
The Structure of Regional Conflict in Northern Ethiopia

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A conventional view of regional conflict in Ethiopia is that it is the result of the domination and exploitation of conquered peoples by the central Ethiopian state. The pattern of regional conflict does not, however, fit this explanation. The most important threat to the central government today comes not from the recently conquered pastoral and sedentary peoples of southern Ethiopia but from the northern highlands (Eritrea, Tigray, northern Wollo and Gonder) which have been associated with the Ethiopian state for many centuries. A more satisfactory explanation needs to take into account both the political and economic bases of revolt in northern Ethiopia following the 1974 revolution. Politically, the people were alienated from a national government of which they had previously often been a dominant part. Economically, the progressive marginalisation and agricultural degradation of the northern highlands was accelerated by the policies of the post-1974 government, policies which brought immediate and important benefits to the southern regions.

Over the last three decades, no part of independent Africa has been so violently ravaged by conflict as the Horn. Three major conflicts have split the region: the Ethio-Somali dispute, which led in 1977/78 to by far the largest conventional war between independent African states; the Sudanese civil wars; and the war between the central Ethiopian government and movements seeking separate independence for Eritrea. In their wake, and often fomented by the massive build-up of armaments in the region that the major conflicts have brought with them, a mass of lesser (but still devastating) conflicts have proliferated: the civil war in northern Somalia, the Afar and Oromo movements in eastern and southern Ethiopia, the Tigrayan resistance in northern Ethiopia, all the way down to the casual extermination of smaller

communities in local conflicts fuelled by the supply of automatic weapons.

Such tragedies demand explanation; and at least for the large proportion of conflicts in the region which in one way or another affect its most populous and centrally located state, Ethiopia, such explanations are not far to seek. Very broadly, there is a conventional explanation of regional conflict in Ethiopia, to which I have myself in some measure contributed, which accounts for these conflicts in terms of the political hegemony and economic exploitation imposed by the central Ethiopian state, and by the social groupings from which this is chiefly drawn. The Ethiopian state is, in this view, essentially the creation of the Orthodox Christian peoples of the northern highlands — Amhara and Tigrayan, though with a substantial element

of Christian and Amharised Oromo — who are often referred to as Abyssinian. With the powerful political and military organisation built on the economic base provided by highland ox-plough agriculture, this state has been able to dominate the surrounding peoples, its hegemony over whom has been justified by a sense of manifest destiny reinforced by religious superiority. With the vast accretion of strength provided in the second half of the nineteenth century by effective indigenous leadership and access to external armaments, the Ethiopian state both extended its territory and imposed on the conquered peoples a highly exploitative economic structure, which turned formerly independent peasants in the south and west into the vassals of central Abyssinian settlers and landowners.

The wars of the late twentieth century are, in this view, the almost automatic consequence of the conquests of a hundred years earlier, easily summarised in the two words, exclusion and exploitation. Politically, the central Ethiopian government continues to be dominated by the Christian peoples of the northern highlands who formed the core of the old Ethiopian empire. The incorporated peoples are therefore (save for a small and unrepresentative minority who have been assimilated into the ruling core) effectively excluded from the state. Not only are the leading positions in the state overwhelmingly monopolised by Christian highlanders, but the whole structure of the state itself is set up in such a way as to exclude (or, at least, severely disadvantage) the peripheral peoples. Visibly descended (despite the 1974 revolution) from its imperial predecessor, the state is headquartered in the centrally located highland capital, Addis Ababa, from which roads radiate out to control the periphery. Its language, Amharic, is the dominant language of the highland core, fluency in which is essential to anyone who aspires to a post in government. Its army, still more obviously than before the revolution, exists

to enforce the diktat of the central power over dissident peoples. And though some of the formal trappings of religious and cultural superiority have been discarded since the revolution, these have been replaced by the still more stridently centralist rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism. The economic surplus required to maintain this apparatus of control is in turn derived from the exploitation of the very peoples whom it is used to suppress, at first through land alienation and subsequently through the imposition of a centralised state extractive apparatus. The regions and peoples conquered in the late nineteenth century produce almost all of Ethiopia's export crops (with coffee normally accounting for over 60 per cent of published export earnings), and also much of its marketable grain. Small wonder, then, that such a state excites violent opposition, or that such opposition is directed (unusually in Africa) not simply towards the goal of controlling the state, but to a much more thoroughgoing rejection of the whole basis of statehood itself.

It should be emphasised that this picture of the Ethiopian state, though inevitably rather crudely drawn, is not basically a false one. The conquest and exploitation of much of southern and western Ethiopia are demonstrable historical facts (McClellan, 1988). The problem is not that it is untrue, or that it would not amply explain regional resistance — but rather that much if not most of the regional resistance to the central Ethiopian government will not fit into the pattern which this explanation provides. This resistance comes essentially from two sources. The first are the pastoralist peoples of southern and eastern Ethiopia, especially the Somali but also some Afar and pastoral Oromo. These are indeed excluded peoples, lacking any affinity with a central government from which they are separated by language, religion, means of production, and social organisation. The Ethiopian government is able to maintain some control over them,

not only by force, but also by taking advantage of internal divisions of clan, faction and family. Opposition, especially for the Somali, is also fomented by their nearness to and affinity with the Somali Republic. But even these peoples do not fit into the classic pattern of central economic exploitation. With the exception of the Afar-inhabited areas of the Awash valley which have been taken over for commercial agriculture, and much smaller (and largely unsuccessful) attempts at commercial agriculture in the Webe Shebelle valley, they are not so much exploited as ignored by the modern cash economy. Their resistance to central government derives from cultural and political alienation, rather than from economic incorporation.

By far the most important military threat to the central government comes, however, not from the pastoralists, still less from the conquered sedentary peoples of southern Ethiopia, but from the northern highlands: from highland Eritrea, from Tigray, and increasingly from Gonder and northern Wollo.¹ In Eritrea, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) which initiated the secessionist conflict against central Ethiopian rule, was indeed drawn largely from the Moslem peoples of the western Eritrean lowlands; but this has now been almost entirely displaced by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which under the banner of an Eritrea united across ethnic lines within a Marxist-Leninist framework, draws its leadership and much of its support from the Christian Eritrean highlands.² Immediately to the south is Tigray which, since the defeat of the Ethiopian army at Enda-Selassie early in 1989, has come under the control of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF); this is an overwhelmingly Christian region, which has formed part of the Ethiopian state since the very earliest times, and includes its ancient capital of Axum. The TPLF is a movement independent of the EPLF in Eritrea, with which it has had public con-

flicts, but shares with the EPLF (and indeed with the central Ethiopian government) a Marxist-Leninist ideology, articulated through a dependent party organisation, the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT).

But still more strikingly, though the Amhara are universally recognised as *the* core Abyssinian people, whose language, history and culture are essentially those of the central Ethiopian state, even Amhara areas have been progressively lost to central government control. Government control of the Gonder region, including the city of Gonder which was the capital of the Ethiopian empire from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, became increasingly tenuous in the late 1980s, and together with northern Wollo came progressively under the control of a still shadowy organisation, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), which is allied with the TPLF in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The EPDM held its first congress in November 1983 and its second in June 1989, shortly after establishing a parallel party organisation, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force (EMLF), at a congress held in Wollo in late May and early June 1989. From late August 1989, it succeeded (with strong TPLF support) in capturing a string of towns along the main Addis Ababa-Asmara road in northern Wollo, and threatening the Wollo capital of Dessie and the vital road from Addis Ababa to the Red Sea port of Assab. In March 1991, a TPLF/EPRDF attack down the west side of the country succeeded in overrunning Gonder, Gojjam and Welega regions in a very short period; by mid-April 1991, the insurgents were in a position to threaten Addis Ababa, and the regime's prospects of survival appeared to be slight.³

The degree of popular support enjoyed by any of these organisations is unclear. All are organised, like the Ethiopian government which they oppose, on "democratic

centralist" lines, and both EPLF and TPLF are said to operate ruthless internal security systems. The degree of independence, if any, which the EPDM enjoys from its parent organisation, the TPLF, is likewise uncertain. It is clear, however, that central government authority has virtually collapsed in most of the five northernmost highland regions, which form the core of "historic" Ethiopia.

This is in sharp contrast to the astonishing quiescence of the southern highland areas which were fully incorporated into Ethiopia only in the later nineteenth century. There is certainly an organisation, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which seeks to challenge the Ethiopian government over the huge area from Welega in the west to Hararge in the east, with the formal goal of establishing an independent Oromia; but in contrast to the EPLF and TPLF, which have been able to control large areas of territory in the face of the massive and well-armed Ethiopian military, its efforts have as yet amounted to little more than hit-and-run operations in western Welega and the more isolated parts of the Hararge highlands. Throughout by far the greater part of southern Ethiopia, including the Hararge and Bale highlands, the whole of Arsi and southern Shoa, and the highland areas of Sidamo, Kaffa, Gamu Gofa, Illubabor and Welega, it has been possible to travel without difficulty, and there has been little sign of serious resistance to central government. Yet these are precisely the areas which the "exclusion and exploitation" model of Ethiopian centre-periphery relations would suggest are most at risk. These are the areas where an alien structure of central domination has been imposed, and where landlords and settlers exploited the local peasantry in order to produce the cash crops required by the national market and by Ethiopia's incorporation into the global economy.

In short, the "exclusion and exploitation" model, regardless of its inherent

plausibility, scarcely begins to explain the actual structure of regional conflict in Ethiopia. So far from being a revolt of the politically excluded, regional opposition is overwhelmingly derived from peoples who have been associated with the Ethiopian state over many centuries. Due to their relatively high level of education, Eritreans have until recently been over-represented in central government positions. Their progressive exclusion has been due to the war, bringing with it their voluntary or enforced withdrawal, as a result of their own developing Eritrean national consciousness and of central government distrust of their loyalty; the war was not the result of their exclusion. Though Tigray has had a strong sense of its distinctive regional identity, it has also had highly placed connections with central government — under the imperial regime through intermarriage between Haile-Selassie's family and the regional Tigrayan dynasty, under the revolutionary regime through Mengistu Haile-Maryam's deputy and vice-president, Fisseha Desta. The northern Amhara regions have — paradoxically for the stereotype which sees Ethiopian politics in terms of Amhara domination — been rather less well represented in central government than either Eritrea or Tigray, and much of their resentment of the regime in Addis Ababa is articulated in the view that it is not authentically Amhara at all, but Shoan Oromo. So far from being a revolt of the economically exploited, moreover, the separatist movements have drawn their support from a peasantry which has historically controlled its own means of production, and has not been forced into anything remotely resembling the levels of land alienation and incorporation into a global exchange economy characteristic of the south.

But a war there is, and hundreds of thousands of people have died as a result of it.⁴ And an explanation there must likewise be. What follows is necessarily tentative, but attempts to sketch out an

alternative which is broadly compatible with the actual structure of conflict. This explanation needs to approach both the high level of political alienation from the central regime, and also the economic structures and modes of production, which underlie regional separatism. Though obviously linked, these are most conveniently discussed separately.

Eritrea provides the obvious starting point, as the region where the political failures of the Ethiopian state, both imperial and revolutionary, have been most dramatically evident. The distinctiveness of Eritrea lies of course in the fact that, although much if not most of it had been associated with Ethiopia from very early times, it was separated from Ethiopia, between 1890 and 1952, by fifty-one years of Italian colonialism and eleven of British wartime and post-war administration.⁵ Its "reunification" with Ethiopia, under a federal arrangement approved by the United Nations, followed a period of political mobilisation which indicated the broad lines of cleavage within the territory. The most obvious of these cleavages separated the Moslems of the lowlands (largely in the western area bordering the Sudan, but also including the Saho and Afar peoples of the Red Sea plain) from the Tigrinya-speaking Christian highlanders. The Moslems, though with some important exceptions, broadly supported a separate independence for Eritrea, while the Christians (again with exceptions) supported union with Ethiopia. This Moslem opposition carried through, after a hiatus while the local population absorbed the effects of federation, into the ELF; armed conflict in the eastern lowlands broke out shortly after the abrogation of the federal arrangement by the Ethiopian government (with the formal though forced approval of the Eritrean Assembly) in 1962.

More important, however — in terms of what we now need to explain — was the political evolution of the highlands. Thomas Killion (1989) has shown that the commit-

ment to union among Christian Eritreans was always considerably more ambivalent than the broad support of the highlands for the Unionist Party might suggest. The rural population, for whom union represented association with their co-religionists south of the Mareb, and protection against an ever-present Moslem threat, did indeed support unification with Ethiopia; they were understandably urged to do so by the Orthodox Church, which (financed by the Ethiopian government) furnished the basic grassroots organisation of unionism, and by elements of the local aristocracy who could see advantages for themselves in an imperial Ethiopia. Some of the intelligentsia could likewise see a role for themselves, either in running the Eritrean government established under the federation, or in the central government in Addis Ababa. Urban highlanders were however, for the most part, considerably more sceptical — a scepticism which was amply vindicated by the experience of federation. Though highly adept at manipulating the politics of faction and family among the northern Ethiopian aristocracy, Haile-Selassie's regime appears to have had no idea of how to come to grips with organised urban groups or the political parties which represented them — groups which in any event went unrepresented in the no-party state south of the Mareb. It viewed the autonomous government in Eritrea as a threat to its own authority (differing little in this respect from newly independent governments which were obliged to inherit federal arrangements as part of the decolonisation settlement throughout the continent), and sought from the start to absorb Eritrea as an administrative region within the ordinary centralised structure of Ethiopian local government, while dissolving the Unionist Party which had previously served as its instrument for achieving unification. Job opportunities for educated Eritreans within the regional administration were thus reduced, and the sense of regional identity

which had emerged over the colonial period was affronted.

The outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 appeared at first to offer opportunities for reconciliation. It had long been an article of faith among radicals in Addis Ababa that the conflict in Eritrea echoed their own differences with the imperial regime: that it was essentially a clash between "feudal" and "progressive" forces which could be resolved by the accession of fellow progressives to power at the centre. The first Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council, General Aman Andom, was moreover an Eritrean who (though associated with the central government since the liberation campaign in 1941) made it his first priority to secure a settlement in Eritrea. It is by no means certain that he could have succeeded; he sought to win over the local population by direct appeals, rather than negotiating with the separatist movements, and the level of actual autonomy which he would have been prepared to concede remained unclear. At all events, he never got the chance. He was killed in November 1974, following a power struggle with the Jacobins within the PMAC, led by Mengistu Haile-Maryam, which came to a head over the issue of sending further troops to Eritrea.

The support (or at least adherence) which the Ethiopian government has been able to command in Eritrea has not been as negligible as the separatist movements claim. By far the greater number of administrative positions in Eritrea since 1974 have been held by native Eritreans. These have however been drawn heavily from sections of the population (and often individuals) associated with the Unionist Party, many of them from the old Unionist stronghold of Seray; elsewhere, for example among the Kunama people around Barentu in western Eritrea, the central government has been able to call on the artificial unionism derived from local ethnic rivalries. It has also, para-

doxically, been able to capitalise on the fears of Moslem lowland peoples — both among the Afar of the Red Sea plain and among former ELF supporters in the north and west — of domination by the highlanders who play the most prominent role in the EPLF.⁶ Never since 1975, however, has the post of Chief Administrator in Eritrea, or since 1980 of party First Secretary, been entrusted to an Eritrean.

The other disaffected regions of northern Ethiopia — Tigray, Gonder and northern Wollo — had neither Eritrea's experience of separate colonial rule, nor its special constitutional status. Though continuously part of Ethiopia, they nonetheless had longstanding internecine grievances against the Shoan-dominated government in Addis Ababa. Tigray, additionally distinguished by its different language, was the homeland of the emperor Yohannes IV, whose death in 1889 opened the way for the Shoan hegemony. His descendants continued to exercise great authority within the region and, at times, to harbour unrealisable hopes of the imperial crown. Wollo had provided the core of opposition to the coup d'état which brought Haile-Selassie to power as regent in 1916. Ras Gugsä Wolle of Gonder had rebelled in 1930. But although the common view of the Christian highlands as a homogeneous political unit is thus far from accurate, these historical rivalries appeared to have been brought well under control by 1974. The regional governor in Tigray was a great-grandson of the emperor Yohannes, married to Haile-Selassie's granddaughter, who thus combined regional and central affiliations. Another imperial granddaughter was married to the governor of Gonder. Haile-Selassie's eldest son was titular governor of Wollo.

It was partly the very success with which these regions had been associated with the central government under Haile-Selassie that led to their alienation under his successors. The overthrow of the monarchy aroused the opposition of regional aristo-

crats who saw the new regime (quite rightly) as a threat to their own position, and who also retained the loyalty of their local peasantries. And while the aristocracy had much to lose from the new dispensation, the peasantry did not have much to gain. Unlike the peasantries of southern Ethiopia, they largely controlled their own means of production, and the new government's land reform proclamation, which nationalised all rural land, could be seen more as a threat than as the deliverance from landlord exploitation which it appeared as in the south. The two governors, Ras Mengesha Seyoum of Tigray and Nega Haile-Selassie of Gonder, launched a "white" opposition, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), which, though it failed within a few years, helped to set a pattern of political mobilisation against the central regime.

This pattern of alienation was then reinforced by a further set of circumstances. The first was the counterproductive brutality of many of the regional rulers appointed by the central government, particularly notorious in this respect being Melaku Teferra in Gonder; the growth of the TPLF can likewise be ascribed in large measure to the "red terror" campaign carried out in Tigrayan towns by the Derg's regional representative, Sileshi Mengesha, in 1977–78. Imbued with the centralising Jacobinism of the regime which they represented, viewing the territory which they ruled as implicitly hostile, these rulers interpreted any expression of regional identity or dissent as counter-revolutionary activity, and alienated not only the rural population, but also many of the regional intelligentsia who should have been their natural allies. This process was reinforced by events in Addis Ababa, where the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), much of whose leadership was of northern (and especially Tigrayan) origin, was defeated in 1976/77 by an alliance between the military regime and the rival party of the Marxist intelligentsia,

Meison. Fragments of the EPRP retreated to their northern homelands in pursuit of a Maoist strategy of rural liberation, and many of them were eventually incorporated into the TPLF and its sister organisations (Makarkis, 1987, pp. 248–58).⁷ Finally, despite considerable differences between the EPLF and other northern opposition movements, the EPLF had an obvious interest in fostering resistance to the central government in the regions immediately to the south of Eritrea.

While the revolution thus greatly intensified the political basis for northern separatism, this in turn may be seen as the reflection (or superstructural manifestation) of its economic foundations. These in turn derive, not from the exploitation of regions which were being incorporated, by way of a repressive and extractive state apparatus, into the global economy; but, quite the contrary, from the marginalisation of regions which were progressively excluded from the market at both national and international levels.

The economics of alienation, like the politics, were at their sharpest in Eritrea, where Italian colonial rulers had built up an urban infrastructure which went into profound recession on their departure. The artificial war economy of the 1930s would in any event have been difficult to sustain; but the British military administration had little interest in the economic development of the territory (in contrast to the measures which it took to encourage political awareness), and compounded its problems by removing industrial equipment inherited from the Italians. Federation in 1952 with one of the least developed states in the world was little help, still less so since the axis of development in Ethiopia was centred on Addis Ababa, with its links to the coffee-growing regions in the south and west, and via new roads and the line of rail to the Awash valley and the coast at Djibouti and Assab. Economically as well as politically, even though the Ethiopian government

favoured Eritrea over the neglected regions immediately to the south, federation had little to offer to the urban classes of the Eritrean highlands.

Eritrea was however no more than a special case of the general economic predicament of the northern highlands. Over many centuries, the centres of economic and political power in Ethiopia have tended to move southwards — from the original capital at Axum near the Tigray/Eritrean border, to Lalibela and Gondar in the central highlands, and eventually to the late nineteenth century capital of Addis Ababa. While the old centres in present-day Tigray and Eritrea were conveniently placed for trade with the Red Sea basin and the Nile valley, they were correspondingly vulnerable to Moslem (and eventually colonial) attack, and Ethiopia's rulers retreated to the safety of the mountains. When commercial links with the external world regained their central importance to the Ethiopian state in the later nineteenth century, these turned on the export of cash crops, notably coffee, which were grown not in the highlands, but at lower altitudes to the south and west. This was a process from which the southernmost old Ethiopian province of Shoa was the natural beneficiary. The very fact that peasants in the northern highlands controlled their own means of production may have inhibited their incorporation into the world market, since it was not possible for an indigenous Ethiopian state to impose on them the exploitative mechanisms of land alienation and surplus expropriation through which the newly conquered areas of the south and west were harnessed to the needs both of the state and of the international economy. With the exception of the grain-producing region of Gojjam, the peasant farmers of the northern Amhara and Tigrayan highlands produce virtually no marketed surplus for either export or domestic consumption.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the northern highlands have been a

zone of progressive agricultural degradation, from which people as well as power have seeped steadily southwards to avoid the dangers of drought and famine. The catastrophic famines which hit the region in 1973/74 and 1984/85 demonstrated the effects of drought on areas already badly hit by overpopulation, uncertain rainfall, increased pressure on land, and the resulting erosion and deforestation. Although the revolutionary land reform of 1975 had been intended to promote the productive forces of the countryside, it paradoxically accelerated this process of agrarian decay. Land reform guaranteed to peasant families a roughly equal share of the land within their own peasants' association area — and as an automatic corollary, denied them access to land outside that area. The overall result, in regions such as Tigray and northern Wollo where the pressure of people on land was already high, was to lock peasants into a local community in which increasing population led only to declining plot sizes and further degradation — a process which Dessalegn Rahmato (1984) has aptly defined as agrarian involution.

Opportunities for peasants to compensate for the inadequacy of their family farms by seeking additional income from the monetary sectors of the economy were systematically (though for the most part inadvertently) removed by the economic policies of the revolutionary government. First, since peasants who left their home areas could lose their rights to land there (unlike the pre-revolutionary system, in which land rights derived from inheritance, and were inalienable), the flow of migrants to the towns was sharply reduced, and in the first years of the revolution possibly even reversed; food, job and housing shortages in the towns in any event made them an unattractive proposition, and a high proportion of urban immigrants are women, lacking land rights in the countryside and forced from their homes by marital breakdown, who often support themselves by

prostitution (Clapham, 1988, p. 130). Secondly, opportunities for peasants to supplement their income by seasonal labour in the cash-crop sector of the economy were removed by the nationalisation of privately managed plantations and estates, and the prohibition of the private hire of agricultural labour. These opportunities had been critically important, especially in Tigray. Huge numbers of temporary workers from Gonder and Tigray (estimates vary between 100,000 and 300,000 each year) converged for the sesame harvest on the Humera lowlands bordering the Sudan, where the urgent need for labour and the peculiar characteristics of the crop enabled them to gain — by peasant standards — high rates of pay. For peasants in Wollo and south-eastern Tigray, similar opportunities were offered by cotton-picking and other seasonal labour in the Awash valley. Peasants from all over the northern highlands went at picking time to the coffee-growing areas of the south and west. With the revolution, all of these opportunities were drastically reduced, it not totally halted. Sesame production in the Humera area was badly affected by the fighting between the government and the EDU, and although attempts at rehabilitation were made after the EDU's defeat, the area was subsequently abandoned. At Humera and in the Awash valley, the new state farms recruited casual labour at punitively low rates of pay, and could only get the necessary workforce by levies on peasants' associations, dubiously "voluntary" campaigns among urban workers, and in extreme cases by methods which fell little short of slavery. Coffee-picking was also badly affected. Excluded from the world economy even in the marginal role which they had previously taken as seasonal labour for export crops, the peasants of the northern highlands have re-entered it as the recipients of famine relief.

The political and economic bases of revolt in northern Ethiopia are thus tragically clear. Politically, the people of the

region were alienated from a national government of which they had historically been not only part, but an often dominant part. Their previous incorporation into a national political structure was indeed reflected in a leadership — whether drawn from an old aristocracy or from a new radical intelligentsia — which resorted to local resistance following defeat at the centre. The political marginalisation of the leadership was accompanied by the economic marginalisation, indeed often destitution, of the local population, providing a setting in which dissident elites, aided by the brutality and ineptitude of the central government and many of its local representatives, could readily find support.

The situation in southern Ethiopia was very different. Precisely because of the level of exploitation under the imperial regime in the newly conquered southern regions, these gained immediate and important benefits from the revolution which were not available in the north. Land reform removed the settler and landlord class, enabling peasants to gain at least usufructory rights in the land which they farmed, and relieving them of their previous obligation to deliver a high proportion of their crop to the landlord. They were incorporated into a cash economy which strengthened their links with central government, at the same time that the northern peasants were being progressively marginalised. The apparatus of revolutionary government — peasants' associations, marketing organisations, villagisation, the party — was installed in most areas without evident difficulty.

It should not be assumed that this quiescence is permanent. The old exploitative apparatus of landlordism has been replaced by the new, more centralised and perhaps more systematically exploitative apparatus of a revolutionary socialist state. The villagisation programme through which the government sought to extend its control over peasant agriculture — throughout the country, but especially in the south, where

it has been easiest to implement — may prove to have been disastrously counter-productive. Old resentments remain to be exploited, and organisations such as the Oromo Liberation Front are seeking to foment them — with results that may yet bring to much of southern Ethiopia the levels of bloodshed and devastation already experienced in the north. But it is at least clear that the stereotype of the "Abyssinian" state as the source of conflict in the Horn of Africa is in urgent need of revision.

Notes

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1. This paper refers to the regional boundaries of Ethiopia as these existed up to 1987, and refers to the Gonder region even for the period before 1975 when it was called Begemder and Semien.
2. See Markakis (1987) for the most detailed and objective account available of the origins of the resistance movements in Eritrea and Tigray.
3. Virtually nothing, to my knowledge, has been published on the EPDM, which is not even referred to in Markakis, *op. cit.* There is an early report, "Ethiopia's Forgotten Liberation Movement", in *New African*, July 1985; see also BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts*, 28 June 1989 (ME/0494 B/5), 5 July 1989 (ME/0500 B/1), and 1 August 1989 (ME/0523 B/5). Later material was collected during a visit to Addis Ababa in March/April 1991.
4. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, as First Secretary for Eritrea of the Commission to Organise the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia,

estimated that 379,000 people had died in the Eritrean conflict alone up to 1983, 280,000 of these being civilians, 90,000 Ethiopian soldiers, and 9,000 soldiers of the resistance movements (see Dawit Wolde Giorgis, 1989).

5. Eritrea was also formally united with Ethiopia within the Italian colonial empire from 1936 to 1941.
6. Early in 1989, for example, the Ethiopian government received a delegation claiming to represent ELF supporters in Sudan, and changed the proposed structure of regional government in Eritrea in order to accommodate their wishes.
7. A residue of the EPRP continues to maintain a guerilla campaign in western Gojjam and opposed the TPLF/EPRDF takeover of the region in March 1991.

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