democratic Organization
62. Afar National Democratic Movement
63. Oida Nationality Democratic Organization
64. Ogaden National Liberation Front
65. Harari Democratic Unity Party
66. Oromo Abo Liberation Front
67. Kaffa Sheka Peoples Democratic Movement
68. Bench Maji Peoples Democratic Movement
69. Sidama Hadicho Peoples Democratic Organisation
70. Gurage Zone Nationalities Democratic Movement
71. Yem Nationality Democratic Movement
72. Gideo Peoples Democratic Organisation

Ethiopia's status in relation to international conventions

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)

Accession. Date of entry into force: 11/09/93

Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-OP1):

No Action.

Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-OP2)

No Action.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)

Accession. Date of entry into force: 11/09/93

Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)

Accession. Date of entry into force: 13/04/94

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Ratification. Date of entry into force: 10/10/81

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-OP)

No Action.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Accession. Date of entry into force: 13/06/91

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC)

No Action.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC)

No Action.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Accession. Date of entry into force: 23/07/76

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (MWC)

No Action.

List of Ratifications of International Labour Conventions (ILO)

Ethiopia has been a member of the ILO since 1923.

19 Conventions have been ratified, of which 18 are in force.

| Convention | | Date of entry into force |
|------------|---|--------------------------|
| C. 2 | Unemployment Convention, 1919 | 11.06.1966 |
| C. 11 | Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 | 04.06.1963 |
| C. 14 | Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 80 | Final Articles Revision Convention, 1946 | 23.07.1947 |
| C. 87 | Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 | 04.06.1963 |
| C. 88 | Employment Service Convention, 1948 | 04.06.1963 |
| C. 98 | Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention | 04.06.1963 |
| C. 100 | Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 | 24.03.1999 |
| C. 105 | Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 | 24.03.1999 |
| C. 106 | Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 111 | Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 | 11.06.1966 |
| C. 116 | Final Articles Revision Convention, 1961 | 11.06.1966 |
| C. 138 | Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (Minimum age specified: 14 years) | 27.05.1999 |
| C. 155 | Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 156 | Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 158 | Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 159 | Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 | 28.01.1991 |
| C. 181 | Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 | 24.03.1999 |

Article 35 of the FDRE Constitution: Rights of Women

1. Women shall, in the enjoyment of rights and protections provided for by this Constitution, have equal right with men.
2. Women have equal rights with men in marriage as prescribed by this Constitution.
3. The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.
4. The State shall enforce the right of women to eliminate the influences of harmful customs. Laws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited.
- 5a. Women have the right to maternity leave with full pay. The duration of maternity leave shall be determined by law taking into account the nature of the work, the health of the mother and the well-being of the child and family.
- 5b. Maternity leave may, in accordance with the provisions of law, include prenatal leave with full pay.
6. Women have the right to full consultation in the formulation of national development policies, the designing and execution of projects, and particularly in the case of projects affecting the interests of women.
7. Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land. They shall also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.
8. Women shall have a right to equality in employment, promotion, pay, and the transfer of pension entitlements.
9. To prevent harm arising from pregnancy and childbirth and in order to safeguard their health, women have the right of access to family planning education, information and capacity.

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Since her involvement in the humanitarian operation to deliver relief and development supplies to non-government held areas of northern Ethiopia during the civil war of the late 1980s, Dr Vaughan has researched and written extensively on Ethiopian political history. She has worked for a range of bodies including the Ethiopian Special Prosecutor's Office. Her analytical work covers such topics as: ethnicity, political interest and socio-political mobilisation; federalism, decentralisation, and local government; patterns of conflict in situations of resource scarcity or iniquity; civil society and associational life; transitional justice and the reversal of impunity.

Kjetil Tronvoll, born in 1966. PhD from London School of Economics (LSE) in social anthropology, and Mag. art. from University of Oslo. He is fellow of African studies at Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Oslo. He has carried out long term anthropological fieldwork in Eritrea (1991–93), Ethiopia (1998–2000) and Zanzibar (2003).

Kjetil Tronvoll was serving as an international observer and researcher to the Ethiopian elections of 1994 (Constituent assembly), 1995 (federal/regional elections), 2000 (federal/regional elections), and 2001 (local elections). He has also observed elections in five other African countries.

Dr Tronvoll has published several books and journal articles internationally on African political processes, including elections, conflict/wars, politics of identity, human rights and minority issues. Books/monographs include: *The Process of Democratisation in Ethiopia: an Expression of Popular Participation or Political Resistance?* (Oslo, 1995, co-author Mai Weini); *A Highland Village in Eritrea* (Lawrenceville, 1998); *Ethiopia, A New Start?* (London, 2000); *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War* (Oxford, 2000, co-author); *Ethiopia Since the Derg:*

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Glossary/Acronyms

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AAPO | All Amhara People's Organisation (since 2002 AEUP) |
| AAU | Addis Ababa University |
| Af gubaye | speaker (of parliament) |
| ACC | Anti-Corruption Commission |
| ADLI | Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation |
| AEUP | All-Ethiopia Unity Party (formerly AAPO) |
| ALMA | Amhara Development Association |
| ANDF | Afar National Democratic Front |
| ANDM | Amhara National Democratic Movement |
| ARDUF | Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front |
| BGPDUF | Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front |
| CBE | Commercial Bank of Ethiopia |
| CBOs | community-based organisations |
| CDF | community development fund |
| CEVO | Consortium of Ethiopian Voluntary Organisations |
| COEDF | Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (EPRP and Meï'sone) |
| CRDA | Christian Relief and Development Association |
| Dergue | (Amh.) 'committee' used of PMAC regime of Mengistu H Mariam |
| ECSC | Ethiopian Civil Service College |
| EDP | Ethiopian Democratic Party (now EDUP) |
| EDU | Ethiopian Democratic Union |
| EDUP | Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party (EDP and EDU) |
| EFFORT | Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray |
| EHRCO | Ethiopian Human Rights Council |
| EIU | Economist Intelligence Unit |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Endeavour | Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Amhara |
| EOC | Ethiopian Orthodox Church |
| EPDM | Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (now ANDM) |
| EPLF | Eritrean People's Liberation Front (now PFDJ) |
| EPPF | Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front |
| EPRP | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party |
| EPRDF | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| Equub | (Amh.) mutual savings association |
| ETV | Ethiopian Television |
| EWLA | Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association |
| FDRE | Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (est.1995) |
| FGM | female genital mutilation |
| Gada | (Orom.) Traditional Oromo age-set social system |
| Gemgem[a] | (Amh.[Tig.]) 'evaluation' |
| GONGO | government-oriented non-governmental organisation |
| GPDP | Gambella People's Democratic Party |
| HNL | Harari National League |
| HNDO | Hadiya National Democratic Organisation |
| HoF | House of the Federation |
| HPR | House of People's Representatives |
| ICRC | International Corps of the Red Cross |
| Iddir | (Amh.) mutual savings association for funeral expenses |
| Kebele | (Amh.) 'neighbourhood' level of administration ('baito' in Tigrigna) |
| Lema'at budin | (Amh.) development group or team, usually around 10–15 members |
| Meison | (Amh.) All Ethiopia Socialist Movement |
| Mengist | government |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Mengistawi budin | (Amh.) ‘government group’ of 50 households |
| ML | Marxist Leninist |
| MoEd | Ministry of Education |
| MoFED | Ministry of Finance and Economic Development |
| MoFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MoFedA | Ministry of Federal Affairs |
| MP | member of parliament |
| (N/I)NGO | (national/international) non-governmental organisation |
| NEB | National Election Board |
| NRS | National Regional State |
| Nus-kebele | sub-kebele |
| OFAG | Office of the Federal Auditor General |
| OLF | Oromo Liberation Front |
| ONC | Oromo National Congress |
| ONLF | Ogaden National Liberation Front |
| OPDO | Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation |
| ORDA | Organisation for Relief and Development in Amhara (formerly ERO) |
| OSG | Oromo Support Group (UK-based NGO) |
| PDOS | people’s democratic organisations |
| PMAC | Provisional Military Administration Committee |
| PM(O) | Prime Minister(’s Office) |
| POW | Prisoner of War |
| PRSP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper/Policy |
| REST | Relief Society of Tigray |
| RRC | Relief and Rehabilitation Commission |
| Seera | (Orom./various) traditional Gurage, Kambatta, social system |
| SEPDA | Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Development Association |

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| SEPDC | Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition (opposition) |
| SEPDF | Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (EPRDF) |
| Sida | Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency |
| Sharia | Islamic legal code |
| Shimagile | elder |
| SNNPRS | Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' National Regional State |
| SPDP | Somali People's Democratic Party |
| SPO | Office of the Special Prosecutor |
| TAND | Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy |
| TDA | Tigray Development Association |
| Tehadso | (Amh.) renewal, cleansing |
| TESCO | Trans-Ethiopia Share Company |
| TGE | Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–1995) |
| TPLF | Tigray People's Liberation Front |
| UNFPA | UN Family Planning Agency |
| UNICEF | UN Children's Fund |
| Wereda | (Amh.) 'district' administration, nominally approx. 100,000 population |
| WFP | UN World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WIBS | wereda integrated basic services |
| WIC | Walta Information Centre |
| WPE | Workers' Party of Ethiopia (of the Dergue) |
| xeer | (Som.) traditional Somali social system |
| [ye]gil | private |
| [ye]mengist | government[al] |

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