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**Eritrea, 1941-52, the failure of the emergence of the  
nation-state: Towards a clarification of the Eritrean question  
in Ethiopia**

**Araya, Mesfin, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1988**

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ERITREA 1941-52, THE FAILURE OF THE EMERGENCE  
OF THE NATION-STATE: TOWARDS A CLARIFICATION  
OF THE ERITREAN QUESTION IN ETHIOPIA

by

MESFIN ARAYA *A*

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
in Political Science in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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1988

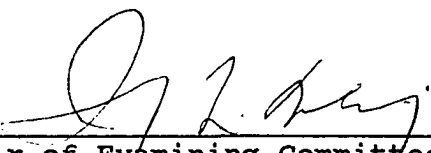
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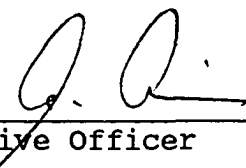
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## PREFACE

Drought is a lack of rain. Famine is a shortage of food. Drought does not necessarily entail famine which can be averted by a proper strategy of development. Development, however, is primarily a political question - who gets what, how, and why? The regime under Haile Selassie was notorious for its negligence of the welfare of the people.

Today, despite the sweeping economic and social changes, the Eritrean war continues to frustrate the democratic hopes and aspirations embodied in the 1974 popular uprising in Ethiopia. The parties at war have proved indifferent even to a minimum condition, such as a cease-fire, to combat the famine, the problem of the peasant. This utter indifference to the welfare of the people has been most clearly demonstrated when, recently, the Eritrean nationalists attacked and destroyed convoys carrying international relief food.

What are the origin and nature of the Eritrean question in Ethiopia? Existing literature is hardly helpful. My study tries to understand a problem little studied and highly misunderstood.

Nationalist regimes and movements come and go. The people are permanent. The long-term perspective has been the guiding principle of my study. From the midst of this war, bloodshed, and famine, a peaceful and prosperous, democratically united Ethiopia can emerge.

In the process of this study, I have incurred intellectual debts to many people. Leonard Markovitz, my advisor, must be singled out. His humane personality was a great support. His regular critical suggestions and his insistence on clarity have helped sharpen my views. I am also indebted to Ofuatey Kodjoe who, in the middle of my research process, was willing to step in as my reader.

A number of colleagues and friends from the Graduate Center have been helpful. Our frequent discussions on various social issues have been intellectually resourceful. I need to mention particularly Douglas Friedman, John Pittman, and Benedito Fontana. Ben was also helpful in the editorial work.

I have spent many hours with Ethiopian colleagues and friends arguing on the Eritrean question. The arguments have forced me to clarify my own position. I would like to thank particularly Yebio Woldemariam, Tesfatsion Medhanie, and my brother, Yonas Araya.

I also thank Meheret Seyoum, Charlotte Watson, and Fina Modesto who helped me in my translation of Italian material.

Finally, I am grateful to my children, Hanna and Petros, who never failed to give me moral support throughout my work. Rose, my wife and best friend, has been at the center of the project. She has borne the costs of being married to a husband whose primary profession for many years has been the research and writing of his dissertation. Her financial and moral support and the endless hours she spent on the word processor make her an inseparable part of this study. Without her help and support, my work would not have been realized. This study is dedicated to her and to my children. To Rose, Hanna, and Petros - my profound love and respect.

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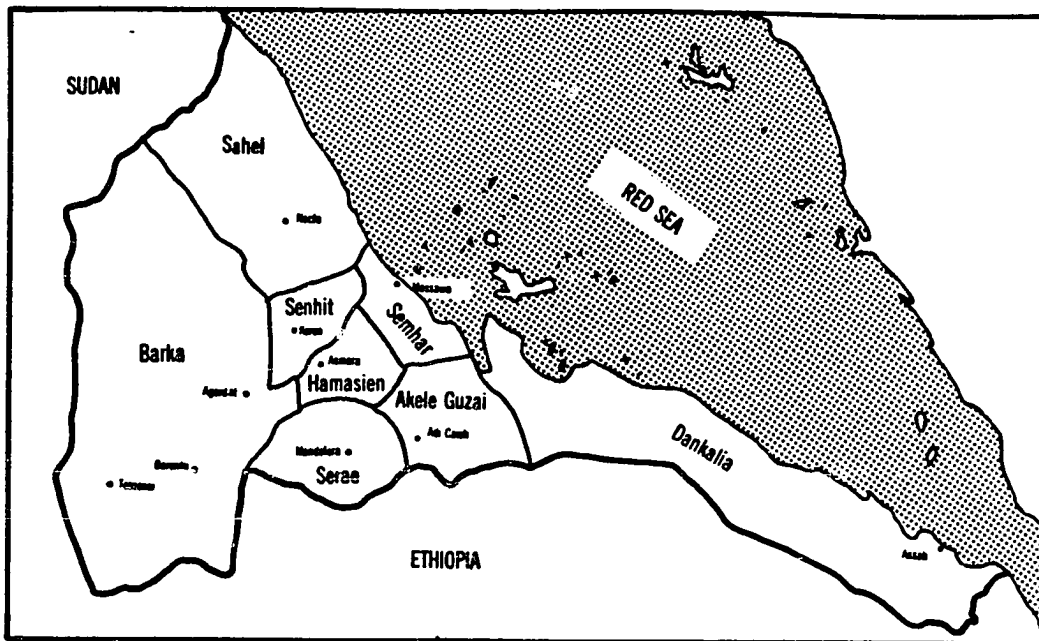
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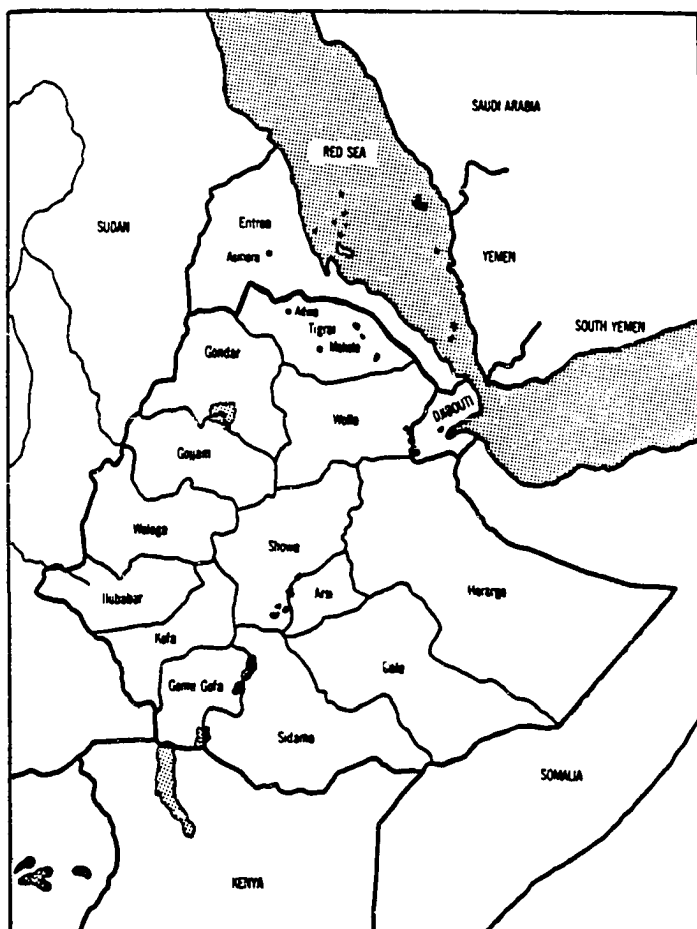
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# ERITREA



# ETHIOPIA



**Abbreviations**

<b>App.</b>	<b>Appendix</b>
<b>Approx.</b>	<b>Approximately</b>
<b>CRIE</b>	<b>Comitato Representativo Italiane in Eritrea</b>
<b>ELF</b>	<b>Eritrean Liberation Front</b>
<b>EPLF</b>	<b>Eritrean People's Liberation Front</b>
<b>FO</b>	<b>Foreign Office</b>
<b>FPCI</b>	<b>Four Power Commission of Investigation</b>
<b>GAOR</b>	<b>General Assembly Official Records</b>

PART I: INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS AND PROPOSITIONS

Describing the aggressive Ethiopian nationalism of the Eritrean highland Christians (the Unionists), Ibrahim Sultan, the leader of the counter movement (the anti-Unionists), recalls -

"The brutality of the hyena devouring the donkey is nothing compared to what the Christians did in Eritrea."<sup>1</sup>

Taunting the Moslems' flight in the face of an armed attack by the Unionists, a highland refrain goes,

"Up on the Hill  
Up on the hill of Tara'emni  
Ho la'le ma'ye la'lo  
Allah, Allah,  
God saved me.  
Ho la'le ma'ye la'lo"<sup>2</sup>

The refrain implies that the decimation of the Moslems was averted by God's merciful intervention. These two examples portray the scope and intensity of the politicization of ethnic ideology in the Eritrean political drama, 1941-1952. In its linguistic composition, Eritrea is heterogeneous. Historically, religion has represented the focus of ethnic group identity, i.e. Moslem vis-a-vis Christian communities. My study, therefore, defines ethnic ideology as a

sub-national loyalty. On the other hand, Eritrean nationalism will refer to an allegiance to the higher and larger entity, the Eritrean nation-state.

This study attempts to provide an alternative explanation to that advanced by the economic reductionist interpretation of political realities of underdeveloped countries. The study focuses on the roles and relationships of class, ethnic identity, and Eritrean nationalism. Specifically, it tries to answer the following questions: Under what historical conditions was ethnic allegiance developed and expressed? What techniques were employed in ideological mobilization, by whom and for what purpose? Why did ethnic loyalty become more significant than, for example, Eritrean nationalism? What are the historical and contemporary implications of the study for the Eritrean question in Ethiopia?

#### THEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

Economic reductionist interpretation, according to Hunt, is defined as the

"...version of historical materialism which presents all social phenomena as 'reducible' to or explicable in terms of the 'economic base'. Thus political struggles or social ideologies are explained as manifestations or reflections of economic forces. In this presentation Marxism is reduced to a set of relatively simple and universal laws."<sup>3</sup>

In its studies of political realities of underdeveloped countries, reductionist interpretation has assumed a variety of forms. My review will be limited to three popular versions: 1 - Dependency theory, 2 - those who interpret ethnic ideology as a manipulative design by the dominant class, and 3 - those who treat ethnic ideology as a false consciousness.

1. A variant of Dependency theory attempts to derive mechanically the domestic politics of underdeveloped countries exclusively from the latter's economic dependency on international capitalism. For Andre Gundar Frank and Samir Amin, for example, international capitalism is said to determine the internal politics of these countries.<sup>4</sup> The dominant classes of underdeveloped countries are dismissed as mere extensions or puppets of metropolitan dominant classes.

The role of international capitalism must not be underestimated. In fact, it will be argued, in my study, that the material basis of the Eritrean political drama cannot be fully understood without the analysis of the significant role of international capitalism, in its colonial form, in the history of Eritrea.

Of question, here, is the tendency of this sort of Dependency perspective, as a theoretical and methodological guide, to depreciate the significance of the dynamics

of domestic politics of underdeveloped countries.<sup>5</sup> Its external-oriented approach a priori precludes political and ideological analyses of these countries. Specifically, the roles of domestic social forces such as classes, political parties, ideologies and leadership, are all simply marginalized. What was the class content of the Eritrean "theatre of politics"? How did the domestic social forces react, for example, to Ethiopia's claim of Eritrea or to the British design to partition the territory? How did the Unionists (those who espoused Ethiopian nationalism) and the anti-Unionists (those who opposed any form of union with Ethiopia) perceive each other's political intentions, and why? How and why were the Unionists popular among the Christian population and the anti-Unionists among the Moslem community? These questions cannot be raised within the framework of Dependency perspectives which denies even a semblance of relative autonomy to domestic political life. Tony Smith is correct to conclude that

"... the chief methodological error of this kind of writing is to deprive local histories of their integrity and specificity, thereby making local actors little more than pawns of outside forces. ... The error... is not that it draws attention to the interconnectedness of economic and political process and events in global manner, but that it refuses to grant the part any autonomy, any specificity, and particularity independent of its membership in the whole. Such writing is tyrannical."<sup>6</sup>

2. Unlike Dependency theory, there are those who focus on domestic political dynamics. But they, too, resort to economic interpretations. Richard Sklar, for example, argues,

"It is less frequently recognized that tribal movements, may be created and instigated to action by the new men of power in furtherance of their own special interests which are, time and again, the constitutive interests of emerging social classes. Tribalism then becomes a mask for class privilege."<sup>7</sup>

They see ethnic ideology simply as a ploy designed by the members of the dominant class. That ethnic ideology may be used by members of the dominant class for political purposes, we do not question. We maintain, however, that such a formulation mechanically derives ethnic ideology fundamentally from the "economic base". Ethnic ideology is hence seen purely as the direct expression of economic class interests. That argument ignores the possibility that members of the dominant class may also take ethnic identity seriously. It also fails to explain why manipulative attempts manage to succeed.

3. Apparently improving on Sklar's argument, Archie Mafeje explains,

"The fact that it works, as is often pointed out by tribal ideologists, is no proof that 'tribes' or 'tribalism' exist in any objective sense. If anything, it is a mark of false consciousness on the part of the supposed tribesmen, who

subscribe to an ideology that is inconsistent with their material base and therefore unwittingly respond to the call for their own exploitation."<sup>8</sup>  
(emphasis original)

If members of the dominated class fail to express their economic class interests and easily succumb to ethnic ideology, their actions are automatically explained away as false consciousness. Accordingly, only those ideologies that express economic class interests are "real". In reality, ethnic conflict can also make a political difference as real as that of economic class conflict. It requires an equal explanation.

In its approach towards the role of ideology, reductionism, invariably, presumes an external relationship between consciousness and reality.

The underlying assumption of this study is that ideologies are understood in their broader meaning as ideas people hold about their world.<sup>9</sup> As such, ideologies are grounded in the process of social practice. There is no separation between consciousness and reality. Ideological categories are practical and form an important part of the process of reality. As Therborn puts it,

"Ideologies function neither as bodies of thought that we possess or invest in our actions, nor as elaborate texts presenting the thought of great minds, which other minds then examine, memorize, accept, or reject, like visitors passing the exhibits in a museum. To understand how ideologies operate in a given society requires first of all that

we see them not as possessions or texts but as ongoing social processes. It is precisely as such processes they interpellate or address us."<sup>10</sup>

As social processes,

"Ideologies defer, compete and clash not only in what they say about the world we inhabit, but also in telling us who we are, in the kind of subject they interpellate."<sup>11</sup>

Competing ideologies address (interpellate) the individual differently. In a given political crisis, for example, one ideological appeal may address an individual primarily as an exploited worker. Another may address him/her primarily as a member of this or that nation. Still, another may address him/her first and foremost as a member of this or that sub-national group. Ideological battle, as Therborn aptly puts it, is not waged only between competing views, it also involves "a struggle over the assertion of a particular subjectivity" (e.g., as a member of this or that class or as a citizen of this or that nation).<sup>12</sup>

Ideological appeal is a form of rational discourse. It claims empirical reference. The success or failure of a given ideology depends on what it affirms and sanctions in reality.<sup>13</sup>

THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE ETHIOPIAN REGIME  
AND THE ERITREAN NATIONALISTS

The inherent weakness of economic reductionism, rooted in its theoretical and methodological conception of the "economic base" as an omnipotent and omnipresent force, is no where better revealed, in its extreme manifestation, than in its use by nationalist regimes and movements in underdeveloped countries. The perspective becomes transformed into a simple conspiracy theory. The ideological debate between the Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean nationalists is a case in point.

The Ethiopian regime wages the Eritrean war on grounds of historical claim of the Eritrean region. A typical argument reads,

"Ever since Ethiopia emerged from the distant horizon of time as a body-politic, its northern part, including the area now called Eritrea, has been at the beginning and at the center of its development. Ethiopia has never existed without this northern part. Nor has this part ever been identified separately from Ethiopia."<sup>14</sup>

The Eritrean nationalists, on the other hand, do not claim Eritrean independence (separatist demand) on grounds of cultural or military repression or the lack of political democracy in general. They wage, what they call, the war of national emancipation on equally historical grounds. Accordingly, the root cause of the Eritrean separatist

demand (independence) is said to be the historical existence of a separate national identity. In the literature, the specific mode of reasoning is not coherent at all. There are two visible trends, nevertheless. There are those who emphasize the European colonization of Eritrea as a point of departure. The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), for example, argues -

"As a result of 60 years of colonial capitalist transformation under a centralized administration and the united struggle of the masses against common enemy, the national identity and consciousness of the Eritrean people was built and consolidated."<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added)

Others claim that the Eritrean sense of separate national identity predates European colonization of Eritrea. Eritrean identity is, therefore, a pre-colonial phenomenon. This view is expressed, among others, by Bereket Habte Selassie, an active member of the Eritrean nationalist intelligentsia. After a brief survey of what is presumed to be the history of Eritrea before Italian colonialism, he concludes,

"The Eritrean people sense of entrapment and isolation, as succeeding colonial powers either encircled them or occupied their land, lies at the root of Eritrean nationalism and a fierce spirit of independence. It is not a new phenomenon; it has its history in the struggle of the Eritrean people... repeated attempts to overthrow alien rule."<sup>16</sup>

European colonialism, accordingly, only served to reinforce already existent national identity. Hence, the present day nationalist movement is the continuation of a long history of Eritrean national consciousness. Irrespective of the mode of reasoning, the nationalists' claim for independence is, invariably, based, like that of the Ethiopian regime, on historical grounds. Since the dismantlement of the Ethio-Eritrean federation, Eritrea is perceived as a colony of Ethiopia.<sup>17</sup>

Western observers and analysts, sympathetic to the Eritrean nationalists' cause, have uncritically assimilated the arguments advanced by the latter.<sup>18</sup> They take the notion of Eritrean historical identity for granted. Their analysis presumes rather than questions the Eritrean nationalists' claim. For example, Richard Greenfield and Richard Leonard take a common colonial history as a basis for Eritrean national identity.<sup>19</sup>

What is interesting in this apparently endless ideological debate, particularly between the Ethiopian regime and the nationalists, is that neither of them appear interested in the internal dynamics of the Eritrean political drama of 1941-52. Both seem uncomfortable when trying to deal with it.

The Ethiopian regime, obsessed by the notion of territorial integrity, and the nationalists, mesmerized by

the idea of an independent Eritrean state, have both refrained from an honest and careful reading of the period. The psychological reason is apparent. The modern political history of Eritrea, particularly the period, 1941-1952, visibly contradicts their claims. The existence of a substantial anti-Ethiopian movement (i.e., the anti-Unionists) does not correspond to the claim advanced by the Ethiopian regime. Nor is the period a consolation for the Eritrean nationalists who claim independence on grounds of historical existence of a separate Eritrean national identity. They, too, will have to account for the existence of a significant Ethiopian nationalist movement (the Unionists) within Eritrea. Hence, in both cases, public discourse appears to threaten their respective assumptions and perspectives. Both sides have developed a convenient escape mechanism - an implicit consensus to shun open and serious study of the modern political history of Eritrea.

What is equally striking is that, despite their antagonistic claims, both camps have also adopted a similar approach when forced to combat this discomfiting period. They resort to a crude version of the economic reductionist perspective - conspiracy theory. In their literature, international conspiracies (often a reference to an undefined term, imperialism) become the key explanation to

all and sundry. Hence their literature, albeit its crude form, is in the tradition of reductionism. It, invariably, marginalizes domestic political and ideological analyses. For example, the Ethiopian official publication reads,

"The subsequent reunion and reintegration of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1962 was... the definitive removal of a system (Ethio-Eritrean federation - M.A.) which was cumbersome and did not satisfy the aspirations of the people but was first imposed on the Eritrean people in flagrant violation of their wishes and only in deference to the views of minority groups."<sup>20</sup> (emphasis added)

The federation is seen as a pure imposition by outside forces. The anti-Unionists are dismissed as a mere minority and "tools of imperialists".<sup>21</sup>

The nationalists equally see the Ethio-Eritrean federation and its collapse as solely the work of international intrigues,

".... a set of conspiracies planned and executed by the imperialist forces, through the United Nations machinery, in order to secure their illegitimate economic and military interests."<sup>22</sup>

The Unionist movement is dismissed as the conspiratorial work of Haile Selassie.<sup>23</sup> For the Ethiopian regime, the popular movement was the Unionist. For the nationalists, it was the anti-Unionist. In both camps, the analyses lack serious empirical evidence. What exactly transpired within the Eritrean political drama? What were the perceptions

and political actions of the internal social forces? Such questions seem taboo for the Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean nationalists.

My study will explore and develop the following series of intimately related propositions:

#### PROPOSITIONS

1. Ideologies occur in historical forms. That is, there is a definite socio-economic framework that defines their parameters. In the Eritrean political drama, ethnic ideology was produced, conveyed and received not under a capitalist mode of production but under what may be called a "peasant mode of production". (For a definition see chapter three pp. 97-101.)

In the colonial history of Eritrea, capitalist social relations had hardly made any significant inroads. It was merchant capital, in the service of metropolitan capital, that was the prevailing mechanism of colonial exploitation. There was hardly any industrial development.

Eritrean towns were little more than distributing and collecting centers for the colonial import and export trade. European colonialism simply fed off Eritrean "pre-capitalist foundations". The resulting outcome was the emergence of a "peasant mode of production". Briefly, its

basic characteristics are household production, primitive technology and rudimentary division of labor. It is marked by the absence of an indigenous bourgeoisie and proletariat rooted in the production process. Unlike the capitalist mode of production, the "peasant mode" fosters the predominance and perpetuation of non-economic forces. Economic and political relations are easily permeated by "affective ties", non-economic bonds (For comparative analysis largely derived from Hyden's study, see chapter three pp. 100-101.). The role of ethnic ideology in Eritrea, therefore, cannot be properly understood apart from the basic socio-economic framework within which it was developed and expressed.

2. The Eritrean political drama had a clear underlying class character. The politicization of ethnic ideology occurred in the context of the modern state and market economy and was conditioned by the intra-class contradictions for control of the state - cleavages within the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class, the heir presumptive to the colonial state (For a definition of the term see chapter four pp. 125-131.). The Unionist and anti-Unionist parties represented political and ideological fractions of the same class, i.e., the petty-bourgeois class. The infighting was centered on the question of the state power and the form that it should take. The intra-class

cleavages were about who gets what, how and why. They were about Eritrean land, labor, and business. The masses (For a definition see chapter four pp. 142-144.) were the chief object of contention.

Though unorganized, the masses were not altogether absent from the political arena. This argument will be developed by focusing on the role of rural brigandage of the times and its relation to the intra-class politics. Briefly, rural banditry emerged in the wake of the economic, social and political crises of the times. It was politically disoriented and organizationally fragmented. Inter-ethnic violence, for example, was not uncommon. But rural brigandage also appeared to express "a latent form of Jacquerie". It was popular among the population. Its relation with the claimants to the state power, the petty-bourgeois class, was striking. It was in the wake of the growing rural violence that the Unionists and anti-Unionists suppressed their differences and accepted the United Nations' proposal, Ethio-Eritrean federation. What is no less significant, it was the alliance of the British authorities in Eritrea, the Eritrean politicians, the Italian residents and the Ethiopian government that finally defeated rural banditry. In retrospect, rural banditry, with its political disorientation and organizational fragmentation, only served to pave the road for the

political emancipation of the petty-bourgeois class whose members, in 1952, became the new holders of power within the larger framework of the Ethiopian state.

3. The members of the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class did invoke ethnic ideology. In their attempts to capture constituencies and broaden their popular support, the members manipulated ethnic histories and symbols. But they also took ethnic allegiance seriously.

Within Eritrea, the members fought against each other as Moslems and Christians belonging to hostile ethnic groups. There was no consensus on what constituted the Eritrean national self. They were not Eritrean nationalists. Within the national framework of Eritrea, the members lacked a shared consciousness of their class membership. They were unable to establish an independent Eritrean state. They even failed to defend the Ethio-Eritrean federation - an institutional arrangement which had provided the latter a measure of regional autonomy. Haile Selassie was able to dismantle the institutional arrangement precisely because there was no unified nationalist movement within Eritrea.

4. The popularity of ethnic ideology cannot be dismissed as mere false consciousness. The pre-colonial history of anti-Moslem politics by the Abyssinian state (traditional Ethiopian state), and new inequalities

introduced by the modern state and market economy (i.e., uneven regional development between Moslem lowlands and Christian highlands, and cultural division of labor) were realities which provided the material and socio-psychological ingredients for the forging of ethnic identities. Realities that were tapped and provoked in the wake of the crisis of the colonial state and the ensuing intra-class contradictions for control of the state. The competitive attempts by Ethiopia, Italy, and Britain to shape the political outcome only served to accelerate inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

5. Historically, the origin of the Eritrean problem in Ethiopia is not the existence of a sense of Eritrean national identity, a claim persistently advanced by contemporary Eritrean nationalist intelligentsia. The modern political history of Eritrea, marked by recurrent ethnic tensions and conflicts, contradicts the nationalists claim. Historically, the anti-Unionist movement, as an expression of anti-Ethiopian sentiment, has been a unique phenomenon largely associated with Eritrean Moslems, as an ethnic group. Eritrean nationalism (in its separatist form) in the Christian highlands is a post-1974 phenomenon.

The Eritrean question is best understood if approached as a crisis related to the process of "state-

building" in Ethiopian political history. At the root of the problem lies the history of the Ethiopian state's effort to dominate society. The dismantlement of the Ethio-Eritrean federation is a case in point. Within Ethiopia, the Eritrean question continues to raise the issue of political democracy, i.e., the relationship between state and society. This argument is developed by analysis of pre- and post-1974 policy practice of the Ethiopian state towards Eritrea. As a concluding remark, the study suggests that the Eritrean question seems to raise a general issue of historical import - the problem of "state-building" in the peripheries, i.,e., underdeveloped countries.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since the official dismantlement of the Ethio-Eritrean federation, over a quarter of a century ago, an armed struggle for independence has continued in Eritrea. Particularly since 1974, the Eritrean war has claimed many lives and is a persistent cause for continued economic and social dislocations of the region. Despite its long history of existence, however, the Eritrean issue remains the least studied and consequently the most misunderstood phenomenon. There is no critical scholarly study on the modern political history of Eritrea, particularly one that is conceptual and with contemporary concern.<sup>24</sup> Histori-

cally, several factors seem to have contributed to this unfortunate situation.

Under Haile Selassie, the Eritrean question was taboo. The very nature of the problem, which questions the territorial integrity of Ethiopia, had, from the outset, made it a sensitive issue for public discourse, particularly under a political system where freedom of speech and assembly were forbidden. Nor was the pervasive and hegemonic Christian Amhara/Tigrean cultural perspective, with its chauvinist Ethiopian nationalism, conducive for free intellectual debate.<sup>25</sup> Outside Ethiopia, the military weakness of the independence movement within Eritrea (an insignificant military power compared to post-1974 condition) had not attracted the attention and interest of foreign scholarship.

When the Ethiopian revolution broke out in 1974, there was hardly a detailed and critical study on the modern political history of Eritrea. It can be said that the 1974 revolutionary period was not intellectually prepared to tackle the Eritrean question. The consequences of this kind of historical predicament are still felt within Ethiopia. Today, the Eritrean war, with its increasing cost in human lives and livelihood, continues to be fought on the basis of the irreconcilable assumptions and perspectives of two militarily highly organized forces - the

Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean nationalist Front.

As noted earlier, post-1974 literature, particularly that written by foreign commentators and analysts in the Western world, has done little to clarify the issue. Invariably, this literature merely echoes the arguments advanced by the Eritrean nationalists, without a careful and serious study of the origin and nature of the Eritrean problem. In the name of democracy, the literature preaches the fragmentation of Ethiopia rather than the establishment of a democratic Ethiopian state. It prescribes a solution whose consequences the authors, as foreigners, are not prepared to share. A detailed study that seriously questions the assumption and perspective of the Ethiopian regime and those of the Eritrean nationalists is necessary. This study, written by an Ethiopian born in the Eritrean highlands and raised in the capital city, Addis Ababa, is an attempt to contribute towards a contemporary understanding of a problem little studied and highly misunderstood. The author hopes that the study may help reformulate the terms of the public debate, hitherto narrowly defined by the Ethiopian elite in power and the Eritrean nationalist intelligentsia who are actively engaged in the search for a separate political power-base.

The study is not concerned with diplomatic conflicts. The strategically and geo-politically motivated

international debate on the former Italian colonies was confined mainly to diplomatic maneuvers at the United Nations forums. There is ample literature on the subject.<sup>26</sup> My focus is primarily the Eritrean domestic politics. The roles of international actors who were directly involved in the Eritrean political drama are taken into account. Their roles are treated as articulated with and mediated by local actors. The challenge to economic reductionist perspective is often either theoretical<sup>27</sup> or is confined to case studies on development.<sup>28</sup> My interest is to try to understand the perceptions and political actions of the domestic social forces, a subject grossly neglected. The study will refer to sources previously little used.<sup>29</sup>

The work suffers from certain shortcomings that need to be mentioned at the outset. Further research needs to be done on pre-colonial socio-economic structure, particularly that of the lowlands and also on rural class formation under colonial rule. The role of banditry in the Eritrean political theater requires research in oral history. My discussion on the commercial supremacy of the Moslem elements in the forties needs more empirical data. So is the case with the section on the economic beneficiaries of post-colonial Eritrea. This study, however, stands by itself as a contribution towards a critical

understanding of the Eritrean problem in Ethiopia.

The study is organized in four major parts. As an introduction, Part One specifies the issues to be investigated. Propositions are spelled out. Part Two analyzes the colonial political economy which defined the basic socio-economic structure of the Eritrean domestic politics. In order to achieve clarity, the Part has been divided into two chapters - i.e., the political and economic reorganizations of Eritrean society under colonial rule. The modern state, the market economy and the "peasant mode" are specified as the basic features of the colonial political economy. Part Three focuses on the Eritrean political drama, i.e. the politics of independence. The Part constitutes three chapters. First, the underlying class character of the Eritrean domestic politics is analyzed. Second, the role of ethnic ideology is discussed. Finally, the specific sources of ethnic allegiance are explained. The recurrent theme in Part Three is the role and relationship of class, ethnic ideology and Eritrean nationalism. As a conclusion, Part Four draws historical and contemporary implications of the study for the Eritrean question in the modern political history of Ethiopia.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. The literal translation goes -

"What the Christians did in Eritrea,  
the hyena would not do to the donkey.  
When the hyena devours the donkey,  
it does not do it that way"

Ibrahim Sultan's interview, Cairo, June 1974. The interview, according to the introductory speech in the tapes, was conducted by three Eritrean nationalists, two from Europe and the other from the United States. The names of the interviewers are not mentioned. I am grateful to Woldu Yohannes who kindly made the two tapes available for me.

2. This is a popular refrain in the oral history of the highlands. The Tara'emni incident occurred on November 30, 1947 when anti-Unionists, largely Moslems, came to meet the delegations of the Four Power Commission of Investigation for the Former Italian Colonies (FPCI). The gathering was disrupted by Unionists, largely Christian highlanders. See the FPCI Report on Eritrea, New York, United Nations, 1948, Annex to App.142.

3. Alan Hunt (ed.), Class and Class Structure, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, p.7.

4. Andre Gundar Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1969 and Samir Amin, Unequal Development, (trans.) by Brian Pearce, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976.

5. For an introductory critique of Dependency Theory see Tony Smith "Underdevelopment of Development Literature: The Case of Dependency Theory" World Politics 31, no.2(January 1979):247-288 and Vicky Randall and Robin Theobald, Political Change and Underdevelopment: A Critical Introduction to Third World Politics, London, Macmillan, 1985.

6. Smith, op.cit., pp.257-258.

7. Richard Sklar "Political Science and National Integration: A Radical Approach" The Journal of Modern African Studies, 5,no.1(1967):6.

8. Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of Tribalism" The Journal of Modern African Studies, 9,no.2(1971): 258-259. According to Tarekegn Adebo, "narrow nationalism... is a variant of false consciousness." See his short essay, "Ethnicity vs Class: Concepts in the Analysis of the Ethiopian Revolution" in Sven Rubenson (ed.) Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, 28-29 April, 1982 - Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies and East Lansing, African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1984, p.546. Other versions of economic interpretation may be found in Claude Meillassoux, "A Class Analysis of Bureaucratic Process in Mali" Journal of Development Studies, 6, no.2(January 1970):97-108; G. Shivgi, Class Struggles in Tanzania, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976 and Mahmood Mamdani, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976. All three treat political parties as economic fractions of the dominant class. Political or ideological fractions are not introduced in their analysis. Saul's criticism of Mamdani clearly reveals the inadequacies of this sort of economic determinist analysis particularly in underdeveloped countries where capitalist relations of production are least developed. See John S. Saul, The State and Revolution in East Africa, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1979, pp.350-390.

9. The following works have been useful references in my discussion of the nature and role of ideology in society - Alvin W. Gouldner, The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar and Future of Ideology, New York, The Seabury Press, 1976; Jorge Larrain, The Concept Ideology, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1979; Rosalyn Wallach Bology, Dialectical Phenomenology: Marx Method, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979 and Goran Therborn, The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology, London, Verso Editions & New Left Books, 1980. Particularly the last two works have been highly useful.

10. Therborn, *ibid*, p.77.

11. *Ibid*, p.78.

12. *Ibid*, p.78. For an extended discussion, see pp.77-81.

13. *Ibid*, pp.33-37.

14. Ethiopia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Eritrea: Then and Now, Addis Ababa, Press and Information Department, May 1976, p.6.

15. Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Memorandum, August 1978, p.5.

16. Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1980, p.51. Jordan Gebre-Medhin also has a similar argument. See his The Eritrean Case: A Critical Appraisal of Peasant and Modernization Studies in Developmental Anthropology, Ph.D. Thesis, Purdue University, May 1979.

17. Eritrean People's Liberation Front, op.cit. p.8. Ethiopia's claim of Eritrea is seen to be the same with that of colonial France over Algeria and Portugal over Angola and Mozambique. See "Joint Declaration of the Eritrean Liberation and Eritrean People's Liberation Front" The Eritrean Case, Proceedings of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, Session on Eritrea, Milan, May 24-26, 1980, p.27.

18. Since post-1974 Ethiopia, there has been, in the Western world, a proliferation of literature supportive of the Eritrean nationalists' separatist demand. See the collections of articles in The Eritrean Case, op.cit. and Basil Davidson, et.al. (ed.), Behind the War in Eritrea, Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980.

19. Richard Greenfield, "Pre-colonial and Colonial History" in ibid, pp.16-31 and Richard Leonard, "European Colonization and the Socio-economic Integration of Eritrea" in The Eritrean Case, op.cit. pp.55-114. The latter emphasizes the break up of pre-capitalist relations.

20. Ethiopia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, op.cit., p.13.

21. Ethiopian Revolution Information Center, Class Struggle and the Problem in Eritrea, Addis Ababa, 1979, p.8.

22. Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), Petition of the Eritrean People to the United Nations General Assembly, Document no.6, New York, December 3, 1971, p.6. Arguments of conspiracy theory abound in the nationalist literature. See Eritrean People's Liberation Front, op.cit.; Eritrean

People's Liberation Front, National Democratic Programme, January 31, 1977; Eritrean Liberation Front, Eritrea and the Federal Act (presented to the Afro-Arab Summit Conference) Cairo, March 7, 1977; Eritrean Liberation Front, Eritrea: The National Democratic Revolution Versus Ethiopian Expansionism, Beirut, Foreign Information Centre, 1979; Bereket Habte Selassie, "Eritrea and the United Nations"; The Eritrean Case, op.cit. pp.114-165; Jordan Gebre-Medhin, "Nationalism, Peasant Politics and the Emergence of a Vanguard Front in Eritrea:", Review of African Political Economy, (September 1984):48-57. See also by the same author op.cit. Here, too, outside observers simply rehearse the arguments of the nationalists. Eritrea's fate is said to have been decided by "Secret diplomacy". See Greenfield, op.cit., p.30. Others say Eritrea was "a political football at the U.N." See Don Connell, "The Changing Situation in Eritrea" in Davidson, et.al., op.cit., p.55. Hence, domestic political and ideological analyses are replaced by analysis of the international diplomatic maneuvers at the United Nations forums.

23. Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Memorandum, op.cit., p.7. The same line of argument is also found in Eritrean Liberation Front, Eritrea and the Federal Act, op.cit.

24. No serious student of Eritrea can afford to ignore the studies of Trevaskis. See G.K.N. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition 1941-52, London, Oxford University Press, 1960. See also Trevaskis Papers MSS. Brit. Empire S36 at Rhodes House, Oxford. The collection covers the years 1946-66, contained in six boxes. The first two are concerned with Eritrea. They deal with district survey studies and brief commentaries. I am grateful to the Rhodes House Library for permission to read the Papers.

Trevaskis' book, published in 1960, eight years after the establishment of the Ethio-Eritrean federation, remains the only detailed study on the modern political history of Eritrea. Despite its perceptive observations and analysis, his study contains critical flaws. Its analytical poverty leaves the roles and relationships of class, ethnic ideology, and Eritrean nationalism, unconceptualized. His work is highly descriptive. The roles of Ethiopia and Italy are inflated at the expense of the perceptions and political actions of local social forces in Eritrea. His pro-British stance undermines the value of

the study. Given the date of publication, almost three decades ago, the work is a useful historical reference. But it cannot be a substitute for a systematic study that approaches the modern political history of Eritrea in the light of its historical and contemporary implications for the Eritrean question in Ethiopia.

Post-Trevaskis detailed scholarly study is rare. The "studies" are either brief commentaries or form a part of a larger focus, e.g., international diplomacy and the fate of Eritrea. Typical examples would be Lloyd Ellingson, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-50" Journal of African History, 18, no.2 (1977):261-281 and Amare Tekle, The Creation of the Ethio-Eritrean Federation: A Case Study in Post-War International Relations 1945-1950, Ph.D. Thesis, Ann Arbor, Michigan State University, 1965.

The post-Trevaskis "studies" may be, roughly, classified under five categories - the Ethiopian government-sponsored "studies", the Eritrean nationalists' publications, those that are uncritically supportive of the nationalists' position, and descriptive commentaries. Ellingson, op.cit., for example, simply describes the roles of the political parties without their class character and the social content of their actions. The fifth category constitutes those who adopt analytical approach without the rigor of empirical analysis. Addis Hiwet, for example, has written several short insightful articles. His approach is in stark contrast to Trevaskis tradition. It has analytical quality. However, concrete empirical elaborations are sacrificed under the rubric of class conflict, revolution, and wars in the Horn of Africa. See his unpublished works, The Nationalities Question in Ethiopia and the Horn, January 1978; Marxism, Nationalism, Regionalism and Revolution in the Horn of Africa, December 1984; War and Revolution in the Horn of Africa: Conjunctures and Prospects, March 1986 and Inside the Eritrean Question, Fecund Ambiguities: Review Article, October 1986. While the first three articles discuss Eritrea in the context of the general question of nationalities in the Horn, the last one is direct in its treatment of the subject. His insistence on the need to see the Eritrean question in the light of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution is highly perceptive.

25. In defiance of Haile Selassie's regime, the Ethiopian student movement in the late 1960's had, for the first time, publicly raised the Eritrean question. The debates did not go beyond the theoretical discussions on

the rights of nations for self-determination. The debates were characteristically devoid of empirical studies. See Randi Ronning Balsvic, Haile Sellassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977, East Lansing, African Studies Center, Michigan State University in Cooperation with the Norwegian Council of Science and the Humanities, 1985. Read particularly pp.277-289.

26. Those interested in the diplomatic conflicts in the disposal of Italian colonies may consult, Benjamin Rivlin, The United Nations and the Italian Colonies, New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1950. For specific case on Eritrea, consult Amare, op.cit.

27. For example, see the collection of articles in Hunt, op.cit.

28. For example, see Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya 1918-1977, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980 or David G. Becker, The New Bourgeoisie and the Limits of Dependency: Mining, Class and Power in "Revolutionary" Peru, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983.

29. A brief note on the primary sources is appropriate. Italian material such as Annuario Statistico Italiano, Annuario delle Colonie Italiane and that of the British at the Public Records Office, London, have been highly useful.

The Four Powers (Britain, France, The United States and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) had organized a commission of investigation for the former Italian colonies. The commission has compiled a tremendous amount of information material ranging from statistical figures on agriculture, commerce, population, urbanization to political parties' programs and interviews. It has equally been highly informative. With the failure of the Four Powers to reach a decision on the fate of the ex-Italian colonies, the problem was forwarded to the United Nations. The latter in turn established its own commission of inquiry. In the case of Eritrea, the commission was composed of delegations from Burma, Pakistan, Norway and South Africa. The United Nations proposal of Ethio-Eritrean federation, for example, was based on the Burmese and South African recommendations. For the purpose of implementation of the proposal, a United Nations commissioner in Eritrea was appointed as an observer and

consultant. The reports of both commissions contain a wealth of information. Ibrahim Sultan's interview conducted by Eritrean nationalists, the publications of Ethiopian governments (pre- and post-1974), and those of Eritrean nationalist Fronts have also been consulted. Since there is no surname in the Ethiopian tradition, the first name is used for Ethiopian authors in the reference section.

PART II: THE COLONIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

## CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL REORGANIZATION

The Eritrean political drama was played out within the framework of specific historical conditions - the result of over half a century of colonial rule - that must be specified. First, this chapter attempts to reconstruct the dominant pre-colonial mode of production.<sup>1</sup> The major argument the chapter advances is that the tributary mode of production was the characteristic feature. Second, the emergence of the modern state in its colonial form is analyzed. The modern state, it will be argued, was established by destroying the traditional sources of power, authority, wealth and status of the pre-colonial nobility.

PRE-CAPITALIST MODE: THEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

Following Dobb's highly economic reductionist approach,<sup>2</sup> some commentators have defined the traditional mode of production in northern Ethiopia (traditionally Abyssinian kingdom) as feudal.<sup>3</sup> Surplus extraction, that is, an exclusively economic criterion, is taken as the essential defining element. According to Addis Hewit, for example,

"Abyssinian society of the last four or five centuries has been governed by the main characteristics that typify a feudal society: an agrarian economy, in which the vast peasant population surrenders its surplus to the maintenance of a ruling class - usually and principally represented by the warrior class and the priestly oligarchy." (emphasis added)<sup>4</sup>

Non-economic factors such as forms of land ownership, political and ideological institutions are dismissed as mere variables and therefore nonessential to the definition.<sup>5</sup> The danger with such a method is that it grossly neglects critical variations among pre-capitalist modes of production characterized by the existence of surplus extraction. We find in Marx, for example, a discussion on slavery, Asiatic mode and serfdom (feudalism). All three fall under the category of pre-capitalist mode, but at the same time are distinct from each other. If we insist solely on a purely economic criterion, how are we to differentiate between, for example, slavery and serfdom. In both conditions there is surplus extraction. There is a need to include non-economic analysis in order to mark their internal differences. An economic reductionist method necessarily forecloses such an option.

Other commentators reject the application of the concept, feudalism, to northern Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> They do so by focusing on the forms of land ownership and/or the rela-

tionship between lord and vassal. They employ non-economic analysis. None of them, however, provide a theoretical justification for their approach. At best, their defence is based on an explicit or implicit empirical reference culled from a purely European experience. A theoretical explanation is necessary in order to clarify the method employed.

Marx defines the capitalist mode of production by an economic criterion. But that is not the case in his discussion of pre-capitalist societies. Marx hardly wrote a systematic discourse on the pre-capitalist mode of production. His major concern was a critique of the capitalist mode of production. His fragmentary remarks, nevertheless, are highly suggestive.<sup>7</sup> His analysis includes non-economic factors. This is highly explicit, for example, in his ~~excerpts~~ excerpts from Kovalevsky.<sup>8</sup> While he accepts the existence of surplus extraction, he rejects Kovalevsky's claim of Indian and Algerian feudalism. His defense significantly dwells on analysis of forms of land ownership (juridical) and the mechanism (political/ideological) employed for surplus extraction. In other words, he combines economic and non-economic analysis. The shift from economic analysis (in the case of capitalist mode) to the inclusion of non-economic analysis (in the case of pre-capitalist mode) is not a mere digression or a conse-

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TABLE 2.1  
Typology of Modes of Production

	<u>Inside the</u> <u>Labor Process</u>	<u>Outside the</u> <u>Labor Process</u>
1. <u>Pre-capitalist mode</u>		
a. Slavery	Domination	Domination
b. Tributary/Feudalism	Autonomy	Domination
2. <u>Capitalist mode</u>	Domination	Autonomy

Source: Constructed from Erik Olin Wright, "The Status of the Political in the Concept of Class Structure", Politics and Society, 2, no.3 (1982) p.338. Tributary mode is an addition.

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quence of an eclectic tendency in Marxian theory. There is, on the contrary, a coherent theoretical foundation to it. A purely economic definition of a pre-capitalist mode of production is theoretically untenable. The definition must necessarily include non-economic analysis. Table 2.1 is useful for the purpose of clarification. The table is not meant to imply any inherent evolutionary historical development. It is intended, instead, to establish a comparative perspective on capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production in order to infer the appropriate method employed in distinguishing differences within the latter, as a category.

In the capitalist mode of production, we observe

the clarification and universalization of the economic imperative. This means that the process of value creation, here, is a purely economic process. Use value is universally mediated by exchange value. That is, production for exchange value dominates. Labor is a commodity. In short, in the capitalist mode of production the economic and non-economic institutions are clearly differentiated. It is precisely because of the clarification and universalization of the economic imperative that Marx speaks about the "Laws of Motion" in the capitalist mode of production. An exclusively economic definition of a mode of production is, therefore, theoretically relevant only to the capitalist mode.

The picture in a pre-capitalist mode is drastically different. Here the production of use value dominates. Labor is not a commodity. Unlike the capitalist mode, surplus extraction is achieved by extra-economic pressures (i.e., political/ideological). The economic and non-economic institutions, in other words, are not differentiated. They converge, instead. A pre-capitalist mode, therefore, needs to be defined not only in terms of its economy but also in terms of its non-economic institutions. It is only by the inclusion of non-economic analysis that we can ultimately establish the essential difference, for example, between feudalism and tributary mode.

Rent in feudalism presupposes the lord's dominion over the soil. In other words, it presupposes that the cultivating population has been turned out of the land and reduced to the condition of serfdom. Legally the land belongs to the lord who, as a private owner, has the right to dispose of his property as he pleases. Tribute, on the other hand, presupposes that the producers, by customary laws, own their means of subsistence and livelihood. In the Eritrean case, it appears that the soil was "no where noble".<sup>9</sup> It was tribute (produce) in place of rent that constituted the chief mechanism for surplus extraction.

#### THE HIGHLAND REGION

The basic units of production were the household economies.<sup>10</sup> The producers were autonomous in the immediate sphere of production. Cereal crops mainly barley and "teff" were the basic cultivation. Livestock formed a secondary occupation. The use of wooden plough and oxen, weeding by hand, reaping of the harvest by simple sickles and treading of grain by animals, constituted the traditional technological features. The producers owned the land. The "Risti" system constituted the basic form of land ownership at the local level.<sup>11</sup> Ownership resided in the "Enda" unit - the larger extended family whose members (comprising a varying number of individual families) claimed a common descent from a founding father. As

a member of the "Enda", the individual possessed usufruct rights over his holdings. The rights were hereditary and permanent. The customary law of inheritance precluded the notion of primogeniture. Family individual holdings were subject to division among the children. Consanguineous organization with its basic principles of indivisibility and inalienability of land ownership was the essential feature of the "Risti" system. Local people spoke of "Risti" as a "fundamental right and a sacred possession".<sup>12</sup> Superimposed on the local land tenure was the system of "Gulti".<sup>13</sup>

Traditional folklore describes the "Gulti" system as the expression of the dominant social and political relations in the society,

"The poor man with his rist.  
The rich man with his gult.  
The gult is for the great warrior,  
and the rist for the weak."<sup>14</sup>

By imperial charters, districts and provinces were granted to government administrative officials as "territorial fiefs". The imperial grant was known as "Gulti". "Gulti" holders, as representatives of imperial power, were expected to maintain law and order, collect taxes, and raise troops for the central authority. In return for services rendered, "Gulti" rights entitled them to extract unpaid labor (tribute) from the producers, mainly in kind.

The "Gulti" system had certain basic characteristics. "Gulti" rights were not independent rights. It was primarily political office that entailed "Gulti" rights. Political office was conditional and not absolute. It was not hereditary. The imperial power had the prerogative to revoke "Gulti" rights. The "Gulti" system was a "concessionary tenure".<sup>15</sup> By its nature, therefore, it represented the withdrawal of revenue from the state treasury. It did not entail the expropriation of the cultivating population. The church also enjoyed "Gulti" rights. The grants were permanent. But such grants were institutional rather than individual.

In practice the power and fortune of provincial and district office holders fluctuated with the weakness and strength of the imperial authority. In the specific history of highland Eritrea, a consolidated hereditary aristocratic class hardly emerged. The rise of the semi-autonomous status of "Bahr Negash" office (i.e. Governorship of highland Eritrea) and its decline since the 16th Century is highly indicative.<sup>16</sup> The historical fate of Tsazzege and Hazzega ruling families in Hamasien is yet another illustration. For many generations the highest political office exchanged hands between the two rival families.<sup>17</sup> With the emperor Yohannes IV northern policy of centralization in the late 19th century, both of the aristocratic

families were replaced by imperial officials from the neighboring province, Tigrai.<sup>18</sup> Alula became the governor of Eritrea. He brought with him his entourage who replaced the local nobility at various key political offices. The periodic assertion of imperial power to give and take away political offices precluded the development of a feudal class solidly entrenched in the production process.

#### THE LOWLAND REGION

Unlike that of the highlands, information material on the lowland region is scarce. My analysis is based on the limited sources available.<sup>19</sup> The discussion that follows will focus on the Beni Amer/Tigre society, in the Western lowlands.

The tributary mode, here, was based on livestock economy. Camels, cattle, goats and sheep were raised. Rigid social barriers divided the Beni Amer, the minority ruling families and the vast subject population, the Tigre. The Beni Amer claimed common descent from a founding father, Amer, the legendary conqueror of the original inhabitants. They regarded themselves "as ramified genealogical unit".<sup>20</sup> Customary laws forbade inter-marriage between the Beni Amer and the Tigre. The Beni Amer referred to themselves as "Nabtab" - denoting "a

nobility of birth".<sup>21</sup> As a subservient group, the Tigre were identified with this or that individual "Nabtab" family in the various clans. The Tigre people were classed together as "Ndessna" which meant "those who belong".<sup>22</sup> Since the 16th Century, the Tigre population had been collectively transformed into a distinct subjugated social group. Their condition, however, was not one of pure slavery.<sup>23</sup> The reference, "Ndessna" underlined their caste status. Nevertheless, conquest did not entail expropriation of their traditional means of subsistence and livelihood.

The land, upon which the reproduction of livestock economy depended, was communal. According to Nadel, whose report on the Beni Amer/Tigre political, social, and economic relations, remains the only detailed study, the Tigre's

"... grazing rights are full and absolute rights, derived from the tacit corporate title which the tribe or clan exercises over an area, and not from some primary property right vested in the overlords."<sup>24</sup> (emphasis added)

Individual Tigre families owned livestock property. As a subject population, nevertheless, the Tigre paid tribute to the members of the aristocracy. The tribute was in kind. It also included milking and herding as labor services. The "Nabtab's" right to collect tribute, as part of an

estate, was hereditary. Inheritance was subject to division among the sons.

The producers, the Tigre, were united with their traditional means of production. They were autonomous in the immediate sphere of production. Independent of their will, they rendered surplus product and services to members of the nobility. They were engaged in the productive process in part for their own maintenance and in part for the maintenance of the ruling families. The Tigre traditional folklore that "The leopard grows fat with goats"<sup>25</sup> aptly describes, in a metaphor, the unequal political, social, and economic relations in the society. Such inequalities are also depicted in Beni Amer folklore. This is done, however, in a rather strange way. Nadel explains the plausible psychological implication contained in an exclusively Beni Amer traditional belief,

"The Beni Amer... believe in witches and sorcerers who eat the souls (or life-substance of people) whom they wish to destroy. Now only the Tigre are believed to possess these powers of evil magic. To the psychologist the connection is convincing; the serfs (see footnote below for an explanation on the term - M.A.) subconscious desire for retribution and the overlords subconscious sense of guilt (perhaps fear - M.A.), must have given birth to this belief in a supernatural agency which makes the masters victims, and the subject masters."<sup>26</sup>

The Beni Amer comprised several clans, headed by

the "Diglal", the paramount chief.<sup>27</sup> Each clan had its own clan chief, the "Omada". The clans were subdivided into smaller kinship groups, "Hissa" with their respective headmen, the "Sheikh". The kinship groups were further subdivided into individual families, "Ailet" each with its own headman, the "Sherfaf". The hierarchical structure was merely symbolic. The system was based on clan confederacy.

The political union was based on the common allegiance, tributary obligation, to the Diglal. The Diglal symbolized the higher unity of the Beni Amer. At varying periods the paramount chief paid annual tribute to the Fung Kingdom in Sennar, the Turkish regime, the Egyptian power and the Abyssinian state.

The Diglal was elected by general "Nabtab" Council. In practice the office of the Diglal had little judicial and executive powers. For example, inter-clan disputes were settled by a general "Nabtab" Council. The clans functioned as autonomous sub-states independent of the paramount chief,

"The main obligations which express the Beni Amer political unity, the traditional common allegiance to a paramount chief, and the readiness for concerted action towards other, outside groups, are neither firmly rooted nor invariable... Sentiments of all allegiance are easily cast aside by refractory clans or jealous clan heads." <sup>28</sup>

Nadel provides historical examples of secession from the confederacy.<sup>29</sup> The clan chief was elected by clan council. He also lacked judicial and executive powers. For example, disputes involving a "Nabtab" were settled by clan council. The Diglal and the clan chiefs reigned over men who were their equals "in descent, status and economic resources".<sup>30</sup> The absence of primogeniture only served to preclude the concentration of wealth in the hands of clan chiefs or the Diglal. The weak political union, however, was sustained by perceived unity of descent and, above all, by the Beni Amer collective political, social, and economic domination of the subject population, the Tigre.

The traditional socio-economic and political structures in both the highlands and the lowlands did not survive the period of colonial rule. The establishment of the modern state, in its colonial form, had destructive consequences.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE COLONIAL STATE

In the pre-colonial period, the region now known as Eritrea had participated in the international market. Coastal trade was the characteristic feature.<sup>31</sup> Indigenous caravan traders from within and around the region played a crucial role in linking the interior with the

coast. For the metropolitan economy, coastal trade invariably remained a poor mechanism for effective penetration and control of the interior economic life. Regional instability caused by wars and recurrent intra-class political cleavages within the nobility too often made trade the first casualty. The fact that foreign merchants were stationed on the coast far from the interior had also meant that the indigenous traders had the sole monopoly of interior markets. Metropolitan economy critically lacked the political mechanism to reorganize the region's internal economy. The birth of the colonial state in 1890 marked a qualitative historical "leap" in the history of Eritrea's integration into international capitalism. Coastal trade was superseded by political and economic reorganization of the region.

The characteristic feature of the political reorganization was the introduction of the modern state in its colonial form. The modern state in Eritrea meant the creation of a defined national territory, a centralized national administrative machinery and laws and the creation of a national police force. The process was completed at the expense of the traditional political and economic bases of the pre-colonial nobility. In the history of colonial Eritrea, the introduction of the modern state created a new national center of political power. The process of

formation of the modern state needs to be spelled out.

#### COLONIAL ACQUISITION

Summing up his bitter experience with foreign intrigues, particularly that of England, emperor Tewdros of Ethiopia (1855--1868), aptly described the mechanics of colonial acquisition,

"First the missionary, then the consul,  
then the soldier."<sup>32</sup>

The role of missionaries in paving the ground for the colonization of Africa is a common story. Their teachings emphasized the supremacy of western values. Missionary schools produced future native colonial functionaries. Wittingly or otherwise, missionaries carried out political activities for their respective countries. Their frequent correspondence with and reports to their governments and philanthropic organizations served as valuable sources of information on climatic, economic, social and political conditions. In Ethiopia, early de facto political agents were often missionaries.<sup>33</sup> Alvarez, the 16th Century Portuguese missionary, D'Abbadie and Sapeto, the French and Italian missionaries of the 19th Century are good examples. The intimate relationship between the activities of missionaries and colonial ventures in Ethiopia may be observed in what D'Abbade had to say. His appeal, in 1839, for British protection in Massawa unambiguously conveys the

political role of missionaries,

"It is needless perhaps to remark that in establishing a European mission in Abyssinia I am paving the way for future commercial intercourse with that country."<sup>34</sup>

The arrival of a young monk, Sapeto, in Ethiopia in 1837 marked the beginning of Italian missions in the Red Sea region. Thirty-two years later he managed to acquire the Bay of Assab for the Italian Rubattino Steamship Company.

After the missions came the de jure political agents. Antonelli, the Italian diplomat, played a central role in the Italian colonial history in the region.<sup>35</sup> His regular reports on economic, social and political conditions of the region and his lobby in Menelik's (the king of Shoa, a claimant to the Ethiopian throne) court was an indispensable preparatory work toward the ultimate realization of Italian colonialism. It was Antonelli who managed to solicit Menelik's support of the Italian drive. It was Antonelli who defined the right moment for colonial penetration.

The arrival of the army was the climax in the process of colonial acquisition. The Italian military led by Baldassaire and later by Baratieri unleashed its forces particularly on the resistance in highland Eritrea. Chiefs were incarcerated in Assab and Nocra; it was a time of terror.<sup>36</sup>

FACTORS FACILITATING COLONIAL ACQUISITION

External and internal factors were at play to facilitate Italian acquisition.

In the Red Sea region, the Anglo-French rivalry was equally matched by an Anglo-Italian rapprochement.<sup>37</sup> It was with British approval that Italy, taking advantage of the Egyptian crisis caused by the Mahadist revolt, took over Massawa in 1885. It was this Anglo-Italian rapprochement that led the Ethiopian emperor, Yohannes IV, to angrily conclude,

"I did not give them Massawa, England gave it to the Italians."<sup>38</sup>

Internally, the famine of 1888 and 1892 had caused social dislocations in the Eritrean region leaving the population physically weak and psychologically demoralized.<sup>39</sup> The death of emperor Yohannes in the wars against the Mahadists was no less significant. It threw the region into political chaos. The ensuing struggle among the highland nobility for political supremacy produced enough collaborators who received Italy as a timely ally. Kolmodin cites several examples of highland collaborators who went to Massawa to greet the Italians.<sup>40</sup> The ruling families in the lowlands, as a protection against the Abyssinian state and Mahadists' raids, readily embraced Italian rule.<sup>41</sup> British support to Italians, social dislocations caused by

wars and famine, colonial terror and in the long run willing internal and regional collaorators were formidable forces that rendered easy Italian acquisition of Eritrea.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRADITIONAL POWER BASE  
OF THE PRE-COLONIAL NOBILITY

The occupation of Eritrea in 1890 did not end the political prerequisite toward the economic control of the region. The colonial state had to be organized, consolidated and maintained. To this end, Italy first began to define the Eritrean boundaries. This was done by a series of treaties<sup>42</sup> - to the north with the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, to the south with Menelik of Ethiopia, and to the southeast with the French Territory of Afars and Issas. The result was a series of partitions. In the west the Beni Amer group was partitioned. The majority were incorporated into Eritrea while their kinsmen remained across the Eritrean border in the Sudan. In the south highland Eritrea's longstanding cultural and political ties with Ethiopia were suddenly severed. The Afars faced the same fate. They were separated from their kinsmen in the south and southeast. Thus a defined national territory was created,

"... by an act of surgery: by severing its different peoples from those with whom their past had been linked and by grafting the amputated remnants to each other under the title of Eritrean."<sup>43</sup>

A series of colonial reforms brought about a radical shift from fragmented authority, characteristic of the traditional political system, to centralized sovereignty. The territory was administered by a colonial governor directly responsible to the home government. To facilitate direct control, several administrative divisions were established.<sup>44</sup> Under the Italians, there were major administrative units, the "Commissariati", which were subdivided into a number of districts, "Residenze". In some cases, districts were subdivided into sub-districts, "Vice-residenze". The introduction of colonial penal and civil codes<sup>45</sup> across the national territory reduced the traditional nobility and the peasants alike to the mercy of the white power structure - the colonial state as the superior authority. The new power at the center was reinforced by the establishment of national police force, the Carabinieri for rural districts and the Polizia dell'Africa Italiana for the major urban centers.<sup>46</sup> Under the British rule, the two were consolidated to form an Eritrean police force.<sup>47</sup>

On the plateau the "Gulti" system was abolished.<sup>48</sup> This brought the destruction of the traditional material base of the old nobility. The members of the traditional nobility were reduced to mere salaried junior civil servants in the racially hierarchial colonial state apparatus.<sup>49</sup> Service

in the colonial army at the non-commissioned ranks "...was the recognized passport to customary titles and, also, to official appointments such as chieftainship".<sup>50</sup> Clerical or even domestic service for colonial officials often served as a springboard for higher positions.<sup>51</sup> The highest position opened to the native were district chieftainship, and "Coaditori", native advisory council.<sup>52</sup>

The process in the lowlands was a protracted one. The Italians who had already acquired the consent of the traditional ruling families had no inclination to abruptly disturb the traditional socio-economic and political structures. The Italian policy was rather marked by a series of reforms aimed at gradual weakening of the traditional power-base of the nobility.<sup>53</sup> At first, traditional offices remained hereditary. The ruling families right to tribute was maintained. The responsibility of collecting taxes, the traditional prerogative and status symbol of the nobility, was retained. Such concessions were accompanied by gradual reforms designed to facilitate colonial control. The Italians abolished the customary law of inheritance and replaced it by the law of primogeniture. The policy was aimed at strengthening chieftainship (hence centralization) at the expense of individual nobility. The traditional tribute was absorbed in government taxes levied on the nobility and subjects alike. Clan

chiefs became minor salaried bureaucrats. The retention of the right to collect taxes, however, continued to provide them with strategic position to abuse the system of tax collection. This had led the subject population to refer to the Beni Amer as 'a government within a government'.<sup>54</sup>

Under the British, three major reforms ended the preeminence of traditional nobility in the lowlands. The introduction of native court composed of clan chiefs and headed by the Diglal and his deputy created more centralization. Direct tax collection was introduced. This destroyed the traditional prerogative and status symbol of the nobility. Finally, in the late forties, the Beni Amer confederacy and the traditional "Nabtab"/Tigre social arrangement came to an end. This was done by administrative reorganization that established, as administrative units, autonomous Tigre clans with their own clan chiefs. By 1949, the Beni Amer were mere clans among clans subject to the colonial state.

The modern state, as a new center of national political power, was to constitute, as we shall see later, the focus of political competition among the nationalists. One of them was the native bureaucrat whose emergence was itself the direct consequence of the establishment of the modern state.

### THE NATIVE BUREAUCRAT

The colonial state was founded on conquest. Conquest alone, however, hardly explains the mechanism for its reproduction. The power of the colonial state was never omnipotent. Colonial legitimacy and stability required continued internal support. The Eritrean bureaucrat was the ideal collaborator.

The native bureaucrat was one of the preconditions for the reproduction cycle of the colonial state. Located in the colonial state apparatus, the native civil servant was a crucial political and ideological link between the colonial state and the population at large. It was through the native bureaucrat that the hardships of colonial oppression were felt by the Eritrean people. The native civil servant was found everywhere in the colonial state apparatus. He was in the native court where over fifty years of colonial mistreatment was based. He served as an interpreter, a clerk, and a teacher in the colonial schools. Having a noncommissioned rank, he was visible in the colonial police force and army. He was a district chief. As a tax collector he was the scourge of the rural producers. In his realm of authority, he was no less oppressive than the white man. Trevaskis describes, particularly, the district chiefs as

"... the most corrupt, avaricious, oppressive and unpopular, their word had

been law and their loyalty to the government absolute."<sup>55</sup>

The native bureaucrat resided in the urban centers, far from the "tribal" areas.<sup>56</sup> He was closest to the white man. He spoke a foreign language. His life style approximated that of the European. By the standard of the native population, he was the most educated and the highest paid. In the eyes of the population at large, he had come to acquire a contradictory image. His status in the "New World", established by colonialism, made him an object of emulation. His role as an agent of colonial misrule made him an object of contempt.

The native civil servant was produced by the process of preserving the traditional nobility in a new historical context and installing new collaborators. As part of the process of consolidation and maintenance of the colonial state, colonial schools served as a recruiting ground for colonial state functionaries. In the early period of Italian colonialism, a special school exclusively for the sons of traditional nobility was established. The sons of highland nobility, for example, attended "Scuola San Giorgio" in Adi Ugri.<sup>57</sup> Colonial education had a utilitarian purpose. According to Andrea Festa, the director of education in Eritrea in 1938 and a man with twenty years of experience in colonial education, the aim

Table 2.2  
Major Colonial Schools Under Italian Rule

<u>Name</u>	<u>Students Enrolled</u>
<u>Scuola 'Vittorio Emanuele III' - Asmara*</u>	
1926-27	164
1932-33	900
1933-34	898
1934-35	1059
<u>Scuola 'Principe Di Piemonti' - Asmara*</u>	
1922-23	300
1932-33	600
1933-34	515
1934-35	578
<u>Scuola 'Salvago Raggi' - Keren**</u>	
1922-23	30
1932-33	128
1933-34	128
1934-35	245
<u>Scuola 'S. Michele' - Saganeiti*</u>	
1922-23	140
1932-33	201
1933-34	201
1934-35	301
<u>Scuola 'Mistu Di Adi Caie'*</u>	
1922-23	45
1932-33	133
1933-34	113
1934-35	143
<u>Scuola Bilingue Di Massawa**</u>	
1922-23	45
1932-33	113
1933-34	113
1934-35	134

\* Highlands

\*\* Lowlands

Source - Angelo Piccioli "Le Istituzione Educative nell' Africa Orientale Italiana" Tomaso Sillani (ed.), L'Africa Orientale Italiana, Roma, Rassegna Italiana, 1936, p.217.

of colonial schools was, to make the native child a "conscious propagandist for Italian civilization".<sup>58</sup> Only primary schools were established.<sup>59</sup> According to Festa's confidential instruction to school directors, the native student by the end of the fourth year,

"... should be able to speak our language (Italian - M.A.) moderately well; he should know the four arithmetical operations within normal limits."<sup>60</sup>

That was all. Textbooks emphasized obedience and loyalty to fascism, the King, the Duce, the flag and the state.<sup>61</sup> Students were taught selected parts of Italian history. A greater part of Italian history was suppressed. The history of disunited Italy, Mazzini's movement of "Young Italy", the revolution of 1848, Garibaldi's expedition of the thousand were all systematically excluded from the school curriculum.<sup>62</sup>

During the British administration the number of schools expanded (see Table 6.3). New opportunities were also opened for the native civil servant. Subordinate posts previously held by Italians under the early years of the British administration were Eritreanized (see Table 6.4). As a rule, there was a ceiling to upward mobility. Underlying the fascist Italian colonial mentality, Fabre, the editor of the fascist journal, *Etiopia*, wrote,

"The office must be a mysterious place where the white man officiates as at an

altar, and the documents encased in the files must have the appearance of sacred papers which natives cannot touch."<sup>63</sup>

Such attitude was not foreign to the British administration, either. The highest offices were held by the British. The Italians came second. At the bottom of this racially hierarchical administration were the Eritrean civil servants.

It was this rigid barrier to upward mobility, a direct consequence of the racist colonial political culture, that drove the Eritrean bureaucrats, in the forties, to call for Eritreanization of the state - the one and only outlet to expand their political base for further accumulation of power, authority, wealth and status. The Eritrean civil servant came into being in the era of the modern state. But the modern state in its colonial form was an impediment. Hence, the anti-colonial sentiment of the bureaucrat.

The next chapter will further explore the colonial impact. The focus will be the reorganization of the Eritrean traditional economy and its consequences.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Mode of production is a purely analytical concept. It is defined as "an articulated combination of relations and forces of production structured by the dominance of the relations of production"; for an extended explanation, see Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, Pre-capitalist Modes of Production, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, pp.9-13. The term Dominance means having a major influence in molding the trend of development. Marx refers to it as "a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity" see K. Marx, Grundrisse translated by Martin Nicolaus, New York, Vintage Books, 1973, p.107.

2. Maurice Dobb, Studies in the Development of Capitalism, New York, International Publishers, 1963. Dobb rejects juridical and political analysis and reduces the defining element of feudalism primarily to "the socio-economic content of the obligation which connects them (i.e. the producer and the lord. - M.A.) p.35. Consequently, whether the lord's ownership of land is hereditary or service-tenure or whether the form of the state is centralized or decentralized are all immaterial to the definition.

3. For example see Addis Hewit, Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution, Occasional Publication no. 1, London, Review of African Political Economy, 1975; Legesse Lemma's review of Ellis' "The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia" Ethiopianist Notes, 2,1(1978):71-73; and also Teshome Kebede "Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ethiopia", in Sven Rubenson (ed.) op.cit. pp. 201-211.

4. Addis, op.cit., p.26.

5. For example, Addis writes that

"The multiple taxation, tribute and corvie labor system imposed on the ristegna peasantry clearly indicated that the latter's ownership of land did not mitigate its class oppression and exploitation."  
Ibid., p.27.

The fact of land ownership by the producer does not count in his analysis. What matters most is the existence of exploitation/oppression. But the existence of the latter does not necessarily make the production system feudal. Exploitation/oppression equally exists in other pre-capitalist modes, e.g., slave or tributary modes.

6. Read for example, Donald Crummey, "Abyssinian Feudalism", Past and Present, no.89, (1980):115-138; Gene Ellis, "The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia", Journal of Modern African Studies 14,no.2 (1976):275-295; John Markakis, Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974; Margery Perham, The Government of Ethiopia, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1969; Dessalign Rahmato, Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia, Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984; and Michael Stahl, Ethiopia: Political Contradictions in Agricultural Development, Stockholm, 1974. The latter two authors specifically refer to the traditional mode of production of northern Ethiopia as tributary, but they equally fail to provide a theoretical justification.

7. Reading the comments by Banerjee and Krader has been greatly helpful in clarifying my thoughts. See Diptendra Banerjee, "In Search of a Theory of Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production", in Diptendra Banerjee (ed.) Marxian Theory and the Third World, New Dew Delhi, Sage Publications, 1985, pp.13-39; and Lawrence Krader, The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx, The Netherlands, Van Gorcum and Company, 1975, particularly Chapter 4.

8. See Part II: "Marx Excerpts from M.M. Kovalevsky" in *Ibid*. I am not concerned with the empirical soundness of Marx's arguments. My concern is his mode of reasoning.

9. An expression Marx uses in his commentary on Kovalevsky's claim of Indian feudalism, *Ibid*, p.383.

10. There is a relative abundance of literature on the traditional socio-economic relations in Northern Ethiopia to which the Eritrean plateau historically and culturally belonged. My information is culled from the following studies: Ambaye Zakarias, Land Tenure in Eritrea, Addis Ababa, 1966; G.W.B. Huntingford (ed.), The Land Charters in Northern Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Faculty of Law, Haile Selassie I University in Association with Oxford University Press,

1965; Imperial Ethiopian Government, Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, Report on Land Tenure Survey on Eritrean Province, Addis Ababa, Department of Land Tenure, 1 September, 1969.; and S.F. Nadel, "Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau", Africa, 16, no.1 (January 1946):1-21 and 16, no.2 (1946):99-108. Richard Pankhurst, State and Land in Ethiopian History, Addis Ababa, The Institute of Ethiopian Studies and The Faculty of Law, Haile Selassie I University, 1966.

11. "Risti" in Tigrigna and "Rist" in Amharic languages. Nadel has a detailed description on the Rist system. See op.cit., particularly the first issue.

12. Ibid, p.7.

13. "Gulti" in Tigrigna and "Gult" in Amharic languages.

14. Huntingford, op.cit., p.12. For more discussion on the relationship between the nobility and the state, see Pankhurst, State and Land, op.cit.

15. Huntingford, op.cit., p.12.

16. Stephen H. Longrigg, A Short History of Eritrea, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1945.

17. Johannes Kolmodin, Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega, Textes Tigrigna, Rome, 1912.

18. Haggai Erlich, Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875-1897, East Lansing, the African Studies Center, Michigan University and the Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel-Aviv University, 1982, pp.83-84.

19. My information has been collected from the following studies: A. Paul, "Notes on the Beni Amer" Sudan Notes and Records, 31 part 2 (December 1950):223-245; P. Paul, "Some Aspects of the Fung Sultanate: Sudan Notes and Records, 35 (December 1954):17-28; A. Paul, The History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan, London, Cambridge University Press, 1954; J. Spencer Trimingham, Islam in the Sudan, New York, Barnes and Nobles, 1949; J. Spencer Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, London, Oxford University Press, 1952; S.F. Nadel Races and Tribes of Eritrea, Asmara, British Military Administration, 1943; S.F. Nadel "Notes on the Beni Amer Society" Sudan Notes and Records, 26, no.1

(1954):51-93. Nadel's study has been particularly informative.

20. Nadel, *Ibid*, p.55.

21. *Ibid*, p.57.

22. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, *op.cit.*, p.158.

23. Paul and Nadel stress this point. Particularly the latter provides a comparative analysis between the conditions of the Tigre subject and the domestic slaves in the Beni Amer households. See Nadel "Notes on the Beni Amer Society" *op.cit.*, pp.73-74.

24. *Ibid*, p.82.

25. In Tigre it reads "La Himman min ata'al hewisto". Both the English and Tigre quotations in Paul The History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan, *op.cit.* p.80.

26. Nadel "Notes on the Beni Amer Society" *op.cit.*, pp.84-85. Though the author refers to Tigre as serfs, he also calls the Beni Amer/Tigre relations as "pseudo-feudal", p.73. It seems the author is using the term, serf, as a descriptive rather than analytical category.

27. For detailed description on the traditional political system, see *ibid*, pp.58-65.

28. *Ibid*, p.59.

29. *Ibid*, p.59.

30. *Ibid*, p.62.

31. Richard K. Pankhurst, The Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from Early Times to 1800, London, Lallibela House, 1961, and his Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935, Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie I University Press, 1968.

32. Quoted in J. Spencer Trimingham, The Christian Church and Missions in Ethiopia, London, World Dominion Press, 1950, p..27. He should have included the foreign merchant at the coast, who was also among the early pioneers to pave the road for colonization.

33. There is a discussion on missionaries and politics in Ethiopian history in Donald Crummey, Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830-1868, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972. A brief commentary on the influence of European missionaries is also found in Trimmingham, The Christian Church and Missions in Ethiopia, op.cit.

34. Quoted in Thomas E. Martson, Britain Imperial Role in the Red Sea Area, 1800-1878, Connecticut, The Shoe String Press, 1961, p.118.

35. For Antonelli's political activities see Zewde Gebre-Selassie, Yohannes IV of Ethiopia, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975. The book contains several references to Antonelli. For a brief biographical note see p.272.

36. Kolmodin, op.cit., p.257-259.

37. A. Ramm, "Great Britain and the Planting of an Italian Power in the Red Sea 1868-1885" English Historical Reviews, 59(May 1944):211-236. Also see William L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902, vol.1, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1935, particularly pages 101-144 and 259-301.

38. Erlich, op.cit., p.116.

39. For economic and social crises caused by the famine see Richard K. Pankhurst, The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892, a New Assessment, Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie I University, 1964.

40. Kolmodin, op.cit., p.254-256.

41. Longrigg, op.cit., pp.115-116 and Erlich, p.85. Anticolonial resistance was confined mainly to the highlands - Tekeste Negash, "Resistance and Collaboration, 1882-1914" in Tekeste Negash, No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940, Uppsala, University of Uppsala, 1986, pp.37-54.

42. Edward Herslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, vol.2, London, Frank Cass, 1967.

43. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.10-11.

44. Italian and British administration is discussed in Trevaskis *ibid*, chapter two. See also Longrigg, *op.cit.*, pp.132-136 and his appendix A. p.176.
45. FPCI vol.I, p.24.
46. *Ibid*, p.28.
47. *Ibid*.
48. Nadel, "Land Tenure in the Eritrean Plateau", *op.cit.*, p.6 and p.20.
49. District chief as a modern salaried civil servant see Trevaskis papers *op.cit.* The following contains discussions on the introduction of chieftainship in colonial Eritrea: Box I, Item 1, The Hamasien: A Social Survey ; Item 2, The Tribes and Peoples of Northern Eritrea: A Survey of Keren; Item 4, Notes on Guidance of the District Officer; Item 5, The Former Italian Colony of Eritrea.
50. G.K.N. Trevaskis, "Eritrean Land: An Urgent Problem", New Times and Ethiopian News (June 7, 1952):4.
51. Trevaskis papers Box I, Item 5, *op.cit.*, pp.91-92.
52. FPCI vol.I, p.24.
53. My information on administrative reforms in the lowland region is culled from Nadel, "Notes on Beni Amer", *op.cit.* and Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, *op.cit.* The latter contains a lengthy discussion on the series of British administrative reforms in the lowland areas.
54. FPCI App.18, p.1.
55. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition *op.cit.* p.31.
56. Reading Derrick's essay has been greatly helpful in my description of the basic characteristics of the native bureaucrat under colonialism per se. See Jonathan Derrick "The Native Clerk in Colonial West Africa" African Affairs 82, No.326 (January 1983):61-74.
57. A. Malvezzi de Medici, "Native Education in the Italian Colonies", Educational Yearbook of

International Institute of Teachers College, I.L. Kandel (ed.), New York, Columbia University, 1931, pp.654-655.

58. Quoted in Roland R. DeMarco, The Italianization of African Natives: Government Native Education in the Italian Colonies 1890-1937, New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1943, p.54. For more information on Italian colonial education in Eritrea read Richard Pankhurst "The Text-books of Italian Colonial Africa" Ethiopia Observer 2, No.4 (1968):327-332.

59. According to Festa, junior high school would be subversive to the colonial cause for it would raise native expectations. See Andrea Festa "Le Istituzioni Educative in Eritrea" Atti Del Secondo Congresso Di Studi Coloniali, (Napoli, Ottobre 1934) Firenze, Centro Di Studi Coloniali, 1935, p.293.

60. Quoted in Trevaskis Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., p.33.

61. See Pankhurst "The Text-books of Italian Colonial Africa", op.cit.

62. Ibid, p.332. In the 1930's non-Italian missionary schools were closed and/or denied entry visas. See Trimmingham, The Christian Church and Missions in Ethiopia, op.cit. p.30.

63. Quoted in Richard K. Pankhurst, "Economic Verdict on the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia, 1936-1941" Ethiopia Observer 14, No.1 (1971):81-82.

## CHAPTER 3

ECONOMIC REORGANIZATIONTHEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

In the Eritrean nationalist literature, the colonial impact on Eritrea is highly exaggerated. Referring to the colonial history in Eritrea, a nationalist publication, for example, argues that,

"The entire economic transformation of Eritrea was brought about by the labor and sweat of the Eritrean people. This led to the development of capitalist relations of production and the emergence and growth, from the ranks of the herdsmen and peasants, of the modern Eritrean working class"<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Rural transformation and the growth of an industrial working class are overstated. Land expropriation for colonial settlement, urbanization, the establishment of transportation and communication facilities and industries are often mentioned as measurements for what is presumed to be the "capitalist transformation"<sup>2</sup> or the "deep super-structural and structural transformation"<sup>3</sup> in Eritrea. Analytical and empirical reading of colonial history reveals the contrary. The destruction of the traditional political structure was indeed accompanied by a reor-

ganization of the Eritrean pre-colonial economy. Sixty years of colonial rule had systematically effected the domination of Eritrean economy by metropolitan capital. Capitalist relations of production, it will be argued, had hardly made any substantial inroads. Instead, what was produced was a "peasant mode of production" which, in the forties, formed the socio-economic basis of the Eritrean domestic politics. A brief analytical clarification is, here, in order.

Dependency and world system theories equate capitalist mode of production with trade, exchange.<sup>4</sup> The participation of a pre-capitalist economy in the international market does not necessarily mean the development of capitalism. Trade is a pre-condition. In and by itself, without a radical change in the sphere of production, it is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of capitalism,

"Both money and commodities are elementary preconditions of capital, but they develop into capital only under certain circumstances. Capital cannot come into being except on the foundation of the circulation of commodities (including money), i.e., where trade has already grown to a certain given degree. For their part, however, the production and circulation of commodities do not at all imply the existence of the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary... they may be found even in 'pre-bourgeois modes of production'... The transformation of money, itself only a different

form of the commodity, into capital occurs only when a worker's labour-power has been converted into a commodity for him. This implies that the category of trade has been extended to embrace a sphere from which it had previously been excluded or into which it had made only sporadic inroads. In other words the working population must have ceased either to be part of the objective condition of labour, or to enter the market place as the producer of commodities; instead of selling the products of its labour it must sell that labour itself, or more accurately, its labour-power. Only then can it be said that production has become the production of commodities through its entire length and breadth."<sup>5</sup> (emphasis added)

The advent of capitalism, therefore, though it presupposes a certain level of development in trade, is contingent upon the separation of the laborer from the means of production and the existence of the "free" wage labor.

#### PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY

The region now known as Eritrea had essentially constituted what may be termed as natural economy, where neither labor nor the products of labor are commodities. Natural economy,

"... is not, strictly speaking an historical observation but a useful abstraction from which to start our analysis. By the category of natural economy we mean social formations in which the production of use-values is dominant. This is not to deny the wide spread existence of exchange relations... Nor is it to deny the existence of... determinate class relations... By using the term natural economy we are

simply drawing a historical base-line, as it were, between the period of penetration of modern capital and the social conditions prevailing before the process of penetration."<sup>6</sup>

Natural economy is by nature opposed to economies of expanded reproduction and to commodity economies.<sup>7</sup> Its process of destruction is completed when land and finally labor-power itself become commodities.

In pre-colonial Eritrea, land and labor-power were not commodities. Trade as the acquisition of goods for their exchange-value -- distinct from their acquisition for their use-value -- had existed. Through the ports of Eritrea, slaves, gold, ivory, hides and skins, wax, etc., were exchanged for luxury goods such as silk, blue and red cotton, glass wares, bottles and needles, etc.<sup>8</sup> Its transformative impact was hardly significant. Local trade mainly had the characteristic of "immediate exchange" -- rural producers exchanged their own products for goods intended for their own use.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of the operation was not to realize a market profit. The dominant form of transaction was barter. A variety of articles such as salt, gold, iron, etc., were used as medium of exchange.<sup>10</sup> None of them had assumed the "general purpose of money".<sup>11</sup> Foreign money such as Indian rupees, Egyptian coins and, particularly, Maria Theresa thalers, were also in circulation. Their circulation, however, was

largely limited even in late 19th Century.<sup>12</sup> Important instruments and centers of exchange -- such as money, transport and communications, shops, and markets were highly marginal.<sup>13</sup> Urban centers were least developed,

"Traditional chief locus of Abyssinia 'Ketema' (town) was the 'Ghebi' (palace) and not the 'Gebeya' (market)."<sup>14</sup>

Towns were politico-military centers rather than the seat of commerce and industry. Where there were trading centers, they were little more than villages. In 1830 the population of Asmara, the modern capital city of Eritrea, was estimated at 150 persons.<sup>15</sup> Massawa, the traditional center of import and export transactions, had, in the early 19th Century, an estimated population of only 1,500 to 2,000.<sup>16</sup> Between 1850's and 1870's, it was no more than 5,000.<sup>17</sup> Handicraft, as an independent activity, had existed, but was confined mainly to the courts and religious center.<sup>18</sup> The French explorers, Ferret and Galliner, describing mid-1840's Abyssinian region, note,

"Each man makes his own cloth and furniture, each family constructs its own house, grinds its own mill, kills its own cattle and sheep, produces its own bread, oil, butter, wax and articles of consumption."<sup>19</sup>

The British Counselor, Wylde, also paints a similar picture of late 19th Century Abyssinian social conditions,

"Nearly everything in the shape of household wants is furnished by the households themselves. There are no

manufactureries in the country, no particular trades. The spinning for the ordinary clothes worn is done at home. Every householder is his own baker, butcher, tailor, brewer... They all do a little carpentering and building, and trades are nearly unknown. The carpenters keep no shops or ready-made goods. All change and interchange of produce is done in the markets, which are the great meeting places. There petty pedlars come and travel about the country with their packs and stock-in-trade consisting of pins and needles, cotton, and Birmingham goods. The cloth merchants have their houses but no shops. Their trade is what might be called a private one as their houses are enclosed with high walls but not shops."<sup>20</sup>

Production of use-value was the typical phenomenon. Money relations remained, at best, marginal and as Marx would say "never took over the whole of labour".<sup>21</sup>

#### LAND ALIENATION

In the colonial history of Eritrea, a large scale land expropriation and a simultaneous development of permanent centers of labor demand could have completed the destruction of the natural economy. This was hardly the case. Colonialism disrupted the reproduction cycle of the natural economy in Eritrea but scarcely completed its destruction.

The confusion over the breakup of pre-capitalist relations in Eritrea partially stems from the failure to make a distinction between the theoretical and actual

practice of colonialism. The law of July 1890 had declared the absolute right of the Italian government to dispose of Eritrean land and reserve it for colonial settlement.<sup>22</sup> In practice, Italian colonial settlement program never materialized. Various experiments in colonial settlement were carried out in the highlands, in Asmara (Hamasi area), Godofelassie near Adi Ugri (Serai area) and at Gura and Keren.<sup>23</sup> The holdings ranged from 35 to 50 acres.<sup>24</sup> The experiments were a total failure. The "Risti" system of local land tenure was a formidable force. The resentment of the cultivators towards the Italian policy of land alienation was symbolized by the popular rebellion led by Bahta Hagos in 1895 in Akele Guzai.<sup>25</sup> The rebellion was soon followed by the battle of Adwa in 1896 in which the Italian army experienced a humiliating defeat at the hands of Ethiopia. The battle of Adwa sealed the fate of Crispi, the ardent advocate of colonial settlement. Ever since, the policy was practically abandoned.<sup>26</sup>

The Italian law, embodied in the "Ordinamento Fondiario", revised in 1926, essentially recognized the native customary laws governing land ownership.<sup>27</sup> Specific areas were converted into "terre demaniale", crown land.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, village lands were alienated for colonial projects such as railways, fortifications, air

TABLE 3.1

Agricultural Farms and Concessions  
Run by Italians in 1932

<u>Types of Property</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>No. Holders</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Private	Highlands	114	8,457
	Eastern Slopes	14	3,035
	Eastern/Western Lowlands	14	165
Concession	Highlands	8	3,020
	Eastern Slopes	5	272
	Lowlands	7	886
Agricultural Center at Tessene		<u>1</u>	<u>7,407</u>
TOTAL		163	23,242

Source: Annuario Delle Colonie Italiane, 1934, p.34.

fields and forestry. The lands of rebellious chiefs were expropriated. In the lowlands, tribal land was declared state property. This included all lands below 350 meters altitude in the Eastern lowlands and below 850 meters in the Western lowlands.<sup>29</sup> Such measures, although theoretically impressive, scarcely entailed the wholesale eviction of the nomads who continued to exercise their traditional usufruct rights for grazing. The number of the colonists

was few. In 1931 of the total European population, mainly Italians, those engaged in farming constituted only 2%.<sup>30</sup> The majority were in the service sector, i.e., administration, army, commerce and transport.<sup>31</sup> Until 1935, the total European population hardly reached 5,000.<sup>32</sup> According to Table 3.1, in 1932 the total number of acres owned by Italians under different titles approximated 23,242. Even though the Italian population had increased since 1935, most of them were colonial soldiers/laborers. According to Pankhurst, out of 63,378 Italians in the region in 1936, 68% were employed in the various government projects.<sup>33</sup> In 1947, according to the FPCI Report, the number of total European land holders was 538, mostly Italians.<sup>34</sup> Together, they held 12% of the total cultivated land in Eritrea.<sup>35</sup> The same FPCI report shows that approximately 87% of cultivated land continued to be held under customary laws. In practice land alienation in Eritrea was hardly a significant phenomenon in terms of the creation of landless peasants who would have been forced to earn a living only by selling their labor-power. Indigenous landlessness was scarcely a generalized phenomenon.<sup>36</sup>

### WAGE LABOR

The existence of a permanent "free" laborer was equally atypical. Settlement migration is the only form in which ties to the land are permanently broken. The labor force of pre-1940 was essentially seasonal and temporary. It was conspicuous in the construction of the railways, public buildings, land reclamation projects in the lowlands, the cotton plantation in Tessene, the collection of Eritrean wild produce, dum nuts (a concession flanking the Barka River in the lowlands), road construction and the colonial army. These colonial projects had admittedly absorbed thousands of Eritrean laborers. According to the FPCI report, during harvests, concession farms such as the Tessene plantation in 1933 had employed 10,000 Eritreans including their families, and 25,000 in 1940.<sup>37</sup> In 1937, road construction had absorbed 43,720 natives.<sup>38</sup> During Italy's preparation to invade Ethiopia, 65,000 Eritreans were mobilized to serve in the army and road construction.<sup>39</sup> Such projects, however, did not contribute to the emergence of a stabilized Eritrean working class. By nature, the projects were not "a life-situation" for the rural producers.

The absence of large scale land alienation and permanent centers of labor demand necessarily meant the

movement of individuals into and out of wage-labor. This significantly impeded the crystallization of a stable working class. The rural producer in Eritrea was, rather, a permanent peasant<sup>40</sup> and a temporary worker. After the Italian defeat and the subsequent collapse of the "war economy", many ex-soldiers and laborers had to return to their villages. The traditional principle of "Risti" continued to assure access to the land during acute economic crisis and old age.

Fifty years of Italian rule was marked by the absence of any significant industries which could have served as a pull-factor -- sucking labor permanently from the rural areas. A confidential official report reveals the colonial policy. In reply to an Italian who wanted to start a tannery, the report stated,

"As you are well aware, it is contrary to the policy of the Italian government to encourage industries in Eritrea."<sup>41</sup>

Hence

"...it came about that if you happened to be a normal Italian colonist, you did not farm, you did not attempt to produce; you worked in a garage or an engineering shop or one of a hundred minor business that catered for army needs, and you imported your fruit, your vegetables, your tinned milk and your every necessary of life from Italy."<sup>42</sup>

The Italian population which had increased since 1935 was almost entirely parasitic, depending on direct state

Table 3.2  
Industrial Activities (1939)

<u>Industrial Firms</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Invested Capital (Lira)</u>
Construction	383	500,000,000
Motor-transport	846	1,518,500,000
Mechanical engineering	227	15,000,000
Beer, ice, malt	25	6,000,000
Chemicals	18	4,100,000
Mills	269	30,000,000
Building materials	241	53,000,000
Timber and furniture	96	3,000,000
Theatre	51	40,500,000
Printing	13	8,000,000
Tanning	7	1,000,000
Textiles	3	3,000,000
Electricity	19	16,000,000
TOTAL	2,198	2,198,100,000

Source: Italy. Memorandum on the Economic and Financial Situation of the Italian Territories in Africa, Rome, Tipografia Del Senato Del Dott. G. Bardi, July, 1946, p.51.

employment on work related to military operations. Major Italian industrial activities which emerged mainly in the 1930's were essentially war-oriented, ancillary to road construction. Such activities absorbed the Italian laborers. The Eritrean was essentially an auxiliary and a source of cheap labor. The less significant Italian enterprises were largely service oriented such as hotels and restaurants or small individual enterprises such as tailor shops and shoemakers.<sup>43</sup>

During the early period of British administration (1943-1945), in the absence of international competition (due to the war in Europe), and taking advantage of the industrial equipment left behind by fascist Italy, a variety of import substituting manufacturing industries producing beer, glass wares, matches, buttons, leather shoes and boots, soap, etc., had been established.<sup>44</sup> According to the report of the European dominated Eritrean Chamber of Commerce, there were 1,610 business enterprises in 1944-45, employing 26,954 Eritreans and 5,609 Italians.<sup>45</sup> The enterprises were financed by Italian settlers' capital. Mainly local raw materials were used. Production was essentially on a small scale. The enterprises were short-lived. The British administration was "running an economy in a tea cup".<sup>46</sup>

With the cessation of World War II and the subsequent resumption of international trade, many industries had to close down. According to the FPCI report, the number of principal industries by 1947 was reduced to a bare 116 employing only 3,538 Eritreans and 509 Italians.<sup>47</sup> Since 1935 there had been a marked increase in the native urban population. By 1950, for example, it had reached about 200,000, one fifth of the total Eritrean population.<sup>48</sup> The urban labor force, nevertheless, was essentially unskilled and largely confined to the service

TABLE 3.3  
Adult Male Occupation in Asmara 1947

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>
Taxi drivers	8
Shopkeepers and traders	1,748
Artisans	253
Goldsmiths	44
Beershops	168
Liquor licenses	171
Buggy owners and buggy drivers	140
Hawkers, shoeblacks, etc.	86
Public scribes	13
Bicycle and car repairers	19
Public baths	1
Cartage contractors	123
Commission agents	7
B.M.A.* - clerks and messengers	2,439
Municipality clerks and messengers	30
Police, prisoners, municipal and commissariato guards, etc.	1,163
B.M.A.* labourers	514
Municipal labourers	121
Army labourers	600
Town cleansing - causal labourers	300
Menial employees in shops and business	4,200
Industrial and agricultural employees	3,900
Domestic servants	4,950
Unemployed	<u>6,062</u>
TOTAL	27,060

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation,  
Report on Eritrea, New York, United Nations, 1948,  
App. 6. (\* British Military Administration)

sector, i.e., domestic service in Italian households,  
menial jobs in small shops, restaurants, hotels, and in the

state administration as cleaners, porters and daily laborers. A national statistical figure for employment in the service sector is not available. A glance at the survey of adult male occupations in the capital city, in 1947 (see Table 3.3), clearly indicates its pervasiveness.<sup>49</sup> Many continued to retain their traditional rights to lands. The process of proletarianization was highly circumscribed.

#### MERCHANT CAPITAL

Eritrea was never a settler colony. Metropolitan capital had treated the region as a trading center and an entrepot. The Eritrean towns were merely distributing and collecting centers for the colony's import/export trade.

Its small size, its relative poverty and its strategic geographical position located between the Sudan in the north, Ethiopia in the south, and South Arabia in the east across the Red Sea, had reduced Eritrea to a "mangad", crossroads.<sup>50</sup> Raw materials from the surrounding regions were imported into Eritrea where, together with Eritrean local produce, they were assembled, packed, and exported through the Eritrean ports. In the opposite direction, a significant portion of the colony's imports of manufactured European goods were destined for reexport to the surrounding regions. In 1939, a variety of firms were

TABLE 3.4  
Commercial Activities - 1939

<u>Firms</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Invested Capital</u> <u>In Lira</u>
Import/export	384	95,000,000
Commission agencies	282	70,695,000
Food	207	33,035,000
Chemical and medicine	223	26,900,000
Machines, iron tools, building materials	606	102,030,000
Textiles, leather, hides skins and shoes	967	122,245,000
Sundry	<u>61</u>	<u>36,475,000</u>
TOTAL	2,690	486,380,000

Source: Italy. Memorandum on the Economic and Financial Situation of the Italian Territories in Africa, Rome, Tipografia Del Senato Del Dott. G. Bardi, July 1946, p.51.

engaged in commercial activities with a total capital of 486,380,000 lira.<sup>51</sup> They were least involved in the production process. Reflective of the low level of indigenous technical development, the exportable produce was moderate. Given the logic of commercial capital, however, what was most important was to buy cheaply.

According to Table 3.5, combined import and export transactions for 1923 amounted to 122,383 tons. By 1933, there was an increase of over 100%. A glance at the value of maritime imports and exports reveals a typical colonial

**TABLE 3.5**  
**Import/Export in Tonnage**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Imports</u>	<u>Exports</u>	<u>Total</u>
1923 <sup>a</sup>	33,141	89,242	122,383
1924 <sup>a</sup>	41,657	92,985	134,642
1925 <sup>a</sup>	61,556	92,778	154,334
1926 <sup>a</sup>	69,723	83,789	153,512
1927 <sup>a</sup>	85,960	87,898	173,858
1928 <sup>a</sup>	81,651	85,502	167,153
1929 <sup>b</sup>	88,921	92,059	180,980
1930 <sup>b</sup>	67,543	135,678	203,221
1931 <sup>b</sup>	71,201	80,171	151,372
1932 <sup>b</sup>	56,211	144,723	200,934
1933 <sup>b</sup>	<u>69,052</u>	<u>190,189</u>	<u>259,241</u>
TOTAL	726,624	1,177,189	1,903,813

Source: Compiled from Annuario delle Colonie Italiane 1926, p.304, 1927, p.381, 1928, p.462, 1929, p.528, 1930, p.569, 1931, p.526, 1932, p.506, 1933, p.565, 1934, p.631, 1935, p.657.

(a) Import/export through Massawa port only.

(b) Import/export through Massawa and Assab ports.

trade of unequal exchange. The invariable excess of imports over exports clearly underlines the division of labor beneficial to the metropolitan economy.

Major pre-colonial exports were replaced by new ones. In pre-colonial times, the principal exports through Massawa had been slaves, ivory, civet and butter.<sup>52</sup> Exports such as hides and skins, or mother-of-pearl, had occupied an insignificant position. According to reports of various travellers, hides and skins, for example,

TABLE 3.6  
Value of Maritime Import/Export Trade  
(in thousands of Lira)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Imports</u>	<u>Exports</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Excess-Imports Over Exports</u>
1923	106,294	40,395	146,689	65,899
1924	146,129	87,902	234,031	58,227
1925	203,453	119,463	322,916	83,990
1926	171,790	97,852	269,642	73,938
1927	201,536	81,566	283,102	119,970
1928	195,627	93,717	289,344	101,910
1929	207,504	72,499	280,003	135,005
1930	176,815	76,279	253,094	100,536
1931	186,825	69,063	255,888	117,762
1932	173,035	59,194	232,229	113,841

Source: Compiled from Annuario Statistico Italiano,  
1928, p.379, 1931, p.574, 1933, p.448.

accounted for only 1 to 4% of the total exports.<sup>53</sup> After 1890, the picture began to change drastically. Pre-colonial major export commodities disappeared. By 1904, for example, hides and skins alone accounted for 44% of the total export.<sup>54</sup> In 1915 nearly half of the aggregate value of export was attributed to hides and skins.<sup>55</sup> Other new products, hitherto of noncommercial significance appeared on the scene - coffee, dum nuts, and "trocus" shell. For 1925 to 1932 the principal exports constituted 72% of the total. Among the principal exports, dum nuts,

TABLE 3.7  
Principal Exports  
(In thousands of lira)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Hides &amp; Skins</u>	<u>Dum Nuts</u>	<u>Raw Mother- of-Pearl</u>	<u>'Trocus" Shell</u>	<u>Coffee</u>	<u>'Sale Marino'</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1925	20,961	6,450	4,259	5,542	31,313	3,914	72,436
1926	21,396	7,527	3,622	5,437	23,469	3,703	65,153
1927	25,371	3,914	2,663	2,043	23,876	4,844	62,707
1928	25,647	2,343	3,766	4,415	23,870	4,127	64,168
1929	16,524	4,360	5,552	2,883	24,634	4,556	58,504
1930	14,274	3,471	2,661	2,303	25,350	7,288	55,344
1931	7,637	4,924	2,293	2,137	31,756	3,958	52,703
1932	5,513	1,073	1,037	2,203	31,032	7,415	48,273

Source: Compiled from Annuario Statistico Italiano, 1930, p.519,  
1932, p.570, 1935, p.295.

mother-of-pearl, "trocus" shell, and salt were exclusively Eritrean, while hides and skins and coffee came from Eritrea and the surrounding regions. Imports were composed of a variety of European manufactured goods such as textiles, sugar, iron, kerosene, etc.

As a single commodity, textiles (cotton fabrics and cotton yarns) was the largest import. In 1932, for example, it constituted approximately 45% of the total value of imports. The annual average for 1925 to 1932 was never less than 35%. Cotton fabrics, which formed the clothing universally worn by the indigenous, accounted, on the average, for approximately 82% of the total textiles imported. For the metropolitan economy Eritrea had significance as a trading center and an entrepot.

TABLE 3.8  
Textile Imports  
(in thousands of lira)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Value</u>
1925	63,696
1926	66,963
1927	67,526
1928	63,125
1929	68,384
1930	57,868
1931	59,938
1932	77,585

Source: Compiled from Annuario Statistico Italiano, 1930, p.519, 1932, p.570, 1935, p.295.

Regional commerce was highly significant. According to Perret's calculation, a combined import and export regional commerce (i.e., caravan and maritime) in 1925, for example, accounted for 46.5% of the total global commerce of the colony.<sup>56</sup> Ethiopia was the principal trading partner of the colony. There are no figures to calculate how much of the total value of Eritrea's maritime export was represented by Ethiopian origin. Maritime exports, regardless of their origins, had an Eritrean label.<sup>57</sup> Analysis of the colony's reexports by caravan reveals the significance of regional trade. Textiles constituted the largest reexported item. In 1925 it amounted to 57% of the total value of the colony's

TABLE 3.9  
VALUE OF IMPORT/EXPORT BY CARAVAN 1923-32  
(in thousands of lira)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>IMPORTS</u>	<u>EXPORTS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>EXCESS</u> Imports over <u>EXPORTS</u>
1923	37,964	29,472	67,436	8,492
1924	54,252	34,942	89,194	19,310
1925	75,454	44,211	119,665	31,424
1926	64,782	37,911	102,692	26,871
1927	58,413	36,635	95,049	21,778
1928	77,547	50,300	127,847	27,247
1929	44,054	32,411	76,466	11,643
1930	24,827	18,423	43,250	6,403
1931	20,930	16,079	37,009	4,851
1932	17,920	14,512	32,431	3,408

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation, Report on Eritrea, New York, United Nations, 1948, App.62.

textile imports. For 1928 it was 63%. The annual average for 1925 to 1928 was approximately 53%. In the overall metropolitan commercial activities in Eritrea and the surrounding regions, Italy enjoyed a trade monopoly.

TABLE 3.10  
Textile Export by Caravan  
(in thousands of lira)

<u>1925</u>	<u>1926</u>	<u>1927</u>	<u>1928</u>
36,225	30,476	29,391	39,916

Source: Compiled from Annuario Statistico Italiano, 1927, p.352, 1928, p.380, 1929, p.458.

In 19th Century, Massawa traded with Egypt, Arabia, India, and Europe. Until the late 19th Century, trade in Massawa was in the hands of Indians supported by merchant houses in Aden and Bombay. Munzinger, according to Pankhurst, estimated that in the mid-19th Century Indian traders, located in Massawa, handled 6/7ths of the imports of the interior.<sup>58</sup> In 1886 there were 70 to 80 Indians, the principal exporters nearly monopolizing banking and credit.<sup>59</sup> 1890, the occupation of Eritrea, marked the steady rise of Italian trade monopoly in the region. In 1891, for example, there were 13 Italian traders in Massawa as against 8 Indians.<sup>60</sup> In 1898, out of 3,764 vessels entering Massawa, 68% were Italian.<sup>61</sup> Out of 3,758 vessels cleared, 69% were Italian.<sup>62</sup> Table 3.11 clearly

TABLE 3.11  
Italy's Trade Monopoly  
(in thousands of lira)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Imports</u>	<u>From Italy</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Total Exports</u>	<u>To Italy</u>	<u>%</u>
1923	106,294	69,022	65	40,394	19,053	47
1924	146,129	81,992	56	87,901	51,101	58
1925	203,453	133,172	65	119,462	81,005	68
1926	171,789	102,052	59	97,852	66,109	68
1927	201,536	113,762	56	81,566	54,322	67
1928	195,627	104,311	53	93,712	61,342	65
1929	207,503	122,556	59	72,499	44,048	61
1930	176,814	89,731	51	76,279	42,693	56
1931	186,825	86,720	46	69,063	46,755	68
1932	173,035	98,786	57	59,194	40,331	68
1933	176,566	96,475	55	62,490	42,306	68
1934	215,817	125,219	58	73,092	53,109	73

Sources: Compiled from Annuario Statistico Italiano,  
1927, p.351, 1928, p.379, 1930, p.518,  
1931, p.574, 1932, p.569, 1933, p.448, 1934,  
p.249, 1935, p.295.

shows Italy's trade monopoly. The establishment of the colonial state was decisive. Italian goods were exempted from taxes.<sup>63</sup> Colonial exportable products were selectively given preferential treatment. To attract caravan trade, no custom duties were imposed on Eritrean/Ethiopian frontier. Free warehouses were established in Massawa to attract trade traffic from the Arabian coast. The nature of the colonial economy primarily oriented to serve the metropolitan interests was a serious structural impediment to any meaningful internal capital accumulation.

#### THE PREDICAMENT OF INDIGENOUS BUSINESS

Despite the unfavorable social and political circumstances that had surrounded pre-colonial trade -- i.e., the lack of peace due to the frequent struggles among the regional warlords for political supremacy; external wars; the absence of modern transport and communication facilities (the great accelerators of trade); and the incessant drive of the Abyssinian state to control the trade traffic -- successful and wealthy indigenous merchants had begun to emerge in the region. Pre-1890 travellers invariably spoke highly of their success and ingenuity. Referring to 19th Century reports on the Abyssinian region, Pankhurst informs us that,

"Commercial consciousness was... well developed among many traders. Ruppell encountered several cases where precious

metals or flour were adulterated, while Plowden observed that merchants were 'spirited and enterprising' and inquired eagerly for novelties."<sup>64</sup>

Caravan trade was their main activity. The trade on imported European commodities was particularly lucrative. Traders took advantage of price differential between the coast and the interior markets,

"At Massawa the trader could only hope for 15 percent profit, but in Shoa (south of Eritrea - M.A.) as much as 200 percent could be obtained."<sup>65</sup>

According to travellers' reports, two dozen bottles (used of drinking or storing liquids) could be obtained for only a dollar in France. Eight or nine bottles were sold for that amount in Massawa. Three to four were sold for the same price in Gondar (southwest of Massawa).<sup>66</sup> The powerful traders stationed in Massawa were non-indigenous. Nevertheless, the indigenous traders had a monopolistic influence over the markets in the interior. The establishment of the colonial state marked a radical departure in the history of indigenous business.

Colonial economy had not done away with indigenous business. The latter was, rather, more deeply involved in the colonial trading network. Its role as a link between the native economy and international capitalism became increasingly prominent. What was radical was the decline of its economic influence. Economic and political in-

equalities highly circumscribed its activity. The establishment of the colonial state and the subsequent opening up of colonial trading centers in the interior, the introduction of a railway network linking Massawa, Asmara, Keren and Agordat; the construction of roads linking practically all the major parts of Eritrea; and the occupation of Ethiopia since 1935 - had significant ramifications. For the foreign merchants, who had hitherto been confined to the coast, it meant easy access to the interior markets. For the indigenous trader it spelled the shrinkage of his traditional market and in some cases even a loss.

Large foreign import and export trading companies such as "Societa Anonima d'Exportazione", "Societa Palma Dum", "Societa Italiana per le Saline Eritrea", "Compagnia Commerciale per l'Africa Orientale" and "Societa Imprese Africane", etc.,<sup>67</sup> were formidable economic forces. Such foreign companies possessed large capital, credit, and market facilities. The colonial state provided them with preferential treatment in the form of monopoly concessions over a variety of local raw materials (e.g., gum nuts, salt, etc.).<sup>68</sup> The state's policy of business licensing was invariably skewed in favor of the foreign trader. Such discriminatory policy was also the rule during the British administration. Under the pretext of lack of capital and skill, the indigenous business often lost in favor of the

foreigner. An official frankly admits the British racist policy,

"When they (Eritreans - M.A.) sought licenses from the administration to run a transport service, start charcoal and firewood business, sell milk or manufacture cheese, preference was usually given to Italians who had more capital and greater technical experience than themselves."<sup>69</sup>

The British policy of quality and price control was no less detrimental to indigenous business whose economic power to compete with foreign business large or small had already been significantly weakened.<sup>70</sup> In the forties the Eritrean trader was conspicuous for his exclusion from import and export enterprises - the exclusive domain of the foreigner.<sup>71</sup> His activities were largely limited to rural commerce and retail trade.<sup>72</sup> In the hierarchical colonial economy, he invariably found himself at the bottom, outdistanced by the Italian, the Arab, the Jew, the Greek and the Indian. Lucrative business sectors were in-variably dominated by foreigners. He was condemned to small-scale operations. In the late 1940's, according to the chief administrator, Brigadier General Drew, there was only one Eritrean trading company at the national level.<sup>73</sup> As a rule, the highest position a trader could realistically aspire to was becoming a regional wholesale distributor, e.g., Ahmed Chechia for Massawa, Negash Sefah for Ghinda, and Hassan Alawi El Safi for Dancalis.<sup>74</sup>

According to Table 3.12, the representation of indigenous business in the Eritrean Chamber of Commerce, in the late forties, was no more than two percent. This is indicative of its weak economic base and low status in its own homeland.

The process of free development of an indigenous commercial farmer was, similarly, highly limited. Significant indigenous commercial farmers hardly emerged. Sixty years of colonial rule had barely disturbed the traditional land tenure system at the local level. The principle of "Risti" system in the highlands continued to

TABLE 3.12  
The Eritrean Chamber of Commerce (1947)

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>No. of Members</u>
Italians	386
British	8
American	1
French	1
Armenians	2
Egyptians	2
Lybians	1
Greeks	18
Indians	18
Jews	21
Eritreans	11
Arabs	34
Sudanese	<u>12</u>
TOTAL	515

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation, Report on Eritrea, New York, United Nations, 1948, App.114.

discourage the sale of land. The customary laws of inheritance precluded the concept of primogeniture which might have facilitated the concentration of land in the hands of a few individuals. Fragmentation of land was a common rural phenomenon.<sup>75</sup> At the outset, the internal solidity of the traditional local land tenure system severely hampered the process of individuation. The attempt by the Italians to destroy it had long been abandoned for a good political reason. The small size of the land holdings, the lack of capital, modern farming techniques, and access to credit and marketing facilities - in short, the lack of productive capital assets, the exclusive privilege of the foreign farmer, were critical factors.

The Italian "Ordinamento Fondiario" had a provision allowing concession farms to favored indigenous colonial bureaucrats to grow cash crops such as coffee and tobacco, etc., in the areas declared state property, particularly in the eastern slopes. A comparative analysis of concession rights to Eritrean and Italian nationals, however, unambiguously underlines the critical disadvantage for the former.<sup>76</sup> A maximum of 12 acres of land was allowed to individual Eritreans.<sup>77</sup> A variety of conditions were attached. The concessions were to last from 9 to 30

years. In some cases the concessionaire could purchase the land after 5 years. In other cases, concession rights were renewable at the discretion of the government. (The British continued the Italian tradition and introduced new ones - i.e., annual or seasonal permits to raise crops on government land.)<sup>78</sup> The Italian land provisions also contained concession rights to collective bodies (i.e., rural communities) to grow cash crops such as cotton. Some of the communities, essentially the nomads in the lowlands, farmed the land on the basis of a sharecropping system and at the same time they continued their traditional productive activity - livestock raising.<sup>79</sup> Figures regarding the size of village concession farms are not available. It is probable that the size was larger than that allowed to the individual. In 1947 there were 282 Eritreans with concession rights.<sup>80</sup> The figure includes both individuals and village communities. It is therefore hard to calculate how many fall under the category of individual concessions. The total area under concession, however, clearly indicates the insignificance of indigenous commercial farming. It was less than 2% of the total cultivated land in Eritrea.<sup>81</sup>

The Italian land provision favored Italian nationals. For large companies, it allowed concession rights over areas ranging from 494 to 27,700 acres solely

in the eastern and western lowlands.<sup>82</sup> The grant was for 99 years and was renewable. In the eastern slopes, concessions over areas of a maximum of approximately 124 acres were allowed.<sup>83</sup> The concession rights were for 30 years. It could become the property of the concessionaire after 5 years of good husbandry and the fulfillment of government conditions. Non-indigenous lands were invariably productive whether under agriculture or forest crops.<sup>84</sup> The colonial rule was clearly an impediment for internal capital accumulation.

Eritrea had experienced a marked increase in population growth, particularly since the 1930's. In the late forties, the total cultivated land, largely in the highlands, was only 2.6%. In the highlands, there were over 170 persons per 100 acres of cultivated land.<sup>85</sup>

TABLE 3.13  
Population Growth for Selected Years

<u>1893</u>	<u>1911</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1948</u>
191,127	331,431	617,361	1,062,518

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation  
Report on Eritrea, vol.1, New York, United Nations,  
1948, p.5.

TABLE 3.14  
Types of Land, 1947

	<u>Acres</u>	<u>%</u>
Cultivated land	640,000	2.6
Forest and scrub	3,500,000	11.1
Pasture	23,000,000	74.6
Mineral areas	55,000	.6
Wasteland	<u>3,522,000</u>	<u>11.1</u>
TOTAL	30,720,000	100.0

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation, Report on Eritrea, Vol.1, New York, United Nations, 1948, p.37.

Italian colonialism conserved the "risti" principle. In the face of demographic change and the subsequent increasing fragmentation of land, it controlled land distribution in areas declared state property. Trevaskis' comment in his survey of Hamasien appropriately describes the colonial arrest of development,

"...whereas other societies have restored their equilibrium by war or revolution; the Pax Italiana preserved the status quo of the Hamasien and thereby prevented the natural process of evolution."<sup>86</sup>

The irony of the comment by the British official is that it is no less applicable to the British administration. In

the tradition of Italian rule, the British provided lands to Italians. In the early years of the administration, for example, 10,000 acres were given out as landlease in areas declared state property.<sup>87</sup>

The predicament of indigenous business was less a consequence of the "free-play" of the market than the aggressive role of the colonial state. As in the case of the native bureaucrat, indigenous business also had to seek a national political base for its economic emancipation.

#### THE "PEASANT MODE OF PRODUCTION"

The thrust of my arguments, so far, has been an attempt to establish the specific historical conditions established by over half a century of colonial rule. A conceptual recapitulation is necessary in order to attain further clarity.

The peculiar characteristic of metropolitan capital, in its colonial form, is not exploitation per se - a theme constantly rehearsed in the works of Dependency theory. Capitalist mode of production, after all, inherently establishes exploitative social relations. Its history, in its own home land, as Marx would say "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire".<sup>88</sup> The uniqueness of its colonial form, rather, lies in its mode of exploitation.

Metropolitan capital, through its agent of merchant capital, did not engineer the separation of the Eritrean rural producers from their traditional means of production and subsistence. The rise of the modern state, the construction of the railway system, the growth of the market and urbanization had altogether a different historical purpose in Eritrea. They can hardly be seen as the forerunners of modern industry. Rather than the exploitation of "free" wage labor, metropolitan capital was content to feed off a "pre-capitalist" mode of production (henceforth in quotation to underline its changed historical function under changed historical conditions). The rural producers were drawn into the sphere of world commodity production on simply "pre-capitalist" foundations. Traditional local land tenure system and the age-old primitive technology hardly changed. The complete destruction of natural economy was not fully realized. Rural economy in Eritrea was incompletely commercialized. A typical rural condition was not commercial farming but a subsistence peasant (household) economy. A typical Eritrean peasant had one leg in the world of natural economy and another in the world of exchange economy. The Eritrean modern towns were merely commercial rather than industrial centers.

They owed their emergence and continued existence

to forces external to them. This basic phenomenon of alienated Eritrean towns is aptly conveyed by a Swiss author in his description of the capital city,

"Asmara, with its cathedral, town hall, terraces and porticoes, its streets crowded with strollers, its civic pride, simple piety and love of pageantry, is a real Italian town. It gives one the impression that it was built and perfected down to the last detail in Apulia and wafted over the sea to Africa where it came down like a meteorite and landed intact on this particular spot."<sup>89</sup>  
(emphasis added)

Asmara's metropolitan-like appearance was a facade. In many respects, it was a modified reproduction of the rural village. In the native quarters, the shanty town, -- Aba Shawal, Edaga Arbi, Geza Berhanu, Acrai -- economic misery, illiteracy, rudimentary housing, the lack of electricity and modern sanitation, and the pervasiveness of primordial relations in place of modern professional associations, vividly recalled the daily conditions of life in rural village.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of a history of over half a century of increasing participation in the international market, a capitalist mode of production did not emerge within Eritrea. The domestic socio-economic structure, which defined the parameter of the Eritrean "theatre of politics", was what Hyden refers to as a "peasant mode of production".<sup>91</sup> The term is used to describe "transi-

tional societies". Comparative analysis (derived from Hyden's description) reveals its essential features.

Division of labor and technical development are basic to the capitalist mode of production. Labor assumes a social character. That is, production is no longer an individual activity. In the "peasant mode of production", on the contrary, labor essentially remains individual, i.e., household production. Rudimentary division of labor and traditional technology are the norm. The production system, essentially cellular, entails the isolation and separation of the rural producers. Classes arise in a pure form only in the capitalist mode of production. In the "peasant mode of production", there is a conspicuous absence of modern classes proper - bourgeois and proletariat anchored in the production process. Its socio-economic structure is, rather, marked by incipient modern classes whose nature remains to be further clarified. In the capitalist mode of production, the economic imperative is universalized. That is, it is the economic fact that brings together the buyer and seller of labor-power in the market. The capitalist mode of production

"...has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value... and

man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."<sup>92</sup>

In a "peasant mode of production", in contrast, the cellular system of production gives rise to and perpetuates the dominance of the "superstructural" elements, what Hyden refers to as the "economy of affection". The term

"...has nothing to do with fond emotion per se. Rather it denotes a network of support communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community or other affinities, for example, religion. It links together in a systematic fashion a variety of discrete economic and social units which in other regards may be autonomous."<sup>93</sup>

Economic and political relations are easily permeated by "affective ties", i.e., non-economic bonds.

The "peasant mode of production", briefly outlined, is intended, as an analytical tool, to capture, in its pure form, the material basis of the Eritrean society. In reality, the colonial impact must not be underestimated. It had radical aspects.

#### THE DISRUPTION OF THE NATURAL ECONOMY

As early as the late 19th Century, the radical consequences of colonialism seemed to have been prefigured by the prophets from the region,

"The Faranje (the white man - read capitalism, M.A.) and Qunqun (termite, M.A.) are the same. Qunqun is the smallest of insects but it eats up a

large tree, causes it to dry up and fall down."<sup>94</sup>

Batha Hagos, one of the earliest collaborators and later a rebel against colonial rule, similarly, seemed to have foreseen the colonial disaster. His rallying cry was,

"When the white serpent (allusion to the white man - M.A.) has once bitten you, you will search in vain for a remedy against its bite."<sup>95</sup>

Capitalism, in its colonial form, was indeed a termite or a deadly serpent. The tree fell and the bite was fatal. The reproduction cycle of Eritrea's natural economy was irreparably disrupted. It lost its traditional internal coherence and external autonomy permanently.

The Eritrean society had come a long way since the days of natural economy. The growth of the market economy and the rise of the modern state in Europe had a long and protracted historical background. The process in Eritrea was swift and painful. It took only a few decades.

Colonialism introduced private property in land, wage labor, and urban unemployment. Through the import/export mechanism, the national economy was drastically reoriented to serve the metropolitan economy. "Pre-capitalist" relations were maintained to bear the costs of reproduction of the colonial economy. The Eritrean rural economy subsidized a variety of colonial projects, i.e., railway and road constructions, colonial wars, and urban

growth. During the period of war economy in the 1930's when indigenous labor was mobilized for army service and road construction, the women, the old and the children worked on the land.<sup>96</sup> The rural economy bore the costs of urban old age pensions and unemployment insurance. Colonial racial policy did not provide social insurance. Even though the traditional principle of "Risti" in the highlands continued to discourage the sale of land, with increasing commoditization, population growth, and fragmentation of land, society began to evaluate the land in new ways. The intensity of competition for land increased. In the forties, frequent land litigations were common.<sup>97</sup> The capitalist ideology, the "belief in the God of Gain, in happiness through money"<sup>98</sup> had gradually but surely begun to captivate the society at large. New needs were developed whose acquisition demanded participation in the money economy. In his survey of the rural areas peripheral to the capital city, Trevaskis notes,

"...there is no part of Hamasien country which does not lie in the shadow of artificiality and materialism cast by the city of Asmara."<sup>99</sup>

Even in the lowland region, relatively less integrated into the international market, bride price had been monetized.<sup>100</sup>

For many peasants, the disruption of Eritrea's

natural economy was, at one level, a decisive break with the past. They became exposed to new market-based insecurities. Unlike the traditional ones associated with the practices among kin and neighbors,<sup>101</sup> a new phenomenon of peasant indebtedness was emerging. According to Trevaskis,

"There had been extraordinary peasant indebtedness before the occupation (i.e. before British occupation, M.A.); but by 1944, whole villages had mortgaged their crops before they had been sown."<sup>102</sup>

It was in the context of this emerging "new" society, where the modern state was established and the meaning of wealth, success and status markedly took a monetary form, that the Eritrean political drama unfolded in the forties.

Part two will discuss the Eritrean political theater. The part will investigate and explain the underlying class character, the role of ethnic ideology and its material and socio-psychological sources.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, Memorandum op.cit., p.5. For similar analysis see Bereket op.cit. and Jordans dissertation op.cit.
2. Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, Memorandum op.cit. p.5.
3. Jordan's dissertation op.cit., p.110.
4. I am referring to Frank, op.cit. and Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World System, New York, Academic Press, 1974.
5. K. Marx, Capital Vol.1, trans. by Ben Fowkes, New York, Vintage Books, 1977, pp.949-950.
6. Henry Bernstein, "African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework" Journal of Peasant Studies, 6, no.4(July 1979):423.
7. Barbara Bradby, "The Destruction of Natural Economy" Economy and Society, 4, no.2(May 1975):127-161.
8. Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from Early Times to 1800 and The Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935 op.cit. The chapters on trade, money, and urban development are highly relevant.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Combining the three uses of money as a means of exchange, as mode of payment and a standard of value. For a distinction between barter and money see Paul Bohannon, "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy" in Johannetta B. Cole (ed.) Anthropology for the Eighties, New York, The Free Press, 1982, pp.241-264.
12. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit.
13. Ibid.

14. Akalu Wolde Michail, "Some Thoughts on the Process of Urbanization in Pre-Twentieth Century Ethiopia" Ethiopian Geographical Journal 5, no.2(December 1967):35. See also Richard K. Pankhurst, History of Ethiopian Towns from the Middle Ages to the Early Nineteenth Century, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1982.

15. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit. p.693.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Richard Pankhurst "The Old-time Handicrafts of Ethiopia" Ethiopia Observer 8, no.3(1964):221-242.

19. Quoted in *ibid*; p.221.

20. Augustus B. Wylde '83 to '87 in the Soudan, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969, pp.291-292.

21. Marx, Grundrisse op.cit., p.103.

22. Italy. Istituto Agricolo Coloniale, Agricoltura Coloniale no.9-10 (Settembre/Ottobre 1932):416.

23. Ibid. See also Great Britain, Historical Section of the Foreign Office, Eritrea, No. 126, London, His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1920, p.17-18.

24. Ibid. p.17.

25. A discussion on the relationship between the Italian policy of land alienation in Eritrea and the rebellion of Bahta Hagos and the ensuing battle of Adawa is found in Richard K. Pankhurst "Italian Settlement Policy in Eritrea and its Repercussion 1886-1896", Boston University Papers in African History vol.I, Jeffrey Butler (ed.), Boston, Boston University Press, 1964. pp.119-156.

26. The increasing number of Italian arrivals in the 1930's, during fascist Italy's preparation for the Ethiopian invasion, was perceived by the native population in Eritrea as Italy's second attempt at large scale land expropriation for colonial settlement. There was increasing restlessness. It was by official proclamation that the people were pacified. General De Bono had to assure them that there would not be colonial settlement.

The proclamation was issued in Tigrigna and Arabic languages. See Bullettino Ufficiale Del Governo Dell'Eritrea No.14, 31 Luglio, 1935, pp.251-252.

27. See FPCI vol.I, p.37.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Michel Perret, "L'Erythree, Le Fascisme et la Crise" Modern Ethiopia, Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice, 19-22 December 1977, Rotterdam, A.A. Balkenia, 1980, p.354.

31. Ibid.

32. In 1931, for example, the total number was only 4,565. Annuario Statistico Italiano, 1933, p.441.

33. Richard Pankhurst, "Italian and 'Native' Labour During the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopia 1935-41" Ghana Social Science Journal 2, no.2 (November 1972):42-74. In early 1940, 73% of the Italian population resided in the capital city. See Italian Affairs vol. 1, No.4 (November 1952):25.

34. FPCI App.31 contains detailed figures on the distribution of cultivated land among foreign nationals and natives with the number of holders and size of holdings.

35. Ibid.

36. The statement is not intended to imply that the limited actual land alienation did not negatively affect the rural cultivators. The conversion of forest land into state property and the foreign monopoly concessions over Eritrean national produce such as dum nut in the lowland, closed free access to traditional safety valves or secondary occupations such as wood cutting or handicrafts - e.g., making baskets and mats with the fibers extracted from the dum nut. Particularly with the population increase and the continuing discriminatory colonial policy of land distribution in the areas declared state property, the negative consequences were acutely felt among the rural population especially in the highlands.

37. FPCI App.37.

38. FPCI App. 72, p.2. The oppressive working conditions particularly of road construction are recorded by a war correspondent to the New York Times. See Ladislav Farago "The Busu Tshiki-Tshik" in Ladislav Farago (ed.), Abyssinian Stop Press, London, Robert Haile and Company, 1936, pp.201-246. Pankhurst has written a detailed description of Italian and native workers in the various colonial projects. See his article in Ghana Social Science op.cit. p.42-74

39. See Pankhurst, *ibid*, p.53, or Emilio De Bono Anno XIII, The Conquest of an Empire, London, The Cressent Press, 1937, p.137.

40. A peasant is a subsistence rural producer who is subject to the dictates of the state and is partially involved in the market. See Eric R. Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, New York, Harper and Row, 1969, pp.xiii-xv.

41. Quoted in Great Britain, Ministry of Information, The First to be Freed, The Records of British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia, London, His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1944, p.38.

42. *Ibid*.

43. For the official colonial directories on Italian enterprises scattered throughout the territory, consult Ufficio Eritreo dell'Economia Elenco Alfabetico degli esercenti Commercio, Industria, ecc. nel Territorio, Asmara, Tipografia Ditta M. Fiorette, 1937. Vol.1 covers Hamasein, vol.2 Akelle Guzai, vol.3 Eastern Lowlands, vol.4 Dancalia, vol.5 Serai and vol.10 Keren. The directories describe locations, type of business and amount of capital.

44. Great Britain, Information Service, Eritrea: A Handbook, London, British Ministry of Information, 1944. pp.25-26.

45. See Eritrean Chamber of Commerce report, FPCI Vol.I, p.60.

46. The Economist vo.152, no.5418 (January, 1947):1015.

47. FPCI, App.71, pp.1-4.

48. United Nations, Report of the United Nations

Commission for Eritrea, GAOR, 5th Session, Supplement no.8 (A/1285), New York, June 1950, p.11.

49. This is also confirmed in the summary record of hearing of Mr. Hamilton Ross, a senior civil affairs officer of Asmara division. See FPCI, App.120, p.1.

50. G.L. Steer, Sealed and Delivered, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1942. The author was told by Eritrean war prisoners, under British forces, that, "Eritrea had been long enough a mangad." p.164. The statement is highly revealing. In the past, external forces had the least interest in Eritrea as a separate entity. The Turks and the Egyptians, with their bases in Eritrea, sought to expand southward. They were checked more than once by the Abyssinian state. The Italians used Eritrea as a spring-board to invade Ethiopia. They tried twice. The first attempt brought their humiliation at the battle of Adwa in 1896. Their second attempt brought a temporary success. After the occupation of Ethiopia, Eritrea was reduced to a mere administrative unit in the larger Italian East African Empire.

Contemporary international history of the region appears to recall past pattern. Superpower politics seems to be marked by competition for influence over the larger region, Ethiopia. The United States-sponsored General Assembly's resolution on federation had hardly encountered resistance from the Soviet Union. The post-federation era is even more revealing. Ethiopia under Haile Selassie was one of the major recipients of military aid from the United States. Support to the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) from the Soviet Union was negligible and came mainly from the clientele states, such as Syria and Iraq. Since 1974 revolution, Ethiopia has become the major recipient of Soviet Military aid. The United States may be engaged in destabilizing the pro-Soviet regime in Ethiopia. There is no concrete evidence that it actively supports the secessionist cause. superpower politics in the region does not seem interested in the break up of Ethiopia. At best, as in the past, Eritrea continues to be a "mangad".

51. For early years, see the official colonial directories which also contain lists of import and export enterprises, Ufficio Eritreo dell'Economia Elenco Alfabetico degli Esercenti Commercio, Industria, ecc. nel Territorio, op.cit.

52. See Pankhurst, The Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit.

53. Ibid, p.367.
54. Ibid, p.372. The calculation does not included tanned skins.
55. Great Britain, Eritrea No. 126, op.cit. pp.27-28.
56. Perret, op.cit. p.362.
57. The United States consular report estimates that for 1918 over half of the colony's export of hides and skins might have originated from the surrounding regions, i.e., Ethiopia and Arabian Red Sea coast. See Addison E. Southard, Eritrea, A Red Sea Italian Colony of Increasing Interest to American Commerce, Special Consular Reports, no.82, Washington, D.C., United States Department of Commerce, 1920, p.20.
58. Pankhurst, The Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit., p.359.
59. Ibid, p.360.
60. Ibid.
61. Statesman's Yearbook, 1900, p.769.
62. Ibid.
63. For the various colonial state policies towards Italian monopoly over the region see the section on "The Politics of Customs" in L'Agricoltura Coloniale, no.9-10, op.cit. pp.66-75.
64. Pankhurst, The Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit., p.347.
65. Ibid, p.383.
66. Ibid, p.384.
67. For more details see Annuario Delle Colonie Italiane, 1936, App.III, pp.93-101. The same issue may be consulted for small Italian businesses. See also the Italian colonial business directories referred to earlier op.cit.
68. For excessive regulations of domestic markets particularly during the five years of Italian East African

empire, see Richard Pankhurst, "A Chapter in Ethiopia's Commercial History: Developments during the Fascist Occupation 1936-41" Ethiopia Observer, 14, no.1 (1971):47-67. Under the fascist economic policy of autarchy, indigenous business including non-Italian foreign traders were severely undermined. Para-statal monopoly corporations dominated the markets. Rigid system of business licenses and price regulations of local raw materials were practiced.

69. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit. p.49. For complaints by members of the native council see Sylvia Pankhurst, The British Policy in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia, Woodford Green (Essex) New Times Book, 1946, p.8.

70. For price control proclamations see Eritrean Gazette, 15 September, 1942. Other publications prior to 1949 are compiled in Eritrean Gazette, vol.10, 1949. Lists of commodities whose prices were often regulated are published in the Eritrean Daily News. See for example February 9, 19, and 27, 1947 issues. Among the commodities were grain, flour, textiles, kerosene, tea and edible oil - essential goods, which native business activity largely dealt with.

71. The indigenous trader's import/export activities were largely confined to the surrounding region, particularly the northern province of Ethiopia. See FPCI, Vol.I, p.56.

72. Ibid.

73. See the summary record of hearing of Brigadier General F.G. Drew, Chief Administrator of Eritrea in FPCI, App. 119, p.7.

74. British Eritrean Territorial Authority, District Officer's Book, Massawa, 1942-47, See the section under Trade and Supplies Dept. pp.1-2.

75. Though the measurement criterion used in the FPCI Report is vague. The Report nevertheless categorizes indigenous land holdings as mostly small size. See App.31.

76. My analysis on land distribution in areas declared state property is largely based on the information available in the FPCI Report App.30, pp.2-3.

77. Ibid, p.2.
78. Ibid.
79. See Agricoltura Coloniale, no.9-10, op.cit.,  
p.439.
80. FPCI. App.31.
81. Ibid.
82. FPCI, App.30, pp.2-3.
83. Ibid.
84. FPCI, App.31.
85. FPCI, App. 34.
86. Trevaskis Papers, Box I, Item one, op.cit.  
p.7.
87. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition,  
op.cit., p.54.
88. K. Marx, Capital, Vol.1, op.cit. p.875.
89. Quoted in Angelo Del Boca, The Ethiopian War 1935-1941, translated by P.D. Cummins, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp.17-18.
90. A comparative description on the native quarters and the European section of Asmara is found in E. Sylvia Pankhurst and Richard Pankhurst, Ethiopia and Eritrea, The Last Phase of the Reunion Struggle, 1941-1952, Woodford Green, Lalibela House, 1953, pp.267-272.
91. Goran Hyden, No Shortcuts to Progress, African Development Management in Perspective, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983. Particularly chapters one and two have been relevant to my discussion. I have used the term in quotation marks for two reasons. First, Hyden's definition radically departs from the Marxist approach to modes of production. His definition is not clear at all, for example, on the dominant class relations in a "peasant mode of production". He seems to be content in listing simply its several characteristics. Second, Hyden treats the term as analytical tool defined in its pure form. His description of existing African realities, however, appears as

simplified as his concept. For example, his argument of the uncaptured peasantry who enjoys options to avoid dependence on the markets and subordination to the state seems to grossly underestimate the economic and social consequences of Africa's integration into international capitalism particularly since the period of colonialism. His argument of weak national states in Africa equally underestimates the economic function of the state in the history of post-colonial Africa. With the above two reservations in mind, I find his concept valuable as a descriptive term of "transitional societies".

92. K. Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto, New York, International Publishers, 1966, pp.11-12.

93. Hyden, op.cit., p.8.

94. Quoted in Erlich, op.cit., p.88.

95. Quoted in Pankhurst in Boston University Papers in African History, op.cit. p.148. For the Tigrigna version consult Kolmodin, op.cit. p.262.

96. Rolando Guidotti, "L'Agricoltura in Eritrea nel 1936", L'Agricoltura Coloniale, no.5 (Maggio 1937):183. Guidotti was the head of the Colonial Agricultural Service in Eritrean in 1936.

97. Nadel in Africa, 16, no.2 op.cit., pp.107-108.

98. Sembene Ousmane, The Money Order With White Genesis, (trans.) by Clive Wake, London, Heinemann, 1972, p.2.

99. Trevaskis Papers box 1, item 5, op.cit., p.2.

100. Nadel in Sudan Notes and Records, 26,1, op.cit. p.77.

101. See Bohannan, op.cit., p.250.

102. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition: 1941-52, op.cit., p.55.

PART III: THE POLITICS OF INDEPENDENCE:  
CLASS, ETHNIC IDEOLOGY, AND NATIONALISM

## CHAPTER 4

CLASS POLITICSTHEORETICAL CLARIFICATION

Classes are defined primarily by their relations to the production process. Defined as such, classes exist in their pure form only in the capitalist mode of production. But such a definition is a theoretical and a methodological guide. When analyzing concrete societies, Marxian methodology does not use abstraction formally,

"After it has elaborated the concept abstractly it later denies it, showing the limitations of this level of the concept."<sup>1</sup>

A historical society does not correspond to the theoretical study. The latter, nevertheless, serves as a guide to grasp the process of actual class formation. Classes in a concrete society can be studied only in their active process of development. This distinction, i.e., between the abstract and the concrete level of analysis, is abundantly clear in the works of Marx. For example, in Capital, essentially a theoretical work, Marx mentions only two antagonistic classes - the bourgeois and the proletariat. Each class is treated as a homogeneous social category. At this level of highly abstract analysis, his major concern is the study of capitalism in its pure form -

"Ideal" form. England is not taken as a case study to prove or disprove a hypothesis. It serves, rather, as a concrete example to elaborate the "ideal" form of capitalism, because the English society approximates the subject of his discussion. This is made clear in his preface.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, his analysis of historical society takes into account the unavoidable complexity of the latter. A methodological "shift" is clearly discernible.

His studies of the French society are clear examples.<sup>3</sup> French capitalism was at its early stage of development. The proletariat was still weak. The bourgeois class was economically and politically divided and not cohesive. His analysis, in stark contrast to his theoretical work, discusses the petty-bourgeoisie, the lumpen-proletariat, the peasantry, and the bureaucracy - altogether new social categories that do not occupy any significant place in his theoretical study of capitalism. Neither the proletariat nor the bourgeois class is taken as a homogeneous social category. He focuses on political and ideological analyses. He speaks of

"alliances, blocs, constitutional forms,  
regime, political representatives,  
ideologies or ideas, fractions, factions  
etc."<sup>4</sup>

-- concepts that emphasize the political and the ideo-

logical rather than the economic class conflicts. He also speaks of political forces,

"to which no clear class (economic class - M.A.) designation corresponds, though their role and support is pivotal: the army, the press, the intellectual celebrities, the priests, the rural population."<sup>5</sup>

In short, Marx's studies of concrete society reveal that his categories in Capital bend to fit realities rather than vice versa. The implication, in our case, is clear. In the study of "transitional societies", such as Eritrea, where capitalist development is not only implanted from the outside but is also incomplete, theory will have to bend even further to accommodate reality. With this important caveat, the Chapter attempts to establish the class content of the Eritrean political drama. This is done by focusing on the intra-class cleavages within the Eritrean aspirants to the state power, the nature and role of rural banditry and its relationship to the former. The Eritrean aspirants to the state power, it will be argued, were the dominant force in the political drama.

The emergence of the Eritrean political theater, in the forties, was preceded by two major crises. Their sources and character need to be explained.

### ORGANIC CRISIS<sup>6</sup>

At the outset, the colonial political economy had contained inherent social contradictions which provided the underlying cause for the rise of the anti-colonial movement in Eritrea. The organic crisis can be grasped by analyzing the nature and role of the colonial state.

The history of the modern state in Europe is associated with the decline of feudalism and the rise and development of capitalism. In its classic development, the modern state has exhibited certain features<sup>7</sup>: the rise of a central administrative machinery determined to win relative autonomy for itself; the differentiation of "public" and "private" domain; and a subtle mixture of intervention in the economy and respect for the laws of the market. On the other hand, the modern state, in its colonial form, had little resemblance to its European counterpart. It was implanted from without and flourished in a society with incomplete development of capitalism. It directly represented a particular interest -- the metropolitan economy and was thus highly interventionist. In the capitalist mode of production, force arises from the economic lash of the market. There is no extra-economic coercion outside the labor process. In the colonial political economy, in contrast, control of the producer in and out of the labor process was pervasive.

The colonial political economy in Eritrea was highly characterized by the conspicuous absence of market competition. The colonial state was hardly "a guardian" of "laissez-faire" economy. It had, rather, assumed a major role in the reorganization of the Eritrean national economy. It actively regulated land, labor, and trade. It introduced monetary tax system as external coercion (i.e., political) to induce the withdrawal of the rural producer from natural economy. It alienated land and controlled its distribution in areas declared state property. The work place in the road construction and other colonial projects was racially hierarchical and a militarized camp.<sup>8</sup> The colonial state imposed compulsory labor.<sup>9</sup> Through its various interventionist policies, the state regulated the market. By law, different rates of wages were set for European and indigenous nationals.<sup>10</sup> Monopoly privileges were created for European traders and businessmen. The colonial state controlled native education. As aptly summarized by Alazar Tesfa-Michael, a young Eritrean intellectual in the forties, the colonial political economy, was direct "legalized robbery".<sup>11</sup>

The Eritreans were equally deprived of political rights. Ultimately, it mattered little whether one was a bureaucrat and a trader, closely associated with the colonial state apparatus and economy, or an exploited urban

worker or rural producer. Political power was in the hands of the whiteman, the foreigner. As a bureaucrat, as a trader, as an urban worker or as a peasant, the native invariably suffered from political, economic and social inequalities. Racism constituted the political culture of colonial rule. The predicament of the native invariably lay in the highly interventionist character of the colonial state.

In the classic history of capitalism in Europe, the bourgeois class, well before its conquest of the state, had already wielded economic power in the "civil society". Its conquest of the state was the legalization of its de facto economic and social power. In the colonial political economy, economic and social power was not located in the "civil society". "Civil society" was poorly articulated. The alternatives opened to the Eritrean were, to a large extent, determined by the colonial state. The colonial experience, in short, was, to a great extent, direct and immediate. In such historical conditions, it does make a significant difference by whom and how the state power is forged. Political power, (i.e., the public sphere rather than the private sphere), becomes a key to material advancement.<sup>12</sup> This reality of colonial experience is nowhere dramatically conveyed as in Nkrumah's famous cry,

"Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all things will be added unto you."<sup>13</sup>

The centrality of the state (i.e., the political) in the colonial history of Eritrea had left behind its permanent social imprint. In the wake of the colonial crisis and the ensuing discussion by the allied forces (France, Britain, USSR and US) on the fate of the former Italian colonies, the Eritrean society became highly politicized. Politics was the "primary" social activity. Under the relative liberal political environment of the British administration, there was a sudden proliferation of organized political groups.

#### CONJUNCTURAL CRISIS<sup>14</sup>

While the contradictions of the social relations under colonial rule served as the historical background for the rise of anti-colonial movement, it was, particularly, the immediate economic, social and political crises, under the British administration, that sparked the fire. The British period marked the eruption of all the contradictions internal to the colonial political economy. Urban and rural areas were the seats of widespread social discontent.

The Eritrean population had perceived the British forces as liberators from the harsh rule of Fascism. The British rule, however, proved even more disastrous. Oral history disparagingly describes the British period as one

based on relative freedom and absolute hunger.<sup>15</sup> The extent of the crisis can be measured by several different indices.

The political uncertainty of the future of Eritrea had caused the flight of foreign capital.<sup>16</sup> Unable to withstand international competition, many industries that were established between 1943 and 1945 had to close down after the end of the Second World War. A high rate of unemployment was characteristic of urban centers. Asmara alone had 22.4% unemployment among the adult male population (see Table 3.3). With the defeat of Italy, the pensions and remittances of the demobilized soldiers, "Askari", were lost.<sup>17</sup> Italian lira was devalued with the exchange rate of 480 lire to one British East African pound.<sup>18</sup> The cost of living was high. In Asmara and Massawa, the index had risen from 100 in 1940 to 611 in 1947.<sup>19</sup> For the same period wages increased little more than 20%.<sup>20</sup> As a rule, wages were dismally low. The average was 2 sh. per day in Asmara and 4 sh. in Massawa.<sup>21</sup> According to the British administration's criterion, the minimum weekly living wage for an Eritrean worker with a family of four was 22.6 sh.<sup>22</sup> "Crimes" ranging from robbery to murder were endemic across the country. In 1946 alone, 23,097 "crime cases" were reported.<sup>23</sup> Rural discontent was no less widespread.

During the Italian rule, the direct rural tax system had meant less as a source of colonial state revenue than as a mechanism to induce the withdrawal of the rural producer from natural economy. Rural tax had constituted a small percentage of the overall state revenue which mostly came from maritime custom duties and the home government.<sup>24</sup> With the British administration, the tax system was drastically revised. The British authorities, whose administration of Eritrea was provisional, resorted heavily to internal sources of state revenue. Consequently taxes were substantially increased.<sup>25</sup> With the demographic growth, particularly the highland countryside was faced with an increasing imbalance between population and resources. The return of many demobilized soldiers to the villages only served to aggravate the pressure on the land. The British racist policy of land distribution in areas declared state property worsened the condition of the rural producers. For the peasant it was a closed-resource situation,

"It was not surprising that the peasant cast hungry eyes on the Italian farms and market gardens sited on what was held to be demaniale, crown land."<sup>26</sup>

The peasants suffered equally from exorbitant prices for basic commodities and low prices for their produce. Due to the high rate of unemployment in the urban centers,

remittances from kin either declined or were suddenly lost. Peasant indebtedness was a wide spread plague. In the lowlands, the "traditional nobility" continued to take advantage of their position, as district chiefs and tax collectors, to oppress and exploit the Tigre population. In 1944 there was a ferment of social discontent, and an open revolt in 1947.<sup>27</sup> The general misery across the countryside was the underlying cause for the permanent state of banditry in the forties and early fifties (more on this below). The British period was marked by endemic rural violence. Anti-colonialism had increasingly a popular national dimension.

There was, however, no protracted anti-colonial movement whose existence might have possibly encouraged the establishment of a unified or a coalition-based nationalist movement. Fascist Italy had already been defeated. The British administration was only provisional. This had meant that there was, in essence, a potential power vacuum. This fact alone stirred political anxiety among the Eritrean population. The political anxiety was heightened particularly in the wake of Italy's renunciation of its former colonies at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946 and the ensuing discussion by the Four Powers on the fate of the former Italian colonies. The political crisis had increased the stake in the fight for the state power. By

whom, how, and why, was the state power (the key to economic heaven) to be forged? Such questions were unavoidably in the forefront. It was not a mere coincidence that 1946 marked the turning point for the sudden proliferation of organized political groups.

How were the organic crisis of colonialism and its immediate economic, social, and political crises translated at the subjective level? Who got organized, and how? Who were the leading elements in the political drama? What were the social contents of their actions?

Those who were organized with explicit political intent were composed of bureaucrats, traders, and small commercial farmers. I call them collectively, the petty-bourgeois class (or an aspirant bourgeois class). The term is meant to convey the weak socio-economic base of the members who were conspicuous for their insignificant involvement in the production process. The members, collectively, as a distinct class, nonetheless, were the heir presumptive to the colonial state.

#### THE NATURE OF THE PETTY-BOURGEOIS CLASS

So far, I have discussed the bureaucrat, the trader, and the commercial farmer, separately. The purpose

was to attain a measure of analytical clarity on the distinct nature of each role in the colonial political economy. The actual historical case, otherwise, was quite complex. At the stage of my proposal, I had considered the members to be clearly divided into two distinct fractions of the petty-bourgeois class - i.e., between those located in the colonial state apparatus and those in private business and that their political conflict during the independence movement had been conceptualized as rooted in their antagonistic locations in the colonial political economy. Further research, however, has revealed that the dichotomy thesis is empirically unfounded. The activities of the members were not clearly differentiated. The description that follows is constructed from a biographical book written by an Italian journalist.<sup>28</sup> It is a biographical sketch of "The Great Personalities" in Eritrea. The lines allotted to each biography are uneven. The book, nonetheless, and particularly in the absence of other sources, remains highly informative.

My findings have enabled me to generalize on the predominant qualities of the members of the petty-bourgeois class. Firstly, the members were engaged in what appeared to be straddling. They belonged neither exclusively to bureaucracy nor to business. The boundaries between the two were highly blurred and indistinct. The members were

involved in the colonial state apparatus in various capacities. They were also to be found in small scale farming growing cash crops such as grain, vegetables, citrus fruits, coffee and tobacco. They were in commerce and transport businesses. They were equally involved in politics as an active member or a leading element of this or that political party and a candidate for or a member of the Eritrean parliament in later years. The members often moved easily between the public and the private sector or vice versa. For example one would start out as a bureaucrat and then move to business profession or politics. A combination of two or even three roles was not uncommon. The case of Haregot Abbai and others is illustrative of a multiplicity of roles in a single person. In the forties he occupied a position in the colonial state apparatus (a bureaucrat).<sup>29</sup> He was among the founders of the Unionist Party (a politician).<sup>30</sup> He was engaged in transport business in 1951 (a business man).<sup>31</sup> In 1952 he was a member of the Eritrean Parliament (a politician/businessman/bureaucrat).<sup>32</sup> Mahari Uolet had served as a colonial clerk.<sup>33</sup> In 1947 he was a member of the native court.<sup>34</sup> In 1948 he became its vice president and had a concession farm growing coffee.<sup>35</sup> In 1952, he was a candidate for the Eritrean parliament.<sup>36</sup> AbdelCader Chebire had been a colonial interpreter in the 1930's,<sup>37</sup>

TABLE 4.1  
INTERPENETRATION IN THE PETTY BOURGEOIS ACTIVITIES

<u>Name</u>	<u>Bureaucracy</u>	<u>Business</u>	<u>Politics</u>
Abbe Mohamed	X		X
Abdalla Abdurahman	X		X
Abdelcader Chebire	X	X	X
Abdu ali Dirar	X	X	X
Abraha Tesemma	X	X	X
Ahmed Bey Mohamed Adam	X	X	X
Ali Mohamed Musa Redai	X	X	X
Ali Omar Fingia Osman		X	X
Araia Uassie	X	X	X
Asfaha Uoldenchiel	X		X
Asressu Barachi	X	X	X
Assefau Gobru		X	X
Beiene Zahlai	X	X	X
Demsas Uoldemichael	X	X	X
Embai Ghereamlac	X		X
GhebreJohannes Tesfamariam	X	X	X
Ghebremeschel Uoldu	X	X	X
Ghernichiel Germu	X		X
Habtesghi Ogbasghi	X		X
Hagos Adem Gubsa	X	X	X
Haile Tuccu	X	X	
Hamid Said Osman	X	X	X
Haregot Abbai	X	X	X
Hassan Ibrahim Mohamud	X	X	X
Ibrahim Sultan	X	X	X
Idris Abdalla Hummad	X	X	X

(cont.)

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Name	Bureaucracy	Business	Politics
Idris Osman Mohmed	X	X	X
Mahari Uolet	X	X	X
Malo Uoldenchiel	X	X	X
Mohamed Aberra Hagos	X	X	X
Mohamed ElHassen Chelai	X	X	X
Mohamed Omar Achito	X	X	X
Mohamed Said Ali	X	X	X
Mohamed Said Mohamed Hasseno	X	X	X
Mohamed Surur Abdalla	X	X	X
Nasser Abubacher	X	X	X
Omar Bescir	X		X
Omar Sefat Idris	X	X	X
Said Sefat Idris Mohamed Ausana	X	X	X
Saleh Ahmed Checchai	X	X	X
Seium Maascio	X	X	X
Suleiman Ahmed Omar Haggi	X	X	X
Tecle Haimanot Bocru	X	X	X
Tedla Bairu Ogbit	X		X
Tesemma Asmerom	X	X	X
Tesfagherghis Gherensi	X	X	X
Tesfanchiel Uorche	X	X	X
Uodeab Uoldemariam	X		X
Uoldeiohannes Ghebrezghi	X	X	X
Uoldesellasse Tesemma	X	X	X

Source: Compiled from Giuseppe Puglisi, Chi E'?  
dell'Eritrea, Dizionario Biografico, Asmara, Agenzia  
 Regina, 1952. The author's spelling of names is  
 retained.

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a famous merchant, owner of a concession farm, and a leading politician of the Independence Bloc in the forties.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, between 1941 and 1952, Hassan Ibrahim Mohamud had been a bureaucrat/businessman/politician.<sup>39</sup> Examples of interpenetration in the realm of the petty bourgeois activities abound. Table 4.1 is intended to show the movement of the members from the public to the private sector or vice versa, which was a typical phenomenon. All the members did not combine two or more roles simultaneously. What is ultimately important, nevertheless, is not so much the number of those who combined several roles as to the easy movement from one sphere to the other - a potential avenue (conspicuously closed to the average Eritrean) that could lead to several opportunities. Secondly, the members possessed additional characteristics that clearly set them apart from the rest of the population at large. Many came from traditional privileged families. Nearly all had been exposed to modern education in colonial schools. They resided in the new urban centers. Though urban residents, uprooted from the countryside, many held largely nominal feudo-military traditional titles bestowed on them by colonial authorities in recognition of loyal services.

The members visibly occupied a contradictory location within the colonial political economy. From the

vantage point of colonial Eritrea as a whole, they constituted part of the colonized. They invariably occupied an inferior position. As a class, the members were confronted with a situation of "blocked ascent", the resolution of which inevitably lay in the capture of the state power. Their political, economic, and social debasement had contributed to their alienation from the colonial world. On the other hand, looked at from the vantage point of the internal dynamics of the colonized, they invariably held relative strategic positions in the colonial political economy. The bureaucrat confronted the population as an agent of foreign domination and exploitation. In his own realm of power, he was no less oppressive than the white-man. The trader engaged in financial exploitation. The absentee commercial farmer exploited indigenous labor. Given their relative strategic location, no other heir to the colonial state had existed. The contradictory location of the class had imparted to its members a unique quality. The members constituted, politically, the most conscious elements of the population. As a class, the petty-bourgeois was not only aware of the historical reasons for its "blocked ascent" in the realm of political, economic, and social power, but also actively sought to remove the obstacles. No one knew better than its members that political advancement was a key to economic power. The

colonial political economy was simultaneously a condition for the rise and rebellion of the petty bourgeois class. The colonial crisis appeared to open new opportunities for the members. It promised political power and through political power, wealth, privilege and status.

#### THE POLITICS OF THE PETTY-BOURGEOISIE

The anti-colonial sentiments of the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class had its roots in the deep seated desire of its members to appropriate resources owned or controlled by the colonizing power, i.e. to regulate, on its own behalf, Eritrean land, labor, trade and business - to reconstitute itself as the new ruling class. The members, however, were unable to produce a coherent leadership in the context of an independent Eritrean state. They were divided essentially into two major political camps - the Unionists and the anti-Unionists. In the works of some commentators on Eritrea, there is a tendency to provide an economic explanation for the division. According to Houtart, for example, the Unionist movement was dominated by the traditional nobility while the anti-Unionists movement was led by the nationalist bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements.<sup>40</sup> His analysis recalls the French revolution rather than the twentieth century Eritrean reality. This clear-cut economic division is historically

unfounded. There was neither a traditional nobility nor a bourgeois class solidly entrenched in the productive process. The former had been reduced to a mere salaried civil servant in the colonial state apparatus. The free development of the bourgeois class had been historically arrested. It was not two distinct sorts of property that formed the basis for the division of the two political movements. The Unionists and anti-Unionists were essentially political and ideological fractions of the same class - the petty-bourgeois. The parties' programs were purely political.<sup>41</sup> They did not try to confront the social and economic problems of the times. They did not contain any conception of structural change within Eritrea, such as agrarian reform, for example. Not even a mild social reform was suggested. They did not attempt to alter in any meaningful way Eritrea's relation to international capitalism. A British report was quite correct to conclude that,

"... in so far as the Eritrean politician is aware of local problems, he is ready to leave their solutions to that form of government which he considers most desirable."<sup>42</sup>

It was the political and ideological differences, centering on the question of state power and the form that it should take, that violently tore the members apart. Specifically, there were two interrelated issues that divided the mem-

bers: was it politically desirable to form a union with Ethiopia or altogether establish an independent Eritrean state? What political assets or liabilities were involved in each course of action? What constituted the Eritrean nation? The last issue was highly significant. It was the different answers to the question of what constituted the Eritrean nation, upheld by the combatants, that ultimately determined their respective political preferences.

Organizationally and strategically, the contest between the Unionist and anti-Unionist had been unevenly matched from the start. The Unionist Party was highly organized. By early 1947, its internal differences already resolved, it had produced a cohesive leadership under the young and able spokesman, Tedla Bairu.<sup>43</sup> The leadership possessed a clarity of purpose and determination. It opposed the partition of Eritrea.<sup>44</sup> It advocated unconditional union with Ethiopia. It was, in fact, a reunion that was demanded.<sup>45</sup> It had its affiliate organization in Addis Ababa, 'Natsa Hamasien' or 'The Society for the Unification of Ethiopia and Eritrea', whose purpose was to provide financial and propaganda support.<sup>46</sup> The Unionist leadership was highly vocal and aggressive. It engaged in frequent demonstrations and terrorist activities.<sup>47</sup> At the international level, the party enjoyed support from anti-Fascist movements in London. Sylvia Pankhurst's

agitation for the Unionists cause in her newspaper, New Times and Ethiopia News, and her constant lobby in the British government was an international asset.<sup>48</sup> Ethiopia's alliance with the new emerging world power, the United States, was highly significant, particularly at the United Nations.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, the strength of the Unionists lay in the chronic organizational weakness of the opposition forces.

The anti-Unionists unanimously opposed partition or union with Ethiopia.<sup>50</sup> They advocated for an independent Eritrea. But they never succeeded in building a monolithic organization or a central directing leadership. Albeit their essentially identical programs, they remained divided into several separately organized groups. Initially they were composed of the Moslem League, the Liberal Progressive Party and the National Moslem Party of Massawa. Among the three, the Moslem League Party led by, the equally articulate Ibrahim Sultan, was the largest and organizationally the strongest.<sup>51</sup> The anti-Unionists lacked an effective international ally. They had sought alliance with Britain. In 1947, for example, their programs had envisaged independence after ten years of British trusteeship with internal autonomy and international supervision. Britain was a declining world power. Most significantly, its policy of partition was unaccept-

able to the anti-Unionists.<sup>52</sup> It was in search of an international ally that Ibrahim Sultan, in June 1949, forged a coalition, the Independence Bloc, composed of the initial three parties, the Pro-Italy Party and a recently formed and numerically insignificant group, the Independent Party. The Bloc called for immediate independence, renouncing any form of trusteeship.<sup>53</sup> Rather than a merger of the different groups under a single leadership, the Bloc remained a loose coalition. It had several spokesmen. Its campaign was highly uncoordinated. Organizational indiscipline reigned supreme. Within the leadership there were recurrent power struggles.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly, its acceptance of the pro-Italy party was strategically flawed. The Pro-Italy Party was composed of Eritreans with negligible influence over the population. It was organized by the "Comitato Representativo Degli Italiani in Eritrea" (CRIE) as a front for Italian interests.<sup>55</sup> The party initially had advocated Italian trusteeship.<sup>56</sup> With the failure of Bevin/Sforza proposals at the U.N. in March 1949, the party called for immediate independence.<sup>57</sup> The nominal independence of Eritrea (rather than union with Ethiopia which had just freed itself from Fascism) was considered as an alternative for the continued Italian political and economic influence over Eritrea. The participation of the Pro-Italy Party in the Independence

Bloc was a liability for Ibrahim Sultan. As the former colonizer, Italy was highly unpopular in Eritrea. At the international level, it was an insignificant power. It was a serious miscalculation on the part of the leadership of the Independence Bloc. Predictably, the policy of collaboration with the Italians had destructive consequences. Italy's presence within the coalition provoked suspicions and recriminations among the activists and followers alike. The power struggles within the leadership were intensified. For the Unionists, with their fanatical Ethiopian nationalism, the episode was a gold mine. It was effectively exploited. The Unionists had all along suspected their opponents as agents of foreign power, British or Italy. Ibrahim Sultan's rapprochement with the Italians became a clear confirmation. Intimidation and assassination became legitimate means to combat what now appeared to the Unionists as the urgent problem: the return of Italy to Eritrea. In early 1950, in the wake of the increasing Italian involvement and under the constant pressure from the Unionists, internal contradictions broke loose and the Independence Bloc disintegrated into several sectarian groups. It was their common hatred toward Ethiopia that had brought the Independence Bloc into existence. Otherwise, personal power struggles among the leaders, the growing Italian involvement and no less significant, ethnic

tensions (more on this later), had been all along, organizationally, corrosive forces.

After four years (1946-50) of bitter and violent conflicts primarily between the Unionists and anti-Unionists (the two competitors for the Eritrean state), a "Peace Congress" was held in Asmara in December 31, 1950, in which all the organized groups participated. A unanimous resolution was passed to accept the U.S.-sponsored U.N. General Assembly's resolution, i.e., the federal union of Eritrea and Ethiopia.<sup>58</sup> The consensus on federation did not immediately resolve the intra-class contradictions. Conflicting interpretations of federalism continued to plague the members. The Unionists attempted to strengthen the Ethiopian government's role in Eritrea. They demanded the active representation of the emperor in the Eritrean executive body.<sup>59</sup> Tigrigna (the Christian highland language) was suggested as the only official language.<sup>60</sup> They preferred a single parliamentary house.<sup>61</sup> The Parliament was to choose the chief executive whose appointment required the emperor's approval.<sup>62</sup> Ethiopian flag was demanded instead of an Eritrean one.<sup>63</sup> The anti-Unionists, despite their organizational fragmentation, fought to consolidate and maintain the internal autonomous status of Eritrea within the framework of Ethio-Eritrean federation.<sup>64</sup> Ibrahim

Sultan's memorandum submitted to the U.N. Commissioner, Eduardo Anze Matienzo, strongly articulated the deep seated fears and suspicions of the opposition forces toward Ethiopia.<sup>65</sup> The memorandum contained nine points - all designed to minimize the role of the Ethiopian government in the internal affairs of Eritrea. A superior federal government with its own separate constitution was deemed vitally necessary.<sup>66</sup> Eritrean and Ethiopian governments were to have equal representation in the federal legislative, executive and judicial organs.<sup>67</sup> A separate flag for the federal government and a new currency were suggested.<sup>68</sup> The Unionists' demand for the active representation of the Ethiopian government in the Eritrean executive body was categorically rejected.<sup>69</sup> A bi-cameral Eritrean parliament was suggested.<sup>70</sup> The Eritrean chief executive was to be selected by the joint assembly of the two houses.<sup>71</sup> Cabinet appointments were to be made by the chief executive subject to approval by the two houses.<sup>72</sup> Though Arabic was the ideal choice (because it was perceived as the language of the majority in Eritrea) Tigrigna was also included as official Eritrean language.<sup>73</sup> A separate Eritrean flag was demanded.<sup>74</sup> The debate underlined a division between the liberal and conservative political tendencies within the petty-bourgeois class. The content of the Unionists' demands

overall opposed an autonomous Eritrea. It was little removed from the Unionists' earlier demand of unconditional union. On the other hand, the content of the anti-Unionists' demands was filled with innumerable institutional mechanisms designed to defend Eritrea against any potential encroachments from the Ethiopian state. The resulting compromise created an autonomous Eritrea under the sovereignty of Ethiopia. A single chamber parliament was accepted. Arabic and Tigrigna became the official languages. Eritrea was given its own flag. The emperor was

TABLE 4.2  
1952 Election Results

<u>Parties</u>	<u>Seats</u>
Unionists	32
Anti-Unionists	
1. Democratic Front	19
a. Moslem League Party	
b. Pro-Italy Party	
c. Liberal Progressive Party	
d. The Independent Party	\ 36
2. Moslem League of the Western Province	/ 15
3. National Party	1
4. Independent Moslem League	1
GRAND TOTAL	68

Source: Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, G.A.O.R. 7th Session, Supplement no.15(A/2188), New York, 1952, p.37.

represented in the Eritrean executive body but the representation was to be largely symbolic. The federation was more a concession to the anti-Unionists than to the Unionists.

The national election of 1952 appeared to mark the birth of Eritrean parliamentary politics. The forces were roughly balanced. The internal fragmentation of the anti-Unionists, however, was no match to the Unionists who, as a single organized group, enjoyed the majority of seats (see Table 4.2). Politically, the federation was a fragile institution. It had never been the first choice of either the Unionists or the anti-Unionists. For both camps, the federation was less than the ideal solution.

#### THE POLITICS OF THE UNORGANIZED: THE MASSES

Marxian theory defines politics, in its ideal-typical manifestation, as a class conflict over a given mode of production. The definition necessarily implies a radical social change. In actual societies, however, class conflict is essentially a historical and a social process rather than an instantaneous phenomenon. As such, it manifests itself at different levels and is expressed in various forms.<sup>75</sup> It is quite legitimate, in Marxian discourse, to speak of class conflict short of its ideal-typical manifestation. Marx's own analysis of class conflict in French society, where the proletariat had just

emerged, is a good example. Lenin treats a trade union strike, at the outset, a purely economic concern, as containing the germ of revolution, i.e., class conflict in its embryonic manifestation.<sup>76</sup> Thompson and Hobsbawm follow a similar tradition. The former's analysis of the history of the English working class and the latter's application of the concept, "social bandit" to "transitional societies", are striking examples.<sup>77</sup> Contemporary radical critics have made analytical distinction between "politics at the level of production" and "politics at the level of the state" in order to capture the nature of class conflict as a process.<sup>78</sup>

My discussion of the Eritrean domestic politics has, so far, focused on the intra-class cleavages of the petty-bourgeoisie. There was no class conflict understood in its ideal-typical form. In fact, the politics of the unorganized was ultimately an appendage to that of the petty-bourgeoisie.

In spite of the deplorable social conditions in the countryside, the peasants did not have an independent political organization. There was nothing that can be called a peasant league. The cellular structure of the production system in the rural villages, the tyranny of work, the lack of political experience beyond the village - all combined to operate against the peasant's ability to organize

at the national level.<sup>79</sup> The urban workers were equally unorganized. The dominance of metropolitan merchant capital had meant the absence of skilled workers concentrated in industrial centers. The major urban centers were of recent origin, mainly since the mid-1930's. Asmara, in its modern setting, was built between 1935 and 1937.<sup>80</sup> In 1931, the native population for Asmara had been 20,638 and a total of 41,702 for all urban centers.<sup>81</sup> By 1947, Asmara alone had a population of 95,000.<sup>82</sup> The urban labor force, therefore, was largely country-bred -- the first generation of rural immigrants. Their cultural make-up was hardly significantly distinguishable from their kin in the rural village. The FPCI, reporting on the labor conditions in the late forties, states

"Amongst the urban Eritrean population there is a lack of homogeneity. Eritreans come to the towns from surrounding villages and tribes, and to a certain extent maintain contact with their villages or tribe, but their previous mode of communal or tribal life gradually loses its significance. New organizations which would unite the Eritrean workers have not yet been formed." (emphasis added)<sup>83</sup>

It was only in 1952 that the syndicate of the Union of Free Workers of Eritrea was formed. Its membership, according to some observers, was estimated between three to five thousand.<sup>84</sup> It was numerically small and politically insignificant. In the forties, therefore, traditional

relations such as kinship and on a large scale religious bodies remained the chief organizational mechanism in the urban centers.

The peasants and the urban workers had, throughout, remained politically unorganized. I refer to them collectively as the masses. The term is used to underline two major characteristics -- the lack of clear internal differentiation and the shapeless nature of their presence in the Eritrean "theatre of politics".<sup>85</sup>

The masses were not altogether absent from the national political scene. At the outset, it may be inferred from the preceding analysis of the intra-class contradictions that the unorganized masses were indirectly present at the center of the political drama. The masses were not external to or outside the intra-class contradictions. The intra-class cleavages necessarily presupposed their presence. The issues involved in the intra-class politics were primarily inter-class issues. The infighting within the petty-bourgeoisie, after all, was about who gets what and how. It was about Eritrean land, labor, business and trade. The masses were the chief object of contention. The politics of the petty-bourgeoisie, in other words, was directly about, but not for, the masses. Most significantly, the unorganized were also present as spontaneous and intermittent participants.

As is often the case in history, the masses did not have their own political party. They did not write their own memorandum or keep their own written records. A great deal of research, particularly on oral history, remains to be done. A careful analytical reading of the period, however, has enabled me, albeit briefly and generally, to comment on what may be considered, here, as uniquely the politics of the unorganized. This is done by focusing on rural brigandage of the times.

Banditry, in Hobsbawm's sense, is not a social movement.<sup>86</sup> It possesses no political organization and program. Bandits are

"... activists and not ideologists or prophets from whom novel visions or plans of social and political organization are to be expected. They are leaders, in so far as tough and self-reliant men often with strong personalities and military talents are likely to play such a role; but even then their function is to hack out the way and not to discover it."<sup>87</sup>  
(emphasis added)

Their aims are modest. "They right wrongs, they correct and avenge cases of injustice."<sup>88</sup> Established authorities consider them as criminals, outlaws. Local people consider them as "heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice".<sup>89</sup> As such, the bandit is not merely an individual person but a symbol -- "a figure of social protest and rebellion".<sup>90</sup>

The prevailing form of brigandage in pre-colonial history of the region has little resemblance to Hobsbawm's concept, social bandit. Historians inform us that pre-colonial banditry had been an institution dominated by the nobility.<sup>91</sup> Brigandage was essentially a form of intra-class political competition for office. It was a tool for the career aspirations of the nobility. Among the notorious late nineteenth century bandits in the Eritrean region were Wolde Michael Solomon and Debebe Araya.<sup>92</sup> Warlordism best describes the phenomenon of pre-colonial brigandage. Since the rise of the colonial state, the era of warlordism, brigandage as a road to political power, had become obsolete. The establishment of the colonial state, as a centralized superior national authority, had meant the loss of the preeminence of the nobility. The traditional nobility and their sons had been incorporated in the colonial state apparatus. Increasingly, modern education, technical skills and business ventures had become the key for career development.

In the forties and early fifties "shifta" activity was endemic in Eritrea.<sup>93</sup> In the early months of 1950 alone, there were an estimated 2,000 armed bands roaming the countryside.<sup>94</sup> But the banditry of this period was an entirely new phenomenon. It was an institution dominated by peasants. As Hobsbawm correctly pointed out, in

his brief commentary on banditry in Eritrea, the demobilized "Askari", the native colonial army, was a natural reservoir of potential recruits.<sup>95</sup> Many bandits were ex-soldiers.<sup>96</sup> Arms and ammunition were available. After the defeat of Italy,

"The disbandment of the Eritrean battalions in 1941 offered the gravest threat to law and order since the Italians had first pacified the country. Eritrea was overrun with ex-soldiers, who were either without work or found civilian life uncongenial and unrewarding. Many had returned home with rifles, ammunition, and hand grenades, which they hoarded against the future. Arms lay abandoned on the battlefields and concealed in a variety of widely dispersed stores and caches. The balance was tipped dangerously in the favor of disorder.<sup>97</sup> (emphasis added)

Attempts by the British authorities to curb "shifta" activity had been futile. The United States Office of Intelligence Research reported that

"The British have made special efforts to guard against those attacks ("Shifta" attacks - M.A.), providing armed convoys for highway traffic between the main urban centers, curfews, reprisal arrests of villagers living near the scenes of raids, and special military 'ferret' forces to combat the raiders. These efforts to control the 'shiftas' have not been successful, and the internal security of the country has declined seriously since May 1950 with large bands of marauders reported roaming the hills."<sup>98</sup>

As aptly described by the United Nations' Commissioner in

TABLE 4.3  
SHIFTA ACTIVITY, 1948 TO APRIL 1950

	<u>1948</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u> (Jan-Apr)
<u>1. Forces of Law and Order</u>			
Killed	8	9	5
Wounded	12	6	11
Captured	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	25	20	17
<u>2. Italian Civilians (excluding those murdered in Asmara)</u>			
Killed	7	13	5
Wounded	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	15	20	6
<u>3. Eritrean Civilians</u>			
Killed	39	32	44
Wounded	21	21	58
Abducted	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>27</u>
TOTAL	68	54	129
<u>4. Shifta</u>			
Killed	15	11	39
Wounded	13	9	29
Captured or Surrendered	<u>40</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>80</u>
TOTAL	68	33	148
<u>5. Holdups, Assaults and Raids</u>	87	102	190
Source: Derived from G.K.N. Trevaskis, "Eritrean Land: An Urgent Problem", <u>New Times and Ethiopia News</u> , June 21, 1952, p.3.			

Eritrea, "They operated outside the given legal politics",<sup>99</sup> i.e., in stark contrast to the petty-bourgeois politics (i.e., parties and elections). The proliferation of bandits marked the stresses and tensions within the "transitional society".

"Shifta" activity of the period can be meaningfully appreciated only if placed in the proper historical context. It occurred in the era of the modern state and the increasing market economy, with all the social ramifications that the two concepts imply: foreign rule, land alienation, tax collectors, corrupt and abusive civil servants, greedy merchants - foreign and native alike, urban unemployment, high cost of living and chronic peasant indebtedness.

There is no available data on the biography of bandit leaders. Information is scarce particularly on those from the lowlands. The bandits were not organized as a single unit. Nor did they possess any clear political direction. There was frequent inter-ethnic violence.<sup>100</sup> The sons of Mesazgi or Hagos Temneway, for example, were considered social bandits on the highlands, and common robbers in the lowlands.<sup>101</sup> As individuals, the bandits might have been motivated by a purely private concern. In his fairly detailed commentary on brigandage in Eritrea, Trevaskis suggests that long-standing inter-family or inter-communal blood feuds were not unusual causes.<sup>102</sup> But banditry of the period also strongly appeared to express "a latent form of jacquerie", a vehicle of popular protest. Among the major targets of bandits were Italian concession farms, shops and restaurants, European businessmen and Eritrean traders, district chiefs, military

convoys and police posts.<sup>103</sup> The targets clearly symbolized a defiance of established power and authority. "Shifta" activity enjoyed popular support. According to Trevaskis, a significant body of Eritrean public opinion treated "shiftas" as "heroes rather than ruffians".<sup>104</sup> In the folk songs of the time, eulogies for the "shifta" were not uncommon.<sup>105</sup> The "shifta" was a popular avenger. There was even a case of two bandits whose social role appeared as a populist redistributor. In his brief account of the infamous/famous bandits, the sons of Mesazgi in Eritrea, Hobsbawm wrote

"Though they probably killed no more than eleven (i.e. Italians - M.A.), their feats were exaggerated by local opinion which credited them with the usual heroic attributes and invulnerability of the social bandit. They acquired a myth. What is more, since the roads became unsafe for Italian drivers, Eritreans who had previously not been allowed to drive by the Italian administration or the British, were authorized to do so. This was welcomed as a rise in status and for the jobs which now became available. Many people said 'Long live the sons of Mesazgi. They enabled us to drive cars'."<sup>106</sup>

In the eyes of the law, such bandits were common criminals to be hunted down, arrested, or killed. From the criterion of the local people, they were legitimate outlaws who deserved sympathy or even protection and support. Table 4.4 shows the punishment inflicted upon villages for assisting

TABLE 4.4  
COLLECTIVE FINES IMPOSED ON COMMUNITIES  
FOR ASSISTANCE GIVEN TO "SHIFTA" BANDS

	<u>1948</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u>
<b>1. <u>Hamasien</u></b>			
Mai Madaf	110*	--	--
Sazzera	--	--	1,000
Kushet	--	--	75
Deikki Zeru	--	--	20
Dembe Ghebreselassie	--	--	10
<b>2. <u>Akele Guzai</u></b>			
Merettu Sebene	1,040	--	--
Digsa	300	--	--
Degere Libe	100	--	--
Chelai Balfret	--	--	10
<b>3. <u>Serai</u></b>			
Dekki Borasi	--	80	--
Hatyina Lalai	--	200	--
Adi Mongonti	--	90	--
Abi Addi	--	95	--
Tacheta	--	--	80
Adi Hezbai	--	--	60
Adi Shumhabtai	--	--	10
TOTAL	1,550	465	1,265

\*In British Pounds.

Source: Derived from G.K.N. Trevaskis "Eritrean Land: An Urgent Problem" New Times and Ethiopia News, June 21, 1952, p.3. Author's spelling has been retained.

"shifta" activity.

Trevaskis dismisses the "shifta" activity in Eritrea as purely an instrument of the urban politicians.

He writes, for example,

"It might be supposed that this class of urban dweller would have little connection with rural shifta. In fact, it is closely related to and exercises a great influence over the backward rural communities; and it has been through this influence and for its own economic ends that this class has stirred up anti-Italian feeling and later encouraged shifta activity against Italians."<sup>107</sup>

His commentary is not altogether unfounded. Politicians, particularly the leaders of the Unionist party, skillfully manipulated and exploited "shifta" activity for their political ends. Particularly highland bandits were renowned for their frequent assaults on anti-Unionist elements.<sup>108</sup> This was not entirely the case, however. Banditry was not purely instrumental. It also appeared to enjoy a relative autonomous existence. It continued to exist beyond the date of the "Peace Congress", the very child of the ascendants to the state power, the petty-bourgeois class. Throughout 1950 and the earlier part of 1951, Eritrea appeared ungovernable - a measure of the relative autonomy of brigandage.<sup>109</sup> Even though stability seemed to have been established by July 1951, authorities continued to perceive "shifta" activity as a threat. A few bandits such as Woldegabriel, one of the sons of Mesazgi, for example, had held out until

1952.<sup>110</sup> In early June 1952, almost two years since the "Peace Congress" or three months before the end of the British administration in Eritrea, Trevaskis had this to say -

"...threat to security presented by the existence of armed bands operating in the territory must remain a single and indivisible problem."<sup>111</sup>

It was above all as a result of the coordinated efforts by the British authorities, the Eritrean politicians, the Italian residents and the Ethiopian government that banditry was suppressed and "law and order" ultimately restored. The popular anarchy had posed a threat. It had been useful, particularly in the early years, as long as the politicians together with their external backers were in a position to manipulate it. Its excess had to be checked. It endangered the "Peace Congress" - the ascendancy of the petty-bourgeoisie to the state power. It menaced regional stability. It provoked the fear of the unknown, perhaps another "Weyane" or even more serious.<sup>112</sup> No one articulated this fear better than Tedla Bairu, the secretary general of the Unionist Party. As early as 1947, he had cautioned,

"During the past seven years the economic position of the country has been very poor and the people have developed a criminal (or rebellious - M.A.) life which they never had in the past. Also the undecided political situation of the country has not im-

proved feelings. Italy says 'we want you', someone else wants us. It is during these deliberations that something might happen to endanger the peace of the territory, and if something happens here it may cause trouble in the mother country, Ethiopia."<sup>113</sup>

In the literature on the period, hardly any connection is made between rural brigandage and the compromise within the petty-bourgeois class to accept the United Nations General Assembly's resolution. "The Grand Compromise" between the Unionists and anti-Unionists, which suddenly transformed the adversaries into the party of "law and order" came into being in the wake of the increasing rural violence. Since the "Peace Congress", "political order", "political stability", had been the watchword of all the political parties. In the face of the growing rural violence, the members of the petty-bourgeois class were more than eager to sink their differences for the central issue of state power. The resolution of the "Peace Congress" clearly emphasized the importance of "stability". It read,

"All political parties of Eritrea, in view of the necessity to bring about general pacifications... have decided to respect in all its parts the decision to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in conformity with the principles, the intentions and the recommendations approved by the General Assembly and its practical implications."<sup>114</sup> (emphasis added)

The United states-sponsored United Nations General Assembly's resolution was no less concerned with regional stability. It stressed "the interest of peace and security in East Africa."<sup>115</sup>

After the "Peace Congress" the British authorities, in collaboration with the Eritrean politicians, the Italian residents and the Ethiopian government collectively embarked on a grand scale pacification program.<sup>116</sup> A new security proclamation was issued. Military garrisons and security forces were increased. A coordinating anti-"shifita" office was established. Intelligence system was improved. Anti-"shifita" campaign was intensified. "Shifita" leaders were offered amnesty and a promise of employment opportunities. Most significantly, it was the introduction and strict enforcement of collective responsibility in rural villages that finally ended "the disorders".<sup>117</sup>

Having accomplished some of its modest aims, banditry (as a manifestation of popular protest) in Eritrea fell into oblivion. Today, we hear about it only through oral history. In retrospect, its political disorientation and organizational fragmentation only served to pave the road for the political emancipation of the petty-bourgeois class. Its actions in the political drama had been confined to the here and now. It never had the intention to capture state power nor could it do so. That kind of role was

historically reserved for the heir presumptive to the colonial state. By September 15, 1952, the day the British administration officially ended, Eritrea was relatively pacified and governable to the new holders of power. As the editor of the government-controlled newspaper, The Eritrea Weekly News, Edward Ullendorff had intimately known the Eritrean politicians in the forties. This is what he wrote about them in his observation of postcolonial Eritrea:

"It was a poignant experience to go back there only a decade after the war and find that the young clerks and interpreters of yesterday, who so recently knew little or no English, had become directors-general of government departments or other senior executives, writing minutes and memoranda with almost equal facility in English, Tigrigna, and Amharic."<sup>118</sup>

An apt description of the political emancipation of the former aspirants to the state power.

The long awaited hopes and aspirations of the members of the petty-bourgeois class were realized not in the context of a fully independent Eritrean state but within the larger political framework of the autocratic Ethiopian state. Moreover, a point that will be elaborated later, the relative beneficiaries of postcolonial Eritrea, particularly in political and educational resources, were the Unionists fraction of the petty-bourgeoisie class - specifically, the Christian elements.

In my analysis, so far, the ethnic dimension of the Eritrean political drama has hardly been touched upon. The purpose was to maintain analytical clarity on the underlying class character of the domestic politics. The next chapter will analyze the role of ethnic ideology.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Theotonia Dos Santos "The Concept of Social Classes" Science and Society, 34, no.2(Summer 1970):177.

2. In the preface to the first edition, he writes -

"What I have to examine in this work is the capitalist mode of production and the relations of production and forms of intercourse that correspond to it. Until now, their locus classicus has been England. This is the reason why England is used as the main illustration of the theoretical developments I make."  
(emphasis added)

See Marx, Capital, Vol.I, op.cit., p.90. Marx's methodology at the level of abstract analysis is amply explained in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital (trans.) Ben Brewster, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970 see pages 194-196.

3. See K. Marx "The Class Struggle in France: 1848-1850" and "The Eighteenth Brumiere of Louis Bonaparte" in David Fernbach (ed.) Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile, Political Writings, vol.2, Middlesex, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp.35-142 and 143-249 respectively. For reviews of Marx's historical writings see Stuart Hall "The 'Political' and 'Economic' in Marx Theory" in Hunt op.cit. p.15-60, and also Gregor McLennan, Marxism and the Methodologies of History, London, Verso Editions and New Left Books, 1981, pp.155-174.

4. Hall, op.cit. p.49.

5. Ibid, p.42.

6. Organic crisis refers to inherent structural contradictions of a given socio-economic system. For an extended explanation see Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971, pp.177-178.

7. See Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbauwm, The

Sociology of the State, (trans.) by Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1983.

8. deBono, op.cit., p.65.

9. During the preparation of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930's, over half of the natives mobilized were taken from their fields. See *ibid*, p.137.

10. A detailed discussion is found in R. Guidotti, "Il Problema dei Salari della Mano d'opera de Colore in Eritrea nel Periodo pre e post-bellico", L'Agri-coltura Coloniale, no.12(Dicembre 1936):441-450. See also Pankhurst in Ghana Social Science Journal, op.cit.

11. Alazar Tesfa-Michael Eritrea Today, Woodford Green (Essex) New Times Book, 1946, p.9. It is an excellent essay on the aggressive role of the colonial state and the weakness of "civil society" in the colonial history of Eritrea.

12. That the state under such historical conditions possesses significant economic and sociological functions; that it can be used for accumulation of wealth and hence social differentiation is strongly supported by post colonial experience. The Kenyan case is a good example. See Swainson, op.cit. The same argument is cogently advanced in the case of Peru. See Becker, op cit.

13. Quoted in Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer, Ghana: End of an Illusion, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1968, p.25.

14. The term refers to the immediate crises potentially adjustable within the established socio-economic structure. See Hoare and Smith, op. cit., pp.177-178.

15. It is said that the Italian policy declared "Fill your stomach (undoubtedly a reference to the war economy under fascism in the 1930's. - M.A.) and shutup". In contrast, the British policy is said to have declared - "Speak and go hungry". It was during the British period that political parties emerged. Quoted in Othman Saleh Sabby, The History of Eritrea, (trans.) by Muhammed Fawaz Al-Azem, Beirut, Dar al Masirah, 1974, p.213.

16. By 1947, the Italian population was well below 30,000. See FPCI, vol. I, p.6.
17. The Pankhursts, Ethiopia and Eritrea, op. cit., p.62.
18. See Proclamation no.21 in Eritrean Gazette Vol.10, op.cit., p.67.
19. FPCI App.77.
20. Ibid.
21. FPCI, App.78.
22. FPCI Vol.I, p.67.
23. FPCI, App.27
24. For the financial year, 1927-28, for example, direct rural tax constituted only 7% of the total colonial revenue. Revenue from maritime custom duties was 47%. See Italy, Ministero Dell'Africa Italiana, Le Colonie Italiane Di Diretto Dominio, Roma, Ufficio Studi E. Propaganda, 1929, pp.114 and 116. A breakdown indicating the contribution from the home government is found in The Statesman's Yearbook, 1930, p.1034.
25. For rural taxes by administrative regions see Eritrean Gazette vol. 3, 1944 and vol.10, 1949 pp.124-130 and pp.383-392 respectively. For a variety of direct and indirect taxes during the British administration see FPCI App.54.
26. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, op.cit., p.53.
27. Paul, A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan, op.cit., p.131.
28. Giuseppe Puglisi, Chi E'? dell Eritrea, Dizionario Biografica, Asmara, Agenzia Regina, 1952.
29. Ibid, p.161.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.

33. Ibid, p.188.
34. Ibid, p.189.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid, p.2.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid, p.162.
40. Francois Houtart, "The Social Aspects of Eritrean Revolution" Eritrea Information, 2 no.3(March 1980):5-6.
41. Agrarian crisis and urban unemployment, the two urgent problems, were hardly addressed in any of the political parties' programs. The FPCI contains the dates of establishment, the statutes and programs of the political parties. For the Unionists see App.93-96. For the Liberal Progressive Party see App.101-102. For the Moslem League see App. 103-107. For the National Party of Massawa see App.116-117.
42. Great Britain, FO371/57173, the War Office to the Foreign Office, March 1946, p.1.
43. For a short biographical background on Tedla Bairu see Puglisi op.cit. p.280-281.
44. FPCI, App. 95.
45. Ibid.
46. See the Ethiopian Amharic weekly newspaper Addis Zemen, September 30, 1944. The association held a mass rally on October 8, 1944. See Ethiopian Herald, October 14, 1944. Both newspapers are available, as clippings, in the United States Archives, 865D.01/11-2844, Caldwell to the Secretary of State, November 28, 1944. By September 1945, it was actively engaged in political propaganda, protest demonstrations, and petitions to foreign embassies in Addis Ababa - see United States Archives 884-014/10-345, William E. Cole, Jr., Charge d'Affaires ad Interim, to the Secretary of State, Addis Ababa, October 3, 1945.

47. See for example, Great Britain, FO371/73792, circular letter to Giornale del Eritrea, 12 November, 1949; FO371/73792 From Head Quarters, Middle East Land Forces, to the Ministry of Defence, London, 24 December, 1949 and FO742/25 concerning extracts from the 'L'Unita dell' Eritrea" No.21, 5 July, 1950.

48. Her other works equally stress the Unionist cause. The reader may consult my bibliography.

49. For historical treatment on Ethio-American alliance and the growing influence of the latter on the region of the Horn of Africa see Harold G. Marcus Ethiopia, Great Britain and the United States, 1941-1974, The Politics of Empire, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983.

50. For details see FPCI App. 101-107 and also App. 116-117.

51. A short biographical background on Ibrahim Sultan is found in Puglisi, op.cit., p.168.

52. The British policy is discussed in the last section of Chapter Six.

53. The reformulated political demand of the Independence Bloc is reproduced in Islamic Review 37, No.10(October, 1949):40-41.

54. Between Ibrahim Sultan and Ali Mohamed Musa Redai and between Wolde ab WoldeMariam and Wolde Selassie Tesema. The recurrent accusations and counter accusations particularly between the last two activists can be found in Great Britain, FO742/25 Nuovo Programma del Partito Eritrea Indipendente, 13 Agosto, 1950; FO742/25 Wolde ab Wolde Mariam to PHQ (Police Head Quarters) Asmara, 28 Agosto, 1950; FO742/25 a letter from Wolde Selasse Tesema to the Police Commissioner, Asmara, n.d.; FO742/25 Police Report on the Meeting of the Independent Party, 9-9-1950; FO742/25 Notice by the Intellectual Association published in the weekly newspaper, Ethiopia no.29, 10/9/50.

55. The CRIE refers to the association of Italian residents in Eritrea. For its political preference see FPCI, App.109.

56. For details see FPCI, App.98-100.

57. The Bevin/Sforza (i.e. British/Italian) plan had proposals to settle the question of former Italian colonies, Lybia, Italian Somaliland and Eritrea. On the latter the proposal advocated partition. It never materialized. Within Eritrea, it had little support.

58. The United Nations General Assembly's resolution, 390(V) is contained in the Final Report of the U.N. Commissioner in Eritrea, GAOR 7th Session, Supplement no.15 (A/2188) New York, 1952, pp.74-75.

59. See *ibid*, p.15.

60. *Ibid*, p.16.

61. *Ibid*, p.14.

62. *Ibid*, p.15.

63. *Ibid*, p.16.

64. For the predominantly similar positions of the various groups within the anti-Unionist camp see also *ibid*, pp.14-16.

65. Great Britain, FO742/23 regarding the memorandum of the Moslem League to the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, H.E. Eduardo Anze Matienzo, Asmara, 10 October, 1951. The nine points are outlined on p.1, details are found in pp.3-15.

66. *Ibid*, p.1 and pp.10-11.

67. *Ibid*.

68. *Ibid*, p.1 and p.12.

69. *Ibid*, p.1 and pp.13-14.

70. *Ibid*, p.14.

71. *Ibid*, p.15.

72. *Ibid*.

73. *Ibid*, p.13. Through Islamic schools, the Moslem elites in Eritrea have adopted Arabic as their written language. Otherwise, Tigre is the widely spoken language among the Moslem population.

74. Ibid, pp.12-13.

75. Economic reductionist approach glorifies the productive force, the economic structure, at the expense of human agency in history. The human agency occupies a central place in Marxian theory. Marx's Theses on Feuerbach is an important caveat to the reductionist school of thought. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works Vol. I, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969, pp.13-15.

76. V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, New York, International Publishers, 1961. See particularly Chapter Two.

77. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, New York, Vintage Books, 1966, also see his article, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?" Social History 3, no.2(May 1978):133-165. E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, New York, W.W. Norton and Co. 1965, and his recent work, Bandits, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981.

78. See for example Michael Buroway "The Hidden Abode of Underdevelopment: Labor Process and the State in Zambia" Politics and Society 2,no.2(1982):123-166.

79. The common predicament of peasants everywhere is fully explained in Wolf, op.cit.

80. del Boca, op.cit. p.18.

81. Agricoltura Coloniale, No.9-10, op.cit., p.461.

82. FPCI, Vol.1, p.5.

83. Ibid, pp.11-12.

84. George A. Lipsky, Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture, New Haven, Human Relations Area Files Press, 1962, p.280.

85. Others have used terms such as "crowd" or "plebs" to convey more or less a similar situation. See for example Thompson in Social History 3, No.2, op.cit., pp.144-145.

86. For an extended discussion, read the Chapter on "What is Social Banditry?" in Hobsbawm, Bandits, op.cit.

87. Ibid, pp.24-25.

88. Ibid, p.26.

89. Ibid, p.17.

90. Ibid, p.18.

91. For banditry in traditional Ethiopia see Donald Crummey "Banditry and Resistance: Noble and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia" and for a slightly different interpretation see Timothy Fernyhough "Social Mobility and Dissident Elites in Northern Ethiopia: The Role of Banditry, 1900-69" both in Crummey, Donald (ed.) Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa, London, James Currey, 1986, pp.133-149 and pp.151-172 respectively.

92. See Erlich, op.cit.

93. "Shifta" is the Amharic/Tigrigna term for a bandit.

94. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 14, 1952, op.cit., p.3.

95. Hobsbawm, Bandits, op.cit., p.12.

96. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 7, 1952, op.cit., p.4.

97. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A colony in Transition, op.cit., p.105.

98. United States, Office of Intelligence Research (OIR), The Capacity of Eritrea for Independence, Report no. 5311, Washington, D.C., Department of State, July 25, 1950, p.5.

99. Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea During the Year 1951, New York, GAOR (A/1959) 16 November, 1951, p.177.

100. See Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 14, 1952, op.cit., p.3.

101. They often terrorized Moslems. See Great Britain FO371/69370, and FO371/73792. Hobsbawm has written a brief account on the sons of Mesazgi, see his Preface in Bandits, op.cit., pp.12-15.

102. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 7, 1952, op.cit., p.4.

103. My information has been culled from the following -- FO371/69370, FO371/73792; New Times and Ethiopia News, May 12, 1951, p.4; Trevaskis Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.109-110; and U.N. A/1959, op.cit., p.59.

104. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 7, 1952, op.cit., p.4.

105. My mother has confirmed that to me.

106. Hobsbawm, Bandits, op.cit., p.14.

107. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 7, 1952, op.cit., p.4.

108. Ibid and also Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.106-110. For complaints by anti-Unionists see the statement by the chairman of the delegation of the Moslem League of Eritrea at the 49th meeting of the Ad Hoc political committee on 21 November, 1950 in United Nations, GAOR (A/AC.38/L.46) 21 November, 1950, pp.1-7.

109. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.110-111.

110. Hobsbawm, Bandits, op.cit., p.15.

111. Trevaskis in New Times and Ethiopia News, June 7, 1952, op.cit., p.4.

112. "Weyane" was a spontaneous localized peasant uprising in the Ethiopian province of Tigray, south of Eritrea. It took place in 1943. The uprising was suppressed by the Ethiopian Government with the help of the British Royal Air Force. See Gebru Tareke "Peasant Resistant in Ethiopia: The Case of Weyane" Journal of African History, 25, No.1 (1984):77-92.

113. FPCI, App. 121, p.5.

114. U.N. A/1959, op.cit., p.71.

115. U.N. A/2188, op.cit., p.74.

116. Trevaskis provides a detailed discussion on this. See his work, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.110-113.

117. Ibid, p.113. The newly established Eritrean government continued to refine the decrees on banditry by passing new ones and through a series of amendments particularly regarding collective (village) responsibilities. See the Banditry Acts of 1956, 1957, 1959, and 1960 in Fasil Nahum, "Enigma of Eritrean Legislation" Journal of Ethiopian Law, 9, No.2(1973):329-334.

118. Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians, An Introduction to Country and People, London, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.193.

## CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICIZATION OF ETHNIC IDEOLOGY

The modern political history of Eritrea is the history of the petty-bourgeois' failure to establish an independent Eritrean state. The class was politically and organizationally too fragmented even to defend an autonomous Eritrea within the larger framework of the federation. The lingering politicization of ethnic ideology, characteristic of the Eritrean domestic politics, provides the central explanation.

THE ETHIO-ERITREAN FEDERATION

By definition, federalism is an institutional arrangement whereby power is constitutionally shared by a national government and regional units of government. The United Nations' proposal was far removed from federalism, both in principle and practice. There was no federal constitution. The resolution had envisioned an advisory federal council which never materialized in reality. In practice, Haile Selassie's government was the federal government. The arrangement was institutional rather than constitutional. Nonetheless, the United Nations proposal of "federation" (henceforth in quotation to avoid misconception) had provided Eritrea with a measure of regional

autonomy. Eritrea had its own constitution which embodied the rule of law. The Ethiopian constitution under Haile Selassie read,

"By virtue of His Imperial Blood as well as by the anointing which he received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power indisputable,"<sup>1</sup>

and that

"The Ethiopian Orthodox Church founded in the fourth century, on the doctrines of Saint Mark, is the established church of the empire and is, as such, supported by the state. The Emperor shall always profess the Ethiopian Orthodox Faith."<sup>2</sup>

One of the duties of the emperor was to "defend the Holy Orthodox Faith".<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the Eritrean constitution proclaimed that,

"All organs of government are provided for by the people. They are chosen by means of periodic, free and fair elections, directly or indirectly."<sup>4</sup>

Freedom of the press and assembly were recognized. The Eritrean democratic features were in stark contrast to the autocratic and anti-secular rule in Ethiopia where political parties, elections, free press, and unions were all totally foreign. Predictably, the "federation" was neither harmonious nor freely accepted by Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup> In 1953 the budding Eritrean trade union was banned.<sup>6</sup> Barely three years after the "federation", on March 28, 1955, Andargatcheo Massai, the emperor's representative in

Eritrea, in reply to the mounting criticisms from members of the Eritrean parliament, blatantly revealed Ethiopia's policy -

"There are no internal nor external affairs as far as the office of His Imperial Majesty's Representative is concerned, and there will be none in the future. The affairs of Eritrea concern Ethiopia as a whole and the Emperor."<sup>7</sup>

By 1955 the "federation" was de facto dismantled. The revised Ethiopian constitution, proclaimed on November 4, 1955, had implicitly considered Eritrea as one of the provinces of Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup> It neither mentioned nor made any allusion to the existence of the "federation". Political parties were subsequently banned. In place of Arabic and Tigrigna, Amharic became the official language. In 1959 the Eritrean flag was removed. In 1962, by Proclamation Order No. 27, Eritrea was, officially, declared the fourteenth province of Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup>

The "federation" did not have a long history. The arrangement, to start with, had contained an inherent contradiction. It was aptly described in Time as

"...a Swiss federation adopted to an African absolute monarchy."<sup>10</sup>

"Liberal Eritrea" was an embarrassment to the autocratic and anti-secular Ethiopian state. Either the Ethiopian state at the center had to be democratized or the "federation" dismantled. The inner logic of the Ethiopian state

provoked the dismantling of the "federation". Haile Selassie's plan in accepting the United Nations proposal was merely a "Trojan Horse" tactic.<sup>11</sup> A 1946 Ethiopian government memorandum, submitted to the Paris Peace Conference, had long anticipated the centralizing tendency of the Ethiopian state.<sup>12</sup> It read,

"It is the considered opinion of the Imperial Ethiopian Government that due regard to the existing situation and the established interests involved requires that Eritrea be administered as a separate province of the Empire under the direct supervision of the Ministry of the Interior."<sup>13</sup>

During the drafting of the Eritrean constitution, the Ethiopian government, through its Foreign Ministry representative, had attempted to obstruct the realization of an autonomous democratic Eritrea.<sup>14</sup>

Haile Selassie's actions in the fifties and early sixties are hardly surprising. What remains historically interesting is that he accomplished his destructive task without any immediate threat to his power. It was the politicization of ethnic ideology, within the Eritrean domestic politics, that greatly facilitated his task. Haile Selassie was never forced to contend with a unified Eritrean nationalist voice. The extent of politicization of ethnic ideology can be shown by several different indices: party formation, ideological mobilization, inter-ethnic violence and parliamentary elections.

### PARTY FORMATION

In the early years of the British administration there was no organized political movement. What had existed between 1941 and 1943 was an association called "Mahbar Fikre Hagar" (society for the love of country).<sup>15</sup> Its president was Gebre Meskel Woldu, a highland Christian. The association was composed of both Christians and Moslems. Among the founding fathers were Ibrahim Sultan and AbdelCader Chebire. The latter was even the vice president of the association. It was truly a pluralistic (Moslem/Christian) association. Its political preference was hardly defined. Its goal was not political, but mainly cultural autonomy - the abolition of Italian racial laws under the British administration; educational and employment opportunities for Eritreans; and the promotion of unity between Moslems and Christians.<sup>16</sup> As a pluralistic association, it had a short life. Christian Unionist elements from within had been active from the start. During religious festivals and "Mahbar Sembete" (Sunday Association), Ethiopian nationalism was actively promoted.<sup>17</sup> The Eritrean Coptic Orthodox Church was the major propagandist. The movement had secret contacts with the Ethiopian government. In his interview, Ibrahim Sultan recalls that, without consulting the Moslem members of "Mahbar Fikre Hagar", the Unionist

leaders had met with an Ethiopian official and had already decided to convert the association to an organized Unionist party.<sup>18</sup> In 1943, to counteract the growing influence of the Unionists, an opposition force, popularly known as the "separatist", emerged from within "Mahbar Fikre Hagar".<sup>19</sup> The group advocated conditional union. It was organized and led by Christian elements from the highlands. The movement had, initially, attracted, particularly, the "Jiberti", the minority Moslems in the highlands. On November 24, 1946 a meeting between the Unionists and the opposition force was held at Bet Georgis.<sup>20</sup> The purpose was to settle their differences. The meeting was a failure. The unyielding position of the Unionists (i.e., unconditional union) was the primary impasse.

The brief meeting had an altogether different ramification. It provoked suspicions on the part of the Moslem activists. The meeting of Bet Georgis revealed potential threats: the stubbornness of the Unionists and the possibility for rapprochement among the Christian elements on the question of union with Ethiopia. According to Ibrahim Sultan, the Moslems at the meeting of Bet Georgis came as individuals and not as representatives.<sup>21</sup> The meeting essentially involved the Christian highlanders. This was symbolized by the highly personalized argument (that dominated the meeting) between Tedla Bairu and Wolde

Ab Wolde Mariam, both from the highlands.<sup>22</sup> In his recollection of the event at Bet Georgis, Ibrahim Sultan claims that, although the Moslem individuals were present throughout the meeting which lasted from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.,

"No one said to us - you are sons of Eritrea. What is your opinion?"<sup>23</sup>

The arrogant Christians, again, did not care to consult the Moslems. For the latter the meeting at Bet Georgis was as disappointing and alarming as their experience in "Mahbar Fikre Hagar". The threats appeared imminent, particularly, in the absence of an organization to defend the rights of the Moslems in the face of the emerging aggressive Ethiopian nationalism of the highlands.

Three weeks later, the Moslem League Party was established in Keren. The "Jiberti" in the "separatist" camp withdrew en masse to join the newly founded Moslem group. In its second conference (January 20-21, 1947), attended by an estimated two to three thousand delegates, the Moslem League passed a resolution which read,

"The Moslem population... which constitutes a clear majority of Eritrea, feels that it has the greatest right to protect their country from being divided, seeing that the resulting damage would be heavier for the Moslem population than for any other."<sup>24</sup>  
(emphasis added)

Clearly, the Moslem League was formed in reaction to the growing aggressive Ethiopian nationalism of the Christian

highlanders. The "separatist" camp which could have joined the Moslem League was prevented by the latter's choice of Arabic as its official language. The former, which was then exclusively composed of minority Christian highlanders, organized its own separate party in February 1947 i.e., the Liberal Progressive Party.

The two opposition forces (the Moslem League and the Liberal Progressive Party) maintained their separate organizations despite their similar anti-Unionist position. But they shared a common flag - green and red, halted with a pair of scales in the center to denote the equality between the Moslems and the Christians.<sup>25</sup> The informal alliance was fragile. The Christian elements were visibly a minority (see Table 5.1). The major political forces confronting each other were the anti-Unionist Moslems and the Unionist Christians.

#### IDEOLOGICAL MOBILIZATION

Ideological mobilization is a call for political action. It

"...seeks to gather, assemble, husband, defer, and control the discharge of political energies."<sup>26</sup>

To that effect, ideological mobilization sets up a common goal, defines the dominant crisis, identifies the special target and the possible alternative and the proper means to

be used.<sup>27</sup> The basic character of ideological mobilization in the Eritrean political theater was not an exception.

Ethnic sentiments that hitherto had appeared less important as long as the colonial state existed, suddenly assumed a formidable national significance in the wake of the crisis of the colonial state and the ensuing intra-class cleavages for control of the state. As Trevaskis graphically portrayed it,

"The most combustible material caught fire first. The structure of the Eritrean political unity, erected during the Italian regime, had concealed the fundamental conflicts of culture and interest among the Eritrean communities. The Italian regime had had the effect of anaesthetizing the passions dividing them and had lent the lie of Eritrean unity a semblance of truth. With the passing of that regime this anaesthetic effect wore off; and in the sharp climate of wartime, and, even more, of post war Eritrea, sensibility, long numbed but never destroyed, began to return."<sup>28</sup>

In their respective attempts to capture constituencies and broaden their popular support, the leaders of the Unionists and anti-Unionists alike had, from the start, provoked ethnic sentiments and traditional hostilities. In late 1947 the FPCI had visited Eritrea. In their report, the USSR and the French delegations vividly describe the specific methods of ideological mobilization,

"This (ideological mobilization - M.A.) was done, not so much by proposing a programme concerning the future of Eritrea, which only a small proportion are in a position to judge, but rather by bringing in to action the traditional forces of native psychology; religious factors, the influence of the chief, material interests, fear of reprisals and the pressure of social communities upon individuals."<sup>29</sup>

Both parties had religious leaders at their disposal. The Unionists had Abuna Marcos, the Archbishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Eritrea. The anti-Unionists, specifically the Moslem League, had Said Abubaker Marghani, the religious leader in Eritrea. In addition, both parties had their respective youth organizations - "Andinet" belonged to the Unionist Party and the Moslem League had the "Shaban El Muslimin".

The politicization of ethnic ideology was no where more conspicuous and more articulated than in the bitter debate, between the Unionists and anti-Unionists, on the fundamental question of what constituted the Eritrean national self. Subsequent party affiliation, inter-ethnic violence and the ethnic-based national election had their roots in the different and antagonistic perceptions of the Eritrean national self, upheld by the two camps. The Unionists perceived Eritrea as ethnically Ethiopian.<sup>30</sup> For Ibrahim Sultan and his colleagues, Eritrea was composed of two-thirds, or even more, Moslems with their own

distinct culture.<sup>31</sup> Hence, it was perceived, from the outset, that

"The Moslems have the right to speak on behalf of the Eritrean population."<sup>32</sup>

Tigrigna language was accommodated only as the language of the minority and for specific political reasons -- to accommodate the demand of their Christian allies, the members of the Liberal Progressive Party, and that of the Unionists.

According to the United Nations census culled from the information provided by the British authorities in Eritrea, the Moslem and Christian populations were roughly balanced.<sup>33</sup> The finding, apparently, makes the claim of Ibrahim Sultan and his colleagues empirically unwarranted. But this is of little significance. What matters is that, in reality, the participants operated under their respective assumptions. When perceptions, right or wrong, are dearly held by the participants, they can easily be transformed into a political force. This is what transpired within the Eritrean political drama.

The Unionists were engaged in mobilization by revival and anticipatory hope.<sup>34</sup> The Party mobilized its constituencies on the basis of past experiences, values and symbols. It also mobilized on the basis of imminent emancipation from colonial bondage. It indulged in comparison

between the present and the future. To buttress its position concrete past and present examples were provided.

The Party recalled the glorious history of Ethiopia with its Axumite civilization and long Christian tradition. Eritrea was depicted as the geographical, historical, and cultural extension of Ethiopia since ancient times.<sup>35</sup> Historical ties and cultural identity were repeatedly stressed. Tedla Bairu articulated the Ethiopian nationalism of the Unionists when he bluntly claimed,

"We are Ethiopians, but we have been apart from our country for more than sixty years."<sup>36</sup>

Ethiopia was affectionately referred to as the "Mother land".<sup>37</sup> The union of Eritrea with Ethiopia was thus presented as the return of the lost daughter to the open arms of her mother.<sup>38</sup> "Mother Ethiopia or death!" was the Party's rallying cry. The Orthodox Church was in the forefront of the struggle, with its formidable ideological influence in the highlands,

"...exercised through 3,500 priests officiating at 550 churches and 1,870 monks in fourteen Eritrean monasteries"<sup>39</sup>

The threat of excommunication was its ultimate instrument against dissidents. The Church constantly contrasted colonial oppression and Ethiopian nationalism. The frequent

public addresses by Abuna Marcos were invariably marked by strong anti-colonial and Ethiopian nationalist appeals.

"Eritrean, whether you are Moslems or Christians, oh Eritreans remember we are all one black race, do not believe that we will ever become white, remember a nation without a ruler is like a monkey and you will therefore always be trodden underfoot by others.... O Eritreans try to march all together united and ask for liberty and also for union with our mother country Ethiopia."<sup>40</sup>

The Unionist cause was depicted as a struggle of blacks against white conspiracy. Accordingly it was argued that

"...the British are favouring the Italians at the expense of the Eritreans, and that there is a conspiracy of the white against the Black."<sup>41</sup>

The return of Haile Selassie from exile was an effective political symbol for the Unionists. It symbolized the victory and dignity of Ethiopia. Ethiopia represented the home of the free Black. The names of Ethiopian patriots (martyrs) from highland Eritrea such as Zerai Deress and Lorenzo Tsehafi Teizaz were constantly invoked. Their patriotic deeds were extolled. An eulogy for Zerai, written in the Eritrean Weekly News, for example, read -

"How much this young man dares!  
He is not shy before their officials  
or before their King!  
He does not fear il Duce;  
He dares their people  
When they insult his country (Ethiopia - M.A.)  
With many lips.

He dances with a sword in the centre (middle)  
of Rome.  
He dances in circles as he smites men.  
The son of Tasfandiras,  
Untameable elephant,  
While others are cowed down,  
He triumphs."<sup>42</sup>

The Unionists defended Ethiopia under Haile Selassie as a democratic and egalitarian society. It was claimed that

"...the present administration of the Ethiopian government is based upon democratic principles and spirit, without any distinction of tribes, religion, with full justice and equality."<sup>43</sup>

Union, it was argued, would bring dignity, freedom, equality, and new opportunities for Eritreans. It was depicted as emancipation from white colonial bondage, the beginning of a new life. Paraphrasing the justification for union by a Sergeant, an ardent Unionist, the FPCI reported

"One man stated that he had served for 25 years (under colonial rule - M.A.) and had only become a sergeant whereas in Ethiopian army he would have been a general."<sup>44</sup>

In the Ethiopian state bureaucracy, there were, already, highland Christian Eritreans occupying high governmental positions in the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Education, etc.<sup>45</sup> Such examples served as a living testimony to justify union by anticipatory hope.

The anti-Unionists resorted to mobilization by

revival and anticipatory fear. They invoked their own reading of past experiences, values and symbols. In opposition to mobilization by anticipatory hope, characteristic of the Unionists, they appealed on the basis of imminent threat inherent in the Unionists' demand. Their appeal was no less supported by concrete past and present examples.

The Liberal Progressive Party sought to counteract the Unionists' influence in the highlands. In opposition to Ethiopian nationalism, it called for "Greater Eritrea" which would include Tigrai, the northern province of Ethiopia.<sup>46</sup> Apparently, the Party looked forward to an independent Eritrea in which the Christian elements would be in the majority. The historical and cultural identity between highland Eritrea and Tigrai, "Tigrai/Tigrigna" region, was constantly stressed. The Party was highly regionalist at heart. It never questioned the Unionists' claim of historical ties and cultural identity between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It, rather, glorified the "Tigrai/Tigrigna" region as the center of ancient Ethiopian civilization.<sup>47</sup> It recalled the heydays of late 19th Century Tigrean political supremacy under emperor Yohannes IV.<sup>48</sup> Its major target of criticism was what it, negatively, perceived as the Shoan political supremacy in Ethiopia since Menilik II. It referred to Ethiopia as the "Imperial

Shoan Government".<sup>49</sup> The Party resented the fact that the Shoan province, once a mere vassal state to emperor Yohannes, had come to assume political supremacy, particularly over the "Tigrai/Tigrigna" region. The Party's memorandum clearly underlines the regionalist indignation,

"The highest offices are reserved for the Shoans, whilst the natives of other regions of Ethiopia are considered as of secondary importance, and none of them according to Shoans must be entrusted with the ruling of the country and the Tigrai, in particular, are considered to be dangerous..."<sup>50</sup>

That Amharic was the only official language in Ethiopia was highly resented.<sup>51</sup> In its home base, the highlands, the political impact of the Party's ideological mobilization was negligible (see Table 5.1). It was, in fact, unpopular. Its articulate spokesman, Wolde Ab Wolde Mariam, was notoriously known as the "Eritrean Quisling".<sup>52</sup> The Party, ever since its inception, had remained the organ of minority Christians in the Independence Bloc. In the anti-Unionist camp, it was clearly the Moslems that dominated the movement (see Table 5.1). Their ideological mobilization invariably stressed the historical, religious and linguistic distinctiveness of Eritrea.

The Moslem League categorically rejected historical or cultural ties with Ethiopia. It was argued that the Italians took Eritrea from the Egyptians and not from

the Ethiopians.<sup>53</sup> A typical ideological appeal read,

"Our country has never been subject to Ethiopia, even in the ancient times. On the contrary, the Eritreans were forced on many occasions to hurl back attempted invasions by the Ethiopians who invaded the country for the sake of robbery and plunder..... For what reason then is an attempt being made to annex our country, which is predominantly Moslem, to Ethiopia. We reiterate our emphasis that we have never been ruled by Ethiopia and we challenge the Ethiopian Government to give us the names of its rulers over Eritrea, if such rulers ever existed, and to give the years of their tenure of office and to tell us when their authority passed over to the Italians who finally handed it over to the British."<sup>54</sup> (emphasis added)

The leaders constantly invoked memories of destruction wrought on the lowlands by Ethiopian Christian kings and nobility in the past. Invoking pre-colonial recollections, a memorandum of the Moslem League declares,

"Swarms of Ethiopians used to raid this country at regular intervals and kidnap women and children... take away the people's property .... set fire to their houses and mosques..."<sup>55</sup>

Union with Christian Ethiopia was perceived as a disaster for Moslems. The Ethiopian flag itself symbolized ethnic domination. It was pointed out, for example, that the Ethiopian flag,

"... in addition to having the colours of the Coptic flag, it bears the lion of Judah, symbol of the Hebrew people and the said lion carries a cross over one shoulder."<sup>56</sup>

The leaders constantly reminded their followers of the unfavorable social conditions of Moslems under Haile Selassie,

"The Moslems have no right to any representation in government, or to appoint a representative or to have their education and upbringing well looked after."<sup>57</sup>

The discriminatory ethnic policy in Ethiopia was repeatedly emphasized as a warning against any attempt for Union,

"The bad conditions of the Moslems can be very clearly seen from the constitution of the present Government of Ethiopia. A Moslem does not have the right to be equal to a Coptic Ethiopian or to fill an administrative post of any kind."<sup>58</sup>

and -

"The attitude of the Ethiopian government towards the Moslems leaves no hope for a good future... The government... does not take the least interest, as it ought to, in their languages or revival of their spiritual life or the preservation of their traditional customs... or respect for their persons."<sup>59</sup>

Traditional animosities and continued ethnic discrimination under Haile Selassie were the recurrent themes in the ideological mobilization. The call of the Liberal Progressive Party for "Greater Eritrea", was not accepted either. Eritrean independence with its pre-1935 territorial boundaries was demanded as a viable alternative.<sup>60</sup>

The anti-Unionists as a whole were highly critical of the relationship of state and society under Haile Selassie. Their criticisms invariably stressed the absence of freedom, ethnic equality and representative institutions. "Empire and dictatorship",<sup>61</sup> "tyranny and oppression"<sup>62</sup> were the terms frequently used to describe Ethiopia. Union was considered a historical regression. By comparison, emerging Eritrea was perceived as "... far more disciplined, advanced and civilized."<sup>63</sup> The intense and antagonistic ideological campaigns, by both camps, the Unionists and anti-Unionists, had a significant political impact on the Eritrean society. The pattern of party affiliation is a good indicator.

In 1947, the FPCI interviewed 3,336 rural representatives. Their findings are contained in Table 5.1.<sup>64</sup>

TABLE 5.1  
Party Constituencies (1947)

	<u>Highlands %</u>	<u>Lowlands %</u>
Unionist	71.1	12.9
Anti-Unionist Camp		
Moslem League	14.9	71.6
National Party of Massawa	--	2.5
Liberal Progressive Party	7.8	.04
Pro-Italy Party	6.2	12.9

Source: Four Power Commission of Investigation, Report on Eritrea, Vol.1, New York, United Nations, p.102.

The figures are claims produced by the representatives. The claims, particularly regarding specific numbers of their followers, were often exaggerated and rarely matched the official census. Scientific inference from the Table is admittedly difficult. The figures are not the result of one man, one vote. The procedures for the selection of representatives were not clear either. Given the absence of an independent political organization of the masses, it can be assumed that the politicians had an influential role. The findings, nonetheless, are important. They are strong indicators of the significance of ethnic ideology in the Eritrean domestic politics. By their open admission, the Unionists and anti-Unionists mutually recognized each other's major sources of social support. The predominantly Christian plateau (Hamasien, Serai and Akele Guzai) was the stronghold of the Unionists. The Unionists share in the lowlands also included their followers from the Christian minority in the south Keren area. The Unionist cause was most popular among the Christians in general and on the plateau in particular. In his interview by the FPCI, Tedla Bairu did not hide the truth of the Christian predominance in his Unionist Party.<sup>65</sup> The claim was not contested by the anti-Unionists. The Unionists' affiliate organization in Addis Ababa was predominantly Christian in its support and leadership. Among its prominent leaders were highland

Eritreans such as Ghebre-Meske Habte Mariam, the president of the Association, Goitom Petros, secretary general, Fesseha Beyn, vice secretary, Askale Tackle, treasurer general and members of the committee included Kidane Adgoi, Solomon Weldekidan, Gebre-Michael Fessehaye, Fetur Abraha, Gebre-Maskal Kefle-Egzi, and so on.<sup>66</sup>

The anti-Unionists were most popular in the predominantly Moslem lowlands. The overall number of the Christian elements in the anti-Unionist camp becomes even smaller when we take into account that the claims of the Moslem League and that of the Pro-Italy Party in the highlands also included their Moslem followers. Hence, the anti-Unionist cause was most popular among the Moslems in general and the lowlands in particular. This claim was not contested by the Unionists either. From its detailed findings, the FPCI, composed of countries with disparate foreign policy interests, could not help agreeing on the salient role of ethnic ideology. In its 1948 report, it concluded,

"Representatives of the population have stated their points of view on the future of Eritrea. Nevertheless these wishes are not mature or the result of independent thinking. They are not founded on serious political economic considerations. Religious association played an important part in the wishes expressed by the representatives"<sup>67</sup>  
(emphasis added)

### INTER-ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Violent clashes between the Christian and the Moslem communities were a recurrent phenomenon. Ethnic identities and conflicts were most intense in the urban centers such as Massawa, Keren, Asmara, and Adi Ugri, where the groups came into more frequent contact and increasing competition over scarce resources - jobs, education, and business. Several events can be cited as examples. In April 1946, minor riots broke out in Massawa and Keren, involving Christian assaults on Arabs (mainly immigrants from Yemen).<sup>68</sup> Some Arab property was destroyed. On July 28, the same year, in Asmara, the car of the president of the Arab community was set on fire; Arab shops were looted.<sup>69</sup> A month later, over an incident in the Asmara marketplace involving the death of a Sudanese, two-hours of murderous attacks on the Christian native quarter were carried out by Sudanese troops.<sup>70</sup> Forty-six Christians were killed and over sixty wounded.<sup>71</sup> The riots, in all cases, were strongly perceived as a clash between Moslems and Christians.

In the wake of the formation of the Independence Bloc, inter-ethnic violence was intensified. A few days after the arrival of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, on February 14, 1950, inter-ethnic violence

escalated. In Asmara and its surrounding areas a three-day (February 21-23) bloody inter-ethnic confrontation took place. Reporting on the first day of the riot, The New York Times reported,

"Sword-wielding Moslems and Christians clashed in a bloody riot today. Incomplete casualty figures indicated at least eleven dead and fifty wounded, and fighting still was raging at 10 o'clock tonight."<sup>72</sup>

Moslem shops and market stalls were set on fire. Reports of total casualties ranged from 41 dead and 130 wounded.<sup>73</sup>

The momentum of inter-ethnic violence was aptly described by The London Times as

"... emotional religious motives... displacing political beliefs as the cause of differences and civil disorder."<sup>74</sup>

A state of emergency was declared in the native quarters of Asmara. It took five days to restore order.

Rural inter-ethnic violence was also a lingering problem. Particularly throughout 1950, there were frequent reported incidents of clashes between Moslem Tigre and their Christian counterparts from Hamassien and Serai, and between the Moslem Saho and their Christian neighbors in Akele Guzai.<sup>75</sup> In the face of population growth and the consequent pressure on the land, anti-Moslem sentiment in rural highlands increasingly took an aggressive form. According to Trevaskis, herds and cattle were sent to the

lowlands during the summer and/or the land fringing the plateau was either occupied or claimed.<sup>76</sup> In Hamasien and Serai frequent Christian assaults on the Moslem minority, the "Jiberti", were common. Ibrahim Sultan vividly describes the humiliation that the minority Moslems in the highlands had to encounter:<sup>77</sup> their faces were disfigured; their hands or fingers were cut off; to add insults to injury, the Koran was defiled and Mosques were burnt.

With the intensification of ethnic violence, particularly since the formation of the Independence Bloc, party identification was increasingly polarized along ethnic lines. There were defections from both camps. For example, in his report to the Secretary of State, Merrell, a US diplomat, indicated that in August 1948 more than 300 Ethiopian flags had been reported displayed in the lowlands in celebration of the Emperor's anniversary.<sup>78</sup> A year later, according to the same report, only 13 flags were displayed.<sup>79</sup> In his September 1949 telegram to the British Foreign Office, Drew, the chief administrator of Eritrea, concluded that the Unionist support in the lowlands had virtually disintegrated.<sup>80</sup> On the side of the anti-Unionist camp there was equally a realignment of forces. From within the Christian minority in the Independence Bloc, two splinter groups merged with the Unionist

camp - The Liberal Progressive Unionist Party led by Abraham Tessema and The Independent Eritrea United to Ethiopia Party led by Wolde Selassie Tessema.<sup>81</sup> The members of the United Nations Commission of inquiry, despite their differences regarding the disposal of Eritrea, unanimously reconfirmed the essential finding of the FPCI report - i.e., the salient role of ethnic ideology in the Eritrean national political drama.<sup>82</sup> As its basic premise, the United Nations proposal, "federation", presupposed the ethnic political division in Eritrea. It was, as the United Nations Commissioner aptly put it, a "middle-of-the-road formula".<sup>83</sup> It was a compromise between the Ethiopian nationalism of the Christian highlands and the anti-Ethiopian sentiment of the Moslems.

#### PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The 1952 parliamentary election outcome further underscores the significant role of ethnic ideology.

At the outset, the drafting of the electoral procedures was a focus of intense political debate between the Unionists and anti-unionists. The latter sought to create a mechanism to protect particularly the Moslem minority in the highlands. To this effect, Ibrahim Sultan and his colleagues insisted upon proportional representation.<sup>84</sup> The proposal introduced by the British

authorities was finally accepted by the contestants. The territory was divided into 68 constituencies with roughly 15,000 people in each.<sup>85</sup> It was a highly ethnic-based electoral system. Direct election was introduced only in Asmara and Massawa. In the rural areas, district electoral colleges were established to vote, by secret ballot, for district representatives. The election results showed that bi-communalism was introduced in all spheres of government. According to the United Nations report, out of 68 seats in the parliament, half were filled by Christians and the rest by Moslems.<sup>86</sup> In the executive branch, Tedla Bairu (a highland Christian) and Sheikh Ali Mohamed Mussa Redai (a lowland Moslem) were elected by the parliament as the president and vice president respectively.<sup>87</sup> Arabic and Tigrigna became the official languages. In the context of the historical pattern of ethnic tensions and conflicts, the parliamentary election did not at all imply the germination of democratic politics in Eritrea. The election, to begin with, did not perceive the problem of Eritrea from a national perspective. Citizenship was defined primarily by attachment to one's parochial cultural community rather than to the Eritrean nation. Under such historical circumstances, the "federation" could not have lasted long.

### CRISIS OF HEGEMONY

The Gramscian concept of hegemony, here, denotes the existence of a coherent class leadership.<sup>88</sup> It implies the ideological unity of a class and its ability to universalize its class project (interest) by drawing the masses into its own realm of ideological discourse. We speak of hegemony when a class, as a whole, is able not only to dominate but also to "lead". Hegemony is essentially an anti-sectarian concept. The Eritrean political drama clearly reveals the lingering crisis of hegemony of the petty-bourgeois class, the heir presumptive to the colonial state. This can be inferred from the preceding analysis.

Theoretically, within the national framework of Eritrea and from the point of view of Eritrean nationalists, the rational course of action for the members of the petty-bourgeois class would be to stick together; to cement political, ideological and organizational unity, and to dwell, in their ideological mobilization, on a common theme -- such as over fifty years of European colonial oppression, for example. If such had been the case in practice, it is likely that Haile Selassie's policy might have faced greater difficulties in Eritrea. The members of the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class lacked a shared conscious-

ness of their class membership. Their political, ideological and organizational fragmentation is a telling example. The class never had a defined national program to rouse the people and draw them into the process of national unification -- to unite them around itself, as in the case of most anti-colonial movements in Black Africa. As a pluralistic (i.e., Moslem/Christian) association, "Mahbar Fikre Hagar" was never sustained. The meeting at Bet Georgis only served to widen the schism within the ranks of the class. Rather than the common long-term class interest, within the national framework of Eritrea, sectarian political and ideological interests were stressed. The members never transcended the fragmentation which they themselves had provoked. Parochialism was their very essence. The personality of the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class, right from the start, was wrought with irreconcilable contradictions. The Class demanded union with Ethiopia. At the same time it sought independence. It settled for limited autonomy, but failed to defend autonomous Eritrea. It called Ethiopia a democratic state. The Ethiopian state was not democratic. It had an exaggerated image of itself and of Eritrea. Yet it could hardly withstand the onslaught of imperial autocracy. Union with Ethiopia? Eritrean independence? Limited local autonomy? Amare Tekle was quite correct to conclude that

"...Eritrea was a confused nation (inappropriate term in our context - M.A.) which knew neither what it wanted nor where it was heading."<sup>89</sup>

As Eritreans, the members of the petty bourgeois class lacked a collective national consciousness. Among its members, there was no fundamental consensus on what constituted the Eritrean national self. They fought between themselves not as Eritreans but as two hostile ethnic groups. De Gropello, the president of the CRIE and Italian quasi-diplomat, had an intimate knowledge of the members of the Eritrean petty-bourgeois class. His disparaging comments aptly convey their characteristic weakness as a class. According to Drew's recollection,

"Gropello remarked that Eritreans were merely puppets and that Italy, Ethiopia, and Britain should get together to come to an agreement for the disposal of the territory."<sup>90</sup>

De Gropello might as well have said, more directly, that the members of the petty-bourgeois class were not Eritrean nationalists, period! In the historical context of political, ideological, and organizational fragmentation of the members, the truncated life of "Liberal Eritrea" was a foregone conclusion. The members manipulated ethnic sentiments and traditional animosities for political purpose. But this was not entirely the case. They also took ethnic allegiance seriously. Within the national

framework of Eritrea, the class lacked a subjective understanding of itself and of its historical role.

Ethnic Ideology was, clearly, a political force. It requires investigation and explanation. The next chapter will focus on the specific sources of ethnic ideology.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. See Article 4 in the revised Ethiopian Constitution of 4th November, 1955 reproduced in Imperial Ethiopian Institute of Public Administration, Organization of Imperial Ethiopian Government, Addis Ababa, 1969, p.2.

2. Ibid, Article 126, p.35.

3. Ibid, Article 21, p.9.

4. See Article 4 of the text of the constitution adopted by the Eritrean Parliament on 10 July, 1952, in United Nations, GAOR (A/2188) op.cit., p.80.

5. The preamble of the Eritrean constitution naively declared "And that the Federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia maybe harmonious and fruitful", Ibid, p.79. The first panel of legal consultants equally commented that "the regime prescribed in the General Assembly's resolution... can only operate satisfactorily if Ethiopia accepts it freely and without any expressed reservation, and intends to apply it in good faith." See *ibid*, p.73. Such hopes were unrealistic.

6. For encroachments on the autonomous rights of Eritrea such as the banning of political parties, the suspension of the Eritrean parliament, the removal of the Eritrean flag and the imposition of Amharic as the official language see Richard Lobbman "The Eritrean War: Issues and Implications" Canadian Journal of African Study 10, no.2 (1976):335-346. For discussion of the period see also Haggai Erlich "The Eritrean Autonomy 1952-1962: Its Influence and Its Contribution to Further Escalation" in Yoram Dinstein (ed.) Models of Autonomy, New Brunswick, Transactions Books, 1981, pp.171-181.

7. Quoted in Ernest W. Luther Ethiopia Today, California, Stanford University Press, 1958, p.147.

8. See the revised Ethiopian Constitution, op.cit.

9. The Proclamation is reproduced in Ethiopia Observer, 5, no.4 (1963):311-312.

10. Time, October 13, 1952, p.38.
11. An apt expression by Addis Hiwet, The Nationalities Question in Ethiopia and the Horn, n.p., 1978, p.22.
12. Haile Selassie's reign since the days of his regency and particularly since his return from exile, had been marked by the emergence of an increasingly centralized state administration mainly involving the establishment of central bureaucracy, the modern national army and national treasury. For useful references on the subject read - Haile Selassie I, My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937 trans. and annotated by Edward Ullendorff, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976, especially pp.50-200. Also, Christopher Clapham, Haile Selassie's Government, New York, Praeger, 1969; Perham, op.cit.; and Robert L. Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1970.
13. Imperial Ethiopian Government, "When Ethiopian Government of Eritrea is Resumed: The Proposed Administration of Eritrea by the Imperial Ethiopian Government" reproduced in Ethiopian Review 3, no.3-5 (September/October /November 1946):14.
14. Arthur A. Schiller, "Eritrea: Constitution and Federation with Ethiopia" The American Journal of Comparative Law 2, no.3 (Summer 1953):375-383.
15. On the history of Party formation, several sources have been consulted -- Great Britain, FO371/57173, the War Office to Foreign Office, March 1946, pp.5-10; Ibrahim Sultan's interview op.cit.; Sabby, op.cit., pp.208-210; Tekeste Habtu, The Role of the Eritrean Political Parties in the Establishment of the Federation Between Ethiopia and Eritrea, B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie I University, 1968, pp.3-12; and Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.60-76.
16. Sabby, op.cit., p.208.
17. Tekeste Habtu, op.cit., p.8. See also Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, p.60.
18. Ibrahim Sultan's interview, op.cit.
19. Tekeste Habtu, op.cit., p.8; FO371/57173 p.60, and Trevaskis, pp.62-63.

20. Sabby, op.cit., pp.209-210.
21. Ibrahim Sultan's interview, op.cit.
22. Ibid. For a short biographical background on Wolde Ab Wolde Mariam see Puglisi, op.cit. p.291.
23. Ibrahim Sultan's interview, op.cit.
24. United States Archives, 884.014/2-2047, Cole to the Secretary of State, February 20, 1947, p.4.
25. Great Britain, FO742/18 regarding Liberal Progressive Party documents (File no. SB/A.5), 1947.
26. Gouldner op.cit., p.26.
27. Therborn, op.cit., p.116.
28. Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., p.109.
29. FPCI vol.I, p.87.
30. It is argued in detail in FPCI App.95.
31. FPCI App.103, p.2 or App.124, p.2; Statement by the chairman of the delegation of the Moslem League of Eritrea at the 55th meeting of the Ad Hoc Political Committee on 24th November, 1950, United Nations, GAOR (A/AC.38/L.51) p.8; United Nations, GAOR (A/AC.38/L.46) op.cit., pp.12-13 and pp.15-16.
32. FPCI App.124, p.1.
33. It is listed as 506,000 Christians and 524,000 Moslems and 8,000 animists. See Report on the United Nations Commission for Eritrea, United Nations, GAOR, 5th Session, Supplement no.8, (A/1285) New York, June 1950, p.10. The FPCI estimate is more or less the same. See App.3 and 5 which contain rural and urban population respectively.
34. For a general discussion on the two terms, see Therborn, op.cit., pp.121-123.
35. FPCI App.95.
36. FPCI App.121, p.2.

37. FPCI App.95, p.5.
38. Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.60-61.
39. FPCI Vol.I, p.8. Threats of excommunication against dissidents were not uncommon. For reports from witnesses see FPCI App.99, pp.7-9.
40. The English translation of the Archbishop's speech is contained in Great Britain, FO742/23.
41. The Pankhursts, Ethiopia and Eritrea, op.cit., p.66.
42. The English translation, quoted in Hailu Habtu, Aspects of Tigrigna Literature until 1974, M. Phil. Thesis, The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, June 1981, p.96. For information on Zerai see Chapter 6 of my study.
43. FPCI App.93, p.3.
44. FPCI App.162, p.4. For comparisons between colonial bondage and union with Ethiopia see App.93, p.2.
45. Pankhurst, The British Policy in Eritrea, op.cit., pp.26-27.
46. A detailed argument is found in FPCI App.101, pp.1-9. Under the Italian East African empire, Eritrea and Tigray were merged to form a single administrative unit.
47. Ibid, pp.6-7.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid, p.6.
50. Ibid, p.8.
51. Ibid.
52. Pankhurst, The British Policy in Eritrea, op.cit., p.20.
53. United Nations, GAOR (A/AC.38/L.46) op.cit., p.5.
54. Ibid.

55. FPCI App.103, p.5. For a slightly different translation see Great Britain, FO742/23, Memorandum of the Eritrean Moslem League, November 10, 1947, p.12.

56. Great Britain FO742/23, Moslem League's Memorandum, 1951, op.cit., p.12.

57. United Nations, GAOR (A/AC.38/L.51) op.cit. p.8.

58. FPCI App.103, p.4. For a slightly different translation see Great Britain FO742/23, Moslem League's Memorandum, 1947, op.cit., p.10.

59. FPCI App.103, p.5. This is also found, with a slightly different translation, in Great Britain, FO742/23, Moslem League's Memorandum, 1947, op.cit. p.13.

60. Ibid, p.5.

61. FPCI App.101, p.9.

62. FPCI App.107, p.1.

63. This was the claim of the Moslem League. See FPCI App.107, p.2. The Liberal Progressive Party also shared the same perception. See for example FPCI App.101, p.7.

64. For detailed findings consult FPCI App.159-173.

65. FPCI, App.121, p.4.

66. United States Archives, 884.014/10-345, op.cit.

67. FPCI Vol.I, p.116.

68. Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., p.67.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid, p.68.

71. Ibid. According to the FPCI estimate, 42 were killed and 85 wounded, Vol.I, p.29.

72. The New York Times, February 22, 1950, p.17.

73. The Manchester Guardian, February 1950, p.7. According to the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, 50 persons were killed. See United Nations, GAOR (A/1285) op.cit., p.29.
74. The London Times, February 23, 1950, p.6.
75. Trevaskis, Eritrea, a Colony in Transition, op.cit., p.109.
76. Ibid, p.55.
77. Ibrahim Sultan's interview, op.cit.
78. United States Archives, 884.00/8-2949, Merrell to the Secretary of State, August 30, 1949.
79. Ibid.
80. Great Britain, FO371/73788, a telegram from Drew to the Foreign Office, 7 September, 1949.
81. United Nations, GAOR (A/1285), op.cit., p.16.
82. For details, see *ibid*, pp.17-21.
83. United Nations, GAOR (A/2188), op.cit., p.2.
84. Ibid, p.16 and also pp.36-37.
85. Ibid, p.36. For more details see Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.118-119.
86. United Nations, Department of Public Information, Shaping A Peoples Destiny: The Story of Eritrea and the U.N., New York, 1953, p.24. Also see Time, op.cit., p.38.
87. United Nations, GAOR (A/2188), op.cit., p.37.
88. Various writers have commented on Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The following have been useful references: Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.) Approaches to Gramsci, London, Writers and Readers, 1982; Gywn A. Williams, "The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation", Journal of the History of Ideas, 21, no.4(October/December 1960): 586-599; and John Merrington "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism", The Socialist Register, New York, Monthly Review 1968, pp.145-176. Gramsci's application of

the concept to a case study is found in his "Notes on Italian History", Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, edited and trans. by Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971, pp.52-120 where he discusses the formation and nature of the modern Italian state in light of the history of the French Revolution.

89. Amare Teckle, *op.cit.*, p.85.

90. Great Britain, FO371/73789 - telegram to the Foreign Office, (no.206), 22 November 1949 regarding a conversation between Drew and De Gropello.

## CHAPTER 6

SOURCES OF ETHNIC IDEOLOGY

In an interesting preliminary essay on ancient Ethiopian history, Hailu Habtu, an Ethiopian nationalist, claims that the Axumite civilization is essentially indigenous in character.<sup>1</sup> The thesis is advanced in opposition to what he calls the dominant Eurocentric scholarship which invariably stresses the external origins (the thesis of Semitic Sabeian origin, for example). The essay is written in light of the current proliferation of nationalist movements in Ethiopia (e.g. Eritrea and Tigray). The political motivation of the essay is made explicit in the introduction. He writes, for example,

"Present consciousness interprets the past and influences the future. Both the interpretation of the past and the vision of the future shape our daily lives. In Ethiopia, and in the wider Horn of Africa, the present is a grim reality of war and want and of destruction and deprivation. Apart from forces outside the region, the chief architects of that reality are the inhabitants of the region - especially its "elites". If the way these elites view their past now was less than satisfactory, might a more wholesome perspective remedy of the excesses and tragic consequences of the myopic chauvinisms and nationalisms of the present. This preliminary study aspires to contribute towards the formulation of such an alternative perspective." (emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

A political reading of his thesis strongly suggests the need for an all-Ethiopian national image formation on the basis of the common cultural heritage indigenously rooted in Ethiopian history.<sup>3</sup> The study is a legitimate scholarly pursuit. His plea to Ethiopian intelligentsia to be critical of European scholarship on Ethiopian history is admirable. However, the author's implicit suggestion on the resolution of the crisis of "nation-building" in Ethiopia has a serious drawback. The author seems to assume that ethnic conflict is a purely cultural phenomenon. Hence, his, apparently, naive anticipatory hope that the recognition by the Ethiopian elite of their common cultural heritage may serve as a panacea to the present crisis - the "myopic chauvinisms and nationalisms of the present".

Ethnic conflict is not a purely cultural phenomenon. It is not inevitable that groups engage in conflict merely because they happen to belong to different cultural communities. Ethnic conflict is primarily a political phenomenon. It deals with who gets what, how, and why. As a political problem, it requires a political solution. The Eritrean case is a good illustration. This chapter elaborates the material and socio-psychological ingredients of ethnic ideology in the Eritrean political drama. It will be argued that the politicization of ethnic

ideology was neither a purely cultural phenomenon nor should it be simply dismissed as a false consciousness. There were concrete political realities and perceptions that were tapped and provoked in the wake of the crisis of the colonial state and the ensuing intra-class cleavages for control of the state. The argument is developed by focusing on three major subheadings: pre-colonial experience, colonial experience, and involvement of external forces in the Eritrean domestic politics.

#### PRE-COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

Unlike Somalia and Libya, the two other former Italian colonies, Eritrea has no cultural unity of its own.<sup>4</sup> The name itself is the product of late nineteenth century Italian colonialism. In its complex form, Eritrea is a mosaic of religious and linguistic groups. There are Christians, Moslems, and animists. Within the Christian community there are Coptic Orthodox (the predominant), Protestants, and Catholics. The Moslem community contains various Islamic orders - Mirghaniyya also known as Khatmiyya (the predominant), Qadiriyya, and Sammaniyya.<sup>5</sup> Besides Tigriña and Tigre, the two predominant languages, Arabic, Saho, Afar, Bilen, Beja, Baza and Barya are also spoken. In its simple form, the essential characteristic of Eritrea is its conspicuous geographical and cultural division between

the sedentary Tigrigna-speaking Christian highlands (i.e., the Tigreans) and the nomadic Tigre-speaking Moslem lowlands (i.e., the Tigre). In this essential cultural division marked by visible differences in life style, language, and religion, the latter has, historically, been the most enduring basis of ethnic identity.

The pre-colonial history of the Eritrean region is often misunderstood. In the works of some commentators, Pool, for example, Eritrea, as a single entity, is, uncritically, dismissed as an "imperial periphery" over which the Abyssinian state (traditional Ethiopian state) had little or no political control.<sup>6</sup> This is misleading. Their analysis, essentially descriptive, fails to see the shared historical and cultural experience particularly between highland Eritrea and Ethiopia. Others have even gone further to reject any cultural ties. In his obsession to justify the nationalists' separatist demand, Bereket, a Christian highland Eritrean, a pre-1974 "expert in Legitimation"<sup>7</sup> under Haile Selassie's government,<sup>8</sup> and a post-1974 "convert" to Eritrean nationalism, confines the term "Habasha" (Abyssinian) to the Amhara region. He writes, for example,

... the Amharas who came to be known as Abyssinians."<sup>9</sup>

His claim is strikingly at odds with everyday experience,

oral history, and the works of many historians.

In their respective regional identity, the Amharas and Tigreans may refer to each other as Amhara or Tigrean. Throughout history, however, they have retained a "supra-regional" and "supra-linguistic" collective reference, "Habasha". In their everyday languages, for example, the Amhara and Tigrean communities refer to their traditional food, dress, music, and even their languages as "Habasha".<sup>10</sup> Kolmodin's collection of Eritrean highlands' oral history amply informs us that, culturally and politically, the Eritrean plateau has been the northern most citadel of the Christian Amhara/Tigrean state known as the Abyssinian kingdom.<sup>11</sup> The Amhara/Tigrean, collectively constitute the historical bearer of the modern Ethiopian state. The fabrication of the myth of the Solomonid monarchy, the establishment of the Abyssinian state in the fourteenth century and its resurgence in the nineteenth century are, essentially, the product of joint Amhara/Tigrean history.<sup>12</sup> Their shared cultural and political history is aptly summed up by Levine,

"Despite the pervasiveness of regionalism among Amhara-Tigreans... some sense of a truly national consciousness seems to have been present at least since the fourteenth century. This manifests itself through references to a national ethnic community; through the agency of a national monarch; and above all through the organization and ministrations of a national church."  
(emphasis added)<sup>13</sup>

Ethiopian nationalism, understood in its "supra-regional" and "supra-linguistic" identity, has a long history in highland Eritrea and has expressed itself in a number of ways.

At critical historical junctures in the past, Amharas and Tigreans had often suppressed their respective regionalism and coalesced against the traditional enemies of the Abyssinian kingdom - Islam and European powers.<sup>14</sup> The expansionist ambition of the Ottoman empire and the sixteenth century Moslem holy war led by Ahmed Gran were both repulsed in the north by the joint Amhara/Tigrean united front. It was with active support of highland Eritrea that the Egyptian forces were annihilated, in 1876, at the battle of Gura, located in the Eritrean region. The Italian's march to the plateau was highly resisted.<sup>15</sup> Oral history informs us that the highlanders (when Menelik II, emperor of Ethiopia, abandoned Eritrea to the Italians after the battle of Adwa) longed for the legendary Abyssinian messianic ruler, Tewodros, who would render their salvation. Their period of despair was expressed in the following loosely translated verse,

"We have been told Tewodros would come,  
Where is he?  
Without witnessing his arrival,  
Darkness fell upon us.  
The staff of Moses,  
Which destroyed the Pharaoh,  
Only God knows."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the colonial rule, the Eritrean Coptic Church was the custodian of Amhara/Tigrean culture. The colonial authorities had deprived the Church of its traditional "Gulti" rights. But its ideological influence was hardly undermined. Unlike the colonial experience in other countries, the influence of European missionaries was negligible. Neither Catholicism nor Protestantism, for example, had a successful history. Catholics and Protestants in Eritrea are minorities. The Italians' inclination to avoid large scale land alienation in the highlands had its roots largely in their fear of provoking Ethiopian nationalism.

The history of Ethiopian patriots from the highlands, in the early years of colonial rule, has yet to be written. Tekeste Negash's essay on the intellectual and political biography of Blatta Gebre Egziabher Gila Mariam (1860-1914) strongly suggests the sense of Ethiopian identity among highland Eritrean elite during Italian colonial rule.<sup>17</sup> Blatta's memoir written in 1887, his letter to Menelik II, and his later works in poetry, reveal his anti-colonial feeling and burning desire for the restoration of Ethiopian unity. During the fascist occupation of Ethiopia, highland Eritrea had produced many prominent Ethiopian patriots, among whom were Abrah Deboch, Mogus Asgedom, and Zerai Deress.<sup>18</sup> Particularly, the latter is the

incarnation of the history of Ethiopian nationalism of highland Eritrea. Describing the dramatic patriotic act of Zerai Deress, Greenfield wrote,

"... in 1937 an imperial ceremony was to commemorate the first anniversary of the occupation of Addis Abeba. An Eritrean youth aged twenty-one named Zerai Deress was sent to Rome to present some captured Ethiopian trophies, including a sword to certain high officials at a function attended by both Mussolini and the King of Italy. Zerai did not know that he would have to present these in a public place where he could become an object of ridicule. In the middle of the parade his eyes lighted on the captured gold lion of Judah which the Italians had removed from its stand near the Addis Abeba railway station. Identifying himself with Ethiopia's shame he knelt to pray. Two policemen tried to move him, but he turned furiously upon them, drew the ceremonial sword and killed five fascist officials before he in his turn was brought down by gunfire. Seriously wounded he was taken to hospital and some years later he died in an Italian island prison."<sup>19</sup>

What is most striking is that Zerai was only twenty-one, born under colonial Eritrea. What an example of a concentrated reflection of the long history of "supra-regional" and "supra-linguistic" Ethiopian identity in the Eritrean plateau! A strong sense of Abyssinia/Ethiopian nationalism, in its anti-Islamic and anti-European manifestations, has been a pervasive historical phenomenon in highland Eritrea.

The historical experience of the Eritrean Moslems,

particularly the lowlanders, appears to differ drastically. Within Eritrea, the Moslem/Christian population ratio is roughly balanced. Within the larger political framework of Ethiopia, however, the Eritrean Moslems have, historically, been a minority.

Historically, they had little or no sense of shared identity with the Amhara/ Tigrean community. The Abyssinian state was primarily a theocratic state where religion and politics were highly interwoven. The Abyssinian state pursued, defended, and maintained its secular interests - land, tribute, and trade under the banner of religion.<sup>20</sup> Its solution for territorial aggrandizement and empire-building was invariably sought by forceful imposition of the Christian Amhara/ Tigrean culture. An Ethiopian historian, Tamrat Tadesse, has aptly summarized the intimate relationship between religion and politics in Ethiopian history. Historically,

"The evangelization of the Ethiopian region followed very closely the expansion of the Christian state."<sup>21</sup>

The "Christian Jihad",<sup>22</sup> however, had been unsuccessful in the Eritrean Lowlands. Particularly since the sixteenth century -- with the rise of the Islamic state of the Fung kingdom in Sennar, the Ottoman power in Massawa and its peripheries, and the nineteenth century Egyptian presence in the lowlands -- the Abyssinian state hardly exercised

any hegemonic power.<sup>23</sup> The Abyssinian kings and nobility had never ceased to claim the region. The process of full and successful incorporation was recurrently interrupted by the presence of the Fungs, the Turks and the Egyptians. The arrival of the Italians in Eritrea in late nineteenth Century abruptly brought an end to the process. In both political and cultural sense, the Eritrean lowland region was truly an "Imperial periphery". That the region still remains predominantly Islamic is a living historical example. Tribute extraction by the Abyssinian state was invariably intermittent and assumed the form of raids and plunders. The lowlands were "raiding zones".<sup>24</sup>

The Moslems perceived the Abyssinian state with intense hostility. In their traditional folklore there are great events that are recollected. Among them, according to Littmann, are the destructions wrought upon the lowlands by the Abyssinian predatory kings and nobility.<sup>25</sup> In the Egyptian/Ethiopian wars of 1875 and 1876 the lowlanders actively aided the Egyptians and have produced their own heroes and martyrs who embodied the symbol of resistance against the Christian Abyssinian state.<sup>26</sup> Othman Saleh Sabby, an Eritrean nationalist, from the lowlands, claims that the Moslems did not perceive the Egyptian occupation of the lowlands as a colonial rule.<sup>27</sup> It is probably plausible, particularly given the religious commonality and

the anti-Abyssinian sentiment of the lowlands. The anti-Italian resistance was mainly confined to the highlands. It scarcely attracted any concerted sympathy from the lowlands whose ruling families did not hesitate to reach an accord with the Italians.<sup>28</sup>

Historically, the spread of Islam in the region has been the direct result of political penetration by Moslem forces. As a result, Ethiopian history in the north has been marked by one of recurrent political rivalry between Christians and Moslems. This rivalry is expressed in a number of ways in the Amhara/Tigrean tradition. Anti-infidel sentiments directed against the Moslems pervades the Ethiopian traditional literature. This is fully portrayed in the Imperial Chronicles (written by court historians). Abraham Demoz, a student of Ethiopian literature, informs us that

"...Islam and the Moslems have provoked some of the most virulent and unrelenting invective in Ethiopian historical writing. .... It is not merely individual Moslems that come under verbal attack but Moslems as a whole."<sup>29</sup>

Amhara/Tigrean folklore is no less permeated by anti-Moslem feeling. The traditional saying in highland Eritrea that

"The sky has no pillars  
and the Moslem has no land."<sup>30</sup>

clearly articulates the Amhara/Tigrean historical perception of the Moslems.

The condition of existence of the "Jiberti", the minority Moslems in the highlands, was even worse. They were deprived of their original rights to land and were often excluded from local and state administration. Their persecution was sanctioned by law and tradition. Reconversion did not take away the stigma of having been a Moslem. Eritrean highland folklore, for example, refers to the reconverts as

"Christians by day,  
Moslems by night."<sup>31</sup>

Simmons' description appropriately summarizes the plight of the "Jiberti" (as a Moslem community) in the Abyssinian kingdom, -- a plight recounted, in the past, by travellers and historians alike,

"... at many times in the past there has been considerable anti-Moslem feeling, stemming partially from the fear that the Jabartis (sic. a reference to "Jiberti" - M.A.) would side with the foreign Moslem enemies of Ethiopia in times of danger. Such feeling has led to levying of special imposts on the Jabartis, to their persecution, and even to their forced conversion. King Theodore, for example, dealt with the Jabarti problem in 1864 by simply issuing a decree forbidding Islam and declaring that those Moslems who refused to become Christians would be regarded as rebels... Several times in the past, moreover, Imperial decrees have deprived Jabartis of land held by hereditary right, which has led many rural Moslems to turn to weaving and trade..."<sup>32</sup>

Polera draws analogy between the persecution of the "Jiberti" and that of the Jews in European history.<sup>33</sup>

As regards Ethiopia, therefore, the historical experiences of the Moslem and Christian communities in Eritrea were essentially contradictory. Historically, the sense of Ethiopian affiliation of the highlands has been equally matched by the anti-Ethiopian sentiment of the Moslems in general and the lowlands in particular. The ideological battle (noted in Chapter 5) between the Unionists and anti-Unionists, as symbolized by the bitter debate between Tedla Bairu and Ibrahim Sultan on the question of Eritrean national self, is reflective of their respective historical experience. The past was brought into play by living generations. History was not a mere background but was actively foregrounded - the here and now.

#### COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

Interested mainly in producing internal collaborators, colonialism had done little to develop national loyalties among Eritreans.

Administrative units coincided with ethnic division. Colonial schools for natives were largely segregated on a cultural basis. Justifying the Italian colonial policy of segregated schools in the 1930's,

Malvezzi de Medici, a professor of law in Florence and a member of the International Colonial Institute, wrote,

"...the marked difference of the native races, the difference in the religions, beliefs and languages spoken by the natives, makes the problem of education in the colony of Eritrea very complex and difficult to solve. It is not yet, or will it probably ever be, possible to adopt a uniform school regulation, not only because of the wide diversity in the degree of civilization of the various races which inhabit Eritrea, but also because their prejudices and their century-old mutual antipathy do not permit children of different race and religion to be educated in the same school."<sup>34</sup>

The policy of separate schools could hardly have been the solution. Colonialism, nevertheless, did not allow Moslem and Christian children to be raised together and share experiences. Urban residence equally precluded collective experience. Geza Berhanu and Accrai, the two largest Moslem quarters in Asmara, were no less a measure of the separate experience of the Moslem and the Christian within the colonial world. Such designs may have brought political order to the colonial state. But they also helped reinforce, between the Christian and Moslem communities, a sense of separateness already rooted in pre-colonial history.

An increasing divergence in the cultural orientations, particularly among the younger members of the petty-

bourgeoisie, was, already, highly visible in the forties.

For example, Trevaskis perceptively notes that

"The urban Moslem, as an expression of his newly acquired self-respect, is revealing an increasing tendency to employ Arabic both in conversation and written communications, while the Christian intelligentsia tends to learn Italian (or in the case of the more youthful, English) as a secondary language.

While the Moslem townsman by reading newspapers and books and by attending cinema shows with Arabic dialogues draws closer to the Arabic world, his Christian counterpart avidly absorbs European culture from Italian and British sources. This cultural divergency expresses itself in a number of ways. For example, while the old generation of Jiberti like their ancestors are as Abyssinian in physical appearance as the Christians, the paler complexions and straighter hair of many of the younger Moslems speak of the Arab wives which their fathers are now acquiring."<sup>35</sup>

Such a growing cultural divergency only served to frustrate the development of class unity among the members. Today, there are Moslem leaders who claim Eritrea as an Arab country. For example, Sabby had repeatedly vowed to establish an independent Arab Eritrea.<sup>36</sup> Such a claim (more on this in the next Chapter) has not passed unchallenged by their Christian counterparts. Summing up the lingering contemporary crisis of Eritrean nationalism, Wolde ab Wolde Mariam had this to say in his 1971 Beirut press conference,

"...the Eritrean communities lived always separately even after the country was united by the Italians in 1889 and have never lived under a government of their own together for almost four hundred years. In other words, the two communities are still strangers to one another."<sup>37</sup>

The colonial experience hardly brought the two communities together. Traditional animosities and prejudices were, in fact, rekindled, heightened, and enlarged in the face of new inequalities introduced by the modern state and market economy.

Metropolitan merchant capital had left Eritrea

TABLE 6.1  
TRADING CENTERS, 1933  
(Value in Lira)

<u>Origin and Destination</u>	<u>Export</u>	<u>Import</u>
I. Highland Region		
Adi Caieh	2,589,646	4,096,148
Adi Ugri	887,531	647,913
Asmara	<u>14,875,254</u>	<u>17,581,314</u>
TOTAL	18,352,431	22,325,375
II. Lowland Region		
Agordat	4,037	4,019
Assab	804,523	739,011
Barentu	27,402	27,052
Tessenei	63,177	94,387
Om Hager	81,779	505,538
Cheren	<u>2,520</u>	<u>36,580</u>
TOTAL	983,438	1,406,587

Source: Derived from Annuario delle Colonie Italiane, 1935, pp.628 and 630.

internally unintegrated and internationally unevenly integrated. There were visible regional differences in the impact of the colonial economic activities. As a rule, the lowland region was less integrated into the international market. As Table 6.1 indicates, nearly 95% of the colonial import/export trade activities were centered in the highlands. This appeared to be more or less the typical pattern during the colonial period.<sup>38</sup> The largely small and basically service industries were also mainly confined to the highlands.<sup>39</sup> The growth of urbanization similarly shows uneven regional development. The highland region was more urbanized than the lowlands. According to Table 6.2, 65% of the total urban population was concentrated in the

TABLE 6.2  
ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION OF URBAN POPULATION

<u>ETHNIC GROUP</u>	<u>HIGHLANDS</u>	<u>LOWLANDS</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>
		<u>Red Sea</u>	<u>Western Province</u>	
Christian	93,000	2,000	6,000	101,000
Moslem	31,000	41,000	17,000	89,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124,000</b>	<b>43,000</b>	<b>23,000</b>	<b>190,000</b>

Source: United Nations, Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea, GAOR, 5th Session, Supplement No.8 (A/1285), New York 1950, p.11.

highlands. The western region, the largest Moslem province, had only 12%. 53% of the total urban population was comprised of Christians. In education, employment in the colonial administration, in trade and business professions, cultural division of labor was also manifest.

Cultural division of labor had not been uncommon in pre-colonial period.<sup>40</sup> Colonial prejudices reinforced it in the modern setting. Describing the colonial prejudices that formed the basis for policy guidelines, De Medici wrote,

"...for the school of arts and crafts, heed must be given to the century-old traditions and even superstitions which limit the element that can be recruited for the various trades. There is no difficulty, however with the Moslems; to them all trades and vocations are noble, but for the people of the plateau it would be impossible, for example, to get anyone to submit to learning the trade of blacksmith, which is looked upon with contempt in their traditions and reserved to certain families who cling to it by heredity as their only means of living, are not allowed to marry in to families of different origin, that is those following other trades, and are not able to own land. With the infiltration of our civilization it is hoped that these prejudices will be abandoned, but it will be long before this happens." <sup>41</sup>

In the predominantly Moslem Keren (Cheren), an exclusive school for arts and crafts was established.<sup>42</sup> Most of the major colonial schools intended to produce low-level

TABLE 6.3SCHOOLS UNDER THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

<u>Region</u>	<u>No.</u>
Highlands	54
Lowlands	<u>20</u>
TOTAL	74

Sources: Derived from Aradom Tedla Facts about Eritrea, Asmara, Printing and Stationary Department, 1964, p.21. The figures exclude the schools in Keren (lowland) and Akele Gazai (highland).

bureaucrats were located in the highlands (see Table 2.2 in Chapter 2). According to Piccioli, the religious composition of the student body in 1935 reveals that only 15% constituted Moslems.<sup>43</sup>

The educational policy was the same under the British administration. Table 6.3 is indicative of regional inequalities. 73% of the mainly elementary schools were confined to the highlands.

The disruptive social consequences of colonial prejudices were conspicuous in the field of employment in the colonial administration. The lower level of educational background of the Moslems particularly outside arts

and crafts, had invariably provided the Christian elements with a clear advantage.

Of the total students in training to become teachers in English in 1951, for example, 60% were Christians.<sup>44</sup> Between August 1951 to the end of March 1952, 1140 Eritreans took the test for employment in the British administration. 76% constituted Christians.<sup>45</sup> Table 6.4 leaves no doubt about the gross underrepresentation of the Moslems. Of the total Eritreans employed, the Moslems comprised only 38%. The highest position attained was by a Christian in the Secretariat branch. Overall, the rank distribution shows a clear advantage enjoyed by the Christian elements. In every title category, with few exceptions, Christians visibly outnumbered the Moslems. The feeling of uncertainty from being left behind was pervasive among the Moslems, particularly, the urban elements. As Trevaskis notes,

"With the Moslem of the West this has taken the form of an anti-Christian sentiment derived from the Moslem's fear of the Christian's greater sophistication, his virtual monopoly of the superior government appointments open to Eritreans..."<sup>46</sup>

The fear that union with anti-secular Ethiopia under Haile Selassie would bring even more inequalities was unbearable. There was also additional source for the fear. The Moslem elements had an upper hand in the field of trade and

TABLE 6.4

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MOSLEMSIN THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION OF ERITREA

	<u>CHRISTIAN</u>	<u>MOSLEM</u>
I. <u>Secretariat:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	1	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	6	2
Artisans & Others	<u>14</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	21	12
II. <u>District Administration:</u>		
A. <u>Asmara &amp; Hamasien</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	4	1
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	22	2
Artisans & Others	<u>89</u>	<u>18</u>
TOTAL	115	21
B. <u>Akele Guzai</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	4	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	12	5
Artisans & Others	<u>79</u>	<u>58</u>
TOTAL	95	63
C. <u>Western Province</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	2
Professional & Technical	1	0
Clerical	13	26
Artisans & Others	<u>5</u>	<u>38</u>
TOTAL	19	66
D. <u>Red Sea Province</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	3
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	1	6
Artisans & Others	<u>3</u>	<u>30</u>
TOTAL	4	39
E. <u>Serae</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	5	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	11	0
Artisans & Others	<u>20</u>	<u>2</u>
TOTAL	36	02

TABLE 6.4 cont.

	<u>CHRISTIAN</u>	<u>MOSLEM</u>
<b>III. <u>Legal Department:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	14
Clerical	25	18
Artisans & Others	<u>24</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	49	42
<b>IV. <u>Department of Custody Property:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	3	0
Artisans & Others	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL	9	3
<b>V. <u>Department of Finance:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	8	0
Artisans & Others	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>
TOTAL	15	2
<b>VI. <u>Inland Revenue:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	12	1
Artisans & Others	<u>15</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	27	2
<b>VII. <u>Customs &amp; Excise:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	79	16
Clerical	0	0
Artisans & Others	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
TOTAL	82	20
<b>VIII. <u>Trade &amp; Supplies Department:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	3	0
Artisans & Others	<u>10</u>	<u>1</u>
TOTAL	13	1
<b>IX. <u>Agriculture &amp; Veterinary:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	16	8
Clerical	56	1
Artisans & Others	<u>131</u>	<u>42</u>
TOTAL	213	51

TABLE 6.4 cont.

	<u>CHRISTIAN</u>	<u>MOSLEM</u>
X. <u>Department of Education:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	221	96
Clerical	6	0
Artisans & Others	<u>61</u>	<u>26</u>
TOTAL	288	122
XI. <u>Department of Labor:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	2	0
Clerical	6	1
Artisans & Others	<u>9</u>	<u>13</u>
TOTAL	17	14
XII. <u>Medical Department:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	14	2
Clerical	16	3
Artisans & Others	<u>302</u>	<u>111</u>
TOTAL	332	116
XIII. <u>Posts &amp; Telecommunications:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	9	3
Artisans & Others	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	9	3
XIV. <u>Government Press &amp; Stationary Department:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	1	0
Clerical	0	0
Artisans & Others	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	4	0
XV. <u>Public Works Department:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	14	0
Artisans & Others	<u>34</u>	<u>6</u>
TOTAL	48	6
XVI. <u>Transport Department:</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	11	0
Artisans & Others	<u>47</u>	<u>29</u>
TOTAL	58	29

TABLE 6.4 cont.

	<u>CHRISTIAN</u>	<u>MOSLEM</u>
<b>XVII. <u>Ports &amp; Lights:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	3
Clerical	0	1
Artisans & Others	<u>5</u>	<u>89</u>
TOTAL	5	93
<b>XVIII. <u>Eritrean Railways &amp; Ropeway:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	1	0
Clerical	29	10
Artisans & Others	<u>59</u>	<u>26</u>
TOTAL	89	36
<b>XIX. <u>Civil Aviation:</u></b>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	0	0
Artisans & Others	<u>14</u>	<u>5</u>
TOTAL	14	5
<b>XX. <u>Police Force:</u></b>		
<u>A. Non-uniformed (Prison Service &amp; Field Force)</u>		
Administrative & Executive Branch	0	0
Professional & Technical	0	0
Clerical	44	10
Artisans & Others	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL	53	13
<u>B. Uniformed:</u>		
Officer Status	2	1
W.O. (Warrant Officer)	55	28
N.C.O. (Non-Commissioned Officer)	274	144
O.R. (Ordinary Rank)	<u>1,632</u>	<u>1,224</u>
TOTAL Police Force	<u>2,016</u>	<u>1,410</u>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	3,578	2,158

Source: Derived from New Times and Ethiopia News, July 28, and August 4, 1951, pp.1-2 and p.4 respectively.

business -- an advantage which they perceived would be undermined by union with Ethiopia.

Historically, Islam and trade have been closely associated.<sup>47</sup> Arabic commercial loan-words in Amharic, Tigrigna and Tigre languages may exemplify the intimate relationship between Islam and trade in the region.<sup>48</sup> Travelers and historians have recounted the monopoly of trade and business by the Moslem in the past. Bruce and Salt inform us that, in the past, the Moslems were pre-eminent as traders in the region of Massawa and the interior.<sup>49</sup> According to Plowden, the mid-nineteenth century British agent, the Moslems in the northern provinces of Abyssinia

"rarely followed any other pursuit three fourths of all trade being in their hands."<sup>50</sup>

On matters of commerce, they were indispensable to the state. According to Perham,

"... once the Muslims had come between Ethiopia and the civilized world, they naturally became the economic intermediaries. But they also penetrated the country and absorbed all but the petty trade in the interior. The rulers adopted towards them that ambivalent attitude common amongst European kings towards the Jews, scorn and hatred on religious and political grounds; partnership and dependence on economic matters. The records of many periods show us the Muslim groups in the centres holding a secure and influential position and acting as links with the outer world."<sup>51</sup>

The Amhara/Tigrean word, "naggade" (i.e. trader) is traditionally a general term for a Moslem.<sup>52</sup> There were cultural, economic and political explanations. According to Pankhurst, a contemporary historian on Ethiopia, traditionally -

"Commerce, being held in disrepute by the Christian majority of the highlands, tended to be left to the Moslems, who in any case were at an advantage in so far as the principal trade routes led through Islamic areas, such as the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden ports, Arabia and the Sudan, where there was often discrimination against Christians, who might on occasion even be seized as slaves. ... many of the Moslems... went on pilgrimages to Mecca, thus journeying on one of the main trade routes, and often had some slight familiarity with Arabic which made them feel at home in the Islamic Middle Eastern world of commerce. The Moslems of the highland furthermore played little or no role in government, and were often excluded from land ownership, having thus virtually no opportunity of employment or advancement outside trade or handicraft work."<sup>53</sup>

The Moslems had an added advantage which is not mentioned in Pankhurst's explanation. The Koran contains a glorification and apology for commerce. Rodinson, an expert on Islamic culture, has shown the intimate relationship between Islam and commercial capitalism.<sup>54</sup>

In the forties, though Christian traders and businessmen were to be found, commercial activity was monopolized by Moslems, particularly the Arab immigrants

from Yemen and the "Jiberti". They were found everywhere - as shop owners, weavers, money lenders, middle merchants, etc. Comparative statistical figures are apparently unavailable. There are indirect indications that strongly confirm the claim. The committee board of the Italian dominated Eritrean Chamber of Commerce, during the British Administration, had only two Eritreans. Both were Moslems.<sup>55</sup> The commercial supremacy of the Moslems may also be inferred from what Trevaskis had to say on the discontent of the urban Christian community during the forties,

"Italo-phobia mainly developed among the intelligentsia, who as a class, had the closest contact with the Italians; hatred of the Moslem Arabs and Jiberti was almost as intense, but was shown by Abyssinian (i.e. reference to highland Christians - M.A.) intelligentsia and proletariat alike. Hatred stemmed from envy and fear... That Arabs should be permitted to profiteer at Eritrean expense seemed an unwarranted injustice. Nor was it any more tolerable that the despised Jiberti should grow fat on profits gleaned from their Christian superiors. But worst still, the impoverished Christian Abyssinians could only obtain loans or credit by favour of the Arabs and Jiberti. Progressively they became more indebted to their Moslem creditors, losing property to them as mortgages were foreclosed."<sup>56</sup>

The highland peasantry was equally indebted to the Moslem traders, particularly the "Jiberti".<sup>57</sup> Anti-Moslem sentiment was widespread in both urban and rural areas.

### INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL FORCES

Ethnic identities and conflicts were enhanced by Ethiopian, Italian and British competitive attempts to influence the course of the political drama.

The Ethiopian government claimed Eritrea primarily on cultural and historical grounds.<sup>58</sup> As early as 1940, "Banderachin", the emperor's weekly field newspaper in Khartoum, had begun to preach Ethiopian nationalism.<sup>59</sup> Propaganda leaflets were dropped on native colonial troops massed on the frontier of Sudan. On his return from exile, the emperor organized a pro-Unionist Eritrean association in Addis Ababa. Through his personal liaison officer, Colonel Nega Selassie, in Asmara, the emperor was able to steadily effect his financial and organizational influence on the Unionist Party.<sup>60</sup> In the emperor's design to dismantle the "federation", the pervasive Ethiopian nationalism in the highlands, in its anti-Islamic and anti-colonial manifestations, was an effective instrument. It is highly unlikely that he might have succeeded without such fortification from within Eritrea. Italy, through its citizens residing in Eritrea, and Britain, as a provisional administrator, were both strategically located to equally exploit the parochial domestic politics to their respective political interests.

The CRIE was an effective Italian instrument. It

organized an Italian Front, The Pro-Italy Party. Through De Gropello, the Italian counterpart to Colonel Nega, various manipulative techniques were employed to influence, particularly, the course of action of the anti-Unionists: anti-Ethiopian propaganda, financial support,<sup>61</sup> provision of facilities such as transport and meeting halls,<sup>62</sup> lavish treatment of individual leaders,<sup>63</sup> outright bribery and the threat of unemployment against anti-Italian elements.<sup>64</sup> The Italian effort was directed particularly against possible Ethiopian victory. It was the pervasive anti-Ethiopian sentiment among the Moslems that provided the opportunity for Italian manipulative activities. The Italians knew very well the history of the region and had used it, in the past, to reproduce the colonial state. In its official capacity, Britain claimed neutrality,<sup>65</sup> but continued to engage, particularly through its military and civilian officials in Eritrea, in what was described by Stafford himself, the chief administrator, as "under the counter" politics.<sup>66</sup>

The British sought partition of Eritrea or trusteeship as an alternative. To this end, the officials in Eritrea deployed several manipulative techniques. Government owned newspapers, the Eritean Daily News and the Eritrean Weekly News were established.<sup>67</sup> Among the major editorial policies was

"...to foster good will among the local population towards Britain."<sup>68</sup>

The administration censored articles or cartoons critical of the British government.<sup>69</sup> It took measures to arrest the development of the highly anti-Italian and anti-British Unionist movement. Several of the movement's activists were arrested on the pretext of terrorism.<sup>70</sup> The British officials were more than eager to foment ethnic tensions and conflicts. They organized armed Moslem militia from the lowlands on the pretext of self defence of the latter against Christian attacks.<sup>71</sup> In the event of Moslem/Christian confrontations, official security measures were negligent.<sup>72</sup> Italian participation in the Independence Bloc was equally a source of worries for British officials. Stafford, describing the British anxiety, wrote,

"...further pressure should be brought to bear to discourage the payment of money by Italians for political purposes. This is the most formidable enemy to our cause."<sup>73</sup>

The administration had tried to obstruct the formation of the Pro-Italy Party by engaging in dilatory tactics.<sup>74</sup> Once the anti-Unionists rejected partition and in the wake of the formation of the Independence Bloc, the administration began covert actions to undermine the alliance. It was engaged in two fronts. With the Christian elements who had all along harbored fear, as a minority, in a Moslem

dominated movement, it promoted the Unionist cause.<sup>75</sup>

With the anti-Italian elements in the Independence Bloc, a pro-British stance was encouraged. Stafford explains the British campaign in the second front,

"The plan of campaign we have suggested to them (i.e. the anti-Italian elements in the Independence Bloc - M.A.) is that their followers should say that their requirement is independence but that it would only be acceptable under the British Trusteeship."

"I am also trying to impress upon them that an independent Eritrea under direct United Nations Trusteeship would be equally unacceptable. I am working very carefully on this, but it is, as you will appreciate, tricky work which has to be carried out as it were 'under the counter'."<sup>76</sup>

The British had hardly any coherent and sustained policy.

External involvement in the Eritrean "theatre of politics" only served to exasperate ethnic identities and conflicts. Ethiopia's role intensified the Moslems' fear of a joint Christian Amhara/Tigrean threat in the realm of culture, politics, and economics. It was to counteract the increasing Ethiopian support for the Unionists, that the leaders of the opposition forces first espoused British trusteeship and later forged alliance with the Italians. On the other hand, particularly the involvement of the Italians increasingly fed into the anti-Islamic and anti-colonial Ethiopian nationalism of the highlands. It was in

the wake of the emergence of the Independence Bloc that terrorist activities against anti-Unionists elements were accelerated.

Traditional animosities largely rooted in the anti-Moslem politics of the Ethiopian state in the past, uneven regional development and cultural division of labor fostered by colonial rule and the involvement of Ethiopia, Italy, and Britain in the domestic politics were critical factors. The underlying perceptions of the domestic social forces, towards these factors, constituted the motor force behind the salient role of ethnic ideology.

Today, the Eritrean question in Ethiopia is far from solved. What historical inferences can my study draw? What can the study inform us about the contemporary phenomenon of Eritrean nationalism? This is the problem addressed in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Hailu Habtu, Preliminary Notes on Ancient Ethiopian History, New York, N.P., 1987.
2. Ibid, p.1
3. This is also confirmed in my conversation with the author.
4. For a short ethnographical history of Eritrea see Nadel, Races and Tribes of Eritrea, op.cit.
5. For details see Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, op. cit., pp.225-247.
6. David Pool, Eritrea - Africa's Longest War, London, Anti-Slavery Society, 1982. See also Robert Machida, Eritrea: The Struggle for Independence, New York, The Red Sea Press, 1987.
7. An appropriate Gramiscian expression in Merrington, op.cit., p.154.
8. He was an attorney-general within the Ethiopian Ministry of Justice. See Chris Prouty and Eugene Rosenfeld, Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia, London, The Scarecrow Press, 1981, p.26.
9. Bereket, op.cit., p.49.
10. In a review essay, Alem Habtu appropriately reminds Bereket of an elementary truth which contemporary highland Eritrean elite deny in favor of myth fabrication. Bereket's claim is in contradiction to "the Eritreans own day-to-day reference to their language as qwanqwa Habasha, their food as magbi Habasha, their dress as Khidan Habasha, their music as derfi Habasha, etc." (emphasis original). See "Books on The Ethiopian Revolution: A Review Essay" Socialism and Democracy, (Fall/Winter 1986):57. The term 'Habasha' in Alem's usage, however, is vague. It appears to embrace both the highlanders and lowlanders. It is doubtful that the Moslems refer to themselves as "Habasha". There is evidence that the Moslems use the term, "Habasha" to refer to the Christian Amhara/Tigrean

community and has a negative connotation. In the history of Eritrean nationalist movement, the term, for example, has been used by the Moslems as synonymous to "Kafir", traitor, an Ethiopian fifth column. For more discussion see Chapter 7 of my study.

11. Kolmodin, op.cit. The oral history, among others, recounts the shared Amhara/Tigrean mythology of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. It also narrates on Abyssinian kings and tributes from the highlands.

12. For analytical presentation that captures the joint Amhara/Tigrean cultural and political history see Donald N. Levine, Greater Ethiopia, the evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1974.

13. Ibid, p.118.

14. The literature on Ethiopian history is enormous. For a good introduction the reader may consult A.H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, A History of Ethiopia, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, and Perham, op.cit.

15. Tekeste Negash, "Resistance and Collaboration, 1882-1914" op.cit., and Erlich, op.cit.

16. Kolmodin, op.cit., p.263. For details on the Amhara/Tigrean legend of Tewodros see Levine, op.cit., pp.157-159.

17. Tekeste Negash, "Blatta Gebre Egziabeher Gila Mariam and His Works: a Sketch Towards a Political Biography of a Nationalist", in Tekeste Negash, No Medicine For the Bite of a White Snake, op.cit., pp.1-21. The poems of Blatta Gebre are found in J.E. Eadie (trans.) An Amharic Reader, London, Cambridge University Press, 1924, pp.193-202.

18. Salome Gabre Egziabher, "The Ethiopian Patriots, 1936-1941", Ethiopia Observer, 12, no.2(1969):63-91.

19. Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History, London, Pall Mall Press, 1965, p.242.

20. Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1572, London, Oxford Press, 1972. See also R. A. Caulk "Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century

Ethiopia: Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 10, no.1(January 1972):23-41.

21. Taddesse, op.cit., p.156.

22. An appropriate term in Abraham Demoz, "Moslem and Islam in Ethiopic Literature" Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 10, no.1(January 1972):6.

23. There is a wide consensus among historians. See for example, Perham, op.cit.; Erlich, op.cit.; Mordechai Abir, Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-Egyptian Rivalry in the Region, London, Frank Cass and Co., 1980, and Trimmingham, Islam in Ethiopia, op.cit.

24. Erlich, op.cit. p.85. More detailed information found in Perham, op.cit. and Longrigg, op.cit.

25. Enno Littmann, Tales, Customs, Names and Dirges in the Tigre Tribes (Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia) vol.2, Leyoen, E.J. Brill, 1910, pp.194-196 and p.233. Anti-Christian war cry is also found in p.200.

26. Paul, A History of the Beja Tribes in the Sudan, op.cit., p.105 and also E.A. Robinson, "The Egyptian-Abyssinian War of 1874-1876", Journal of the African Society, 26, no.103(April 1927):276.

27. Sabby, op.cit., p.183.

28. Longrigg, op.cit., pp.115-116, and also Erlich, op.cit., p.85.

29. Abraham, op.cit., p.8.

30. In Tigrigna it reads

"Samay andi yabellu  
Eslamay addi yabellu."

Quoted in Richard Pankhurst, "Status, Division of Labour and Employment in Nineteenth Century and Twentieth Century Ethiopia", Addis Abeba, Haile Selassie I University Ethnological Society Bulletin, 2, (1961):23. Anti-Moslem sentiment marks the traditional war cries of the highlands. See Kolmodin, op.cit., pp.157-158.

31. In Tigrigna it reads

"Ma'alti Krestyan  
Layti Eslam"

Quoted in Pankhurst, Ethnological Society Bulletin,  
op.cit., p.25.

32. Frederick J. Simmons, Northwest Ethiopia,  
Peoples and Economy, Madison, The University of Wisconsin  
Press, 1960, p.32. For more discussion see Caulk, op.cit.

33. Alberto Pollera, Le Popolazione Indigene Dell  
Eritrea, Bologna, Tiopgrafico Licinio Campelli, 1935,  
p.150.

34. De Medici op.cit., p.652.

35. Trevaskis' papers, Box I Item 5, op.cit.,  
pp.71-72.

36. See for example, John Franklin Campbell  
"Background to the Eritrean Conflict" Africa Report, 16,  
No.5(May 1971):20. Sabby died in Cairo in early 1987. He  
was 55 years old. See The Eritrean Peoples Liberation  
Front publication on its 2nd Congress entitled Guba'ai  
Hadinet-Guba'ai A'Wat, no.193, 15-4-87, p.20.

37. Statement by Mr. Wolde ab Wolde Mariam in His  
Press Conference in Beirut, Beirut, April 15, 1971, pp.2-3.

38. For 1925, for example, see Annuario delle  
Colonie Italiane, 1928, p.446.

39. This is clearly revealed in the colonial  
commercial and industrial directory - Uffificio Eritrea  
dell'Economia Elenco, op.cit.

40. Read for example Pankhurst in Ethnological  
Society Bulletin, op.cit.

41. De Medici, op.cit., p.653-654.

42. Piccioli, op.cit., p.216.

43. Ibid, p.217.

44. British Ministry of Information, Life in a  
British Occupied Territory, no.2, 1951. The back cover  
contains statistical figures.

45. United Nations GAOR (A/2188) op.cit., p.68.
46. Trevaskis papers box I item 5, op.cit., p.40.
47. Mordechai, op.cit.
48. See the works of Wolf Leslau, "Arabic Loan Words in Tigre", Word, 12, no.1(1956):125-141; "Arabic Loanwords in Tigrigna" Journal of the American Oriental Studies, 76, no.4(1965):204-213; "Arabic Loanwords in Amharic" Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 19 (1957):221-244.
49. Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia up to 1800, op.cit., p.286, and his Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935, op.cit., pp.38-39.
50. Quoted in ibid, p.39.
51. Perham, op.cit., p.178.
52. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, op.cit., p.150.
53. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935, op.cit., pp.38-39.
54. Maxime Rodinson, Islam and Capitalism, trans, by Brian Pearce, London, Allen Lane, 1974.
55. FPCI App.114.
56. Trevaskis, Eritrea, A Colony in Transition, op.cit., pp.50-51.
57. Ibid, p.55.
58. Ethiopia, Foreign Affairs Ministry, Memoranda, London, April, 1946, particularly pp.5-11.
59. Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Patriots and the Collapse of Italian Rule in East Africa, 1940-41", Ethiopia Observer, 12, No.2(1969):100.
60. Read Ellingson, op.cit.
61. United States Archives, Merrel to Secretary of State, op.cit. See also Great Britain, FO371/73788, 73789 and 73790.

62. Great Britain, FO742/23.
63. Great Britain, FO742/25.
64. Great Britain, FO371/80873.
65. The New York Times, (January 1950):19.
66. Great Britain, FO371/80872.
67. Wolde ab Wolde Mariam had served as an assistant editor of the Eritrean Weekly News.
68. FPCI, Vol.I, p.19.
69. FPCI, App.22.
70. Great Britain, FO371/73790. See also Pankhurst, British Policy in Eritrea, op.cit., pp.12-15.
71. Ibrahim Sultan's interview.
72. Great Britain, FO371/80873.
73. Great Britain, FO371/80872.
74. FPCI, Annex 1 and 2 to App. 98. There were also complaints from Italian residents regarding the British administration's attempts to suppress their political participation. See FPCI, App.130.
75. The personal power struggle within the leadership of the Christian minority, particularly between Wolde ab Wolde Mariam and Wolde Selassie Tessema, was seen as a golden opportunity. The minutes in a government document for example read.
- "This split might give us a lucky break."
- See Great Britain, FO742/25. In a reference to the departure of the delegates of the Liberal Progressive Unionist Party to Addis Ababa, another government memo written by Stafford reads,
- "The new party is doing well and I think the Liberal Progressive Party as such is now collapsing. I have told the delegates that the conditions they wish

to impose on the union are too many and too stiff but I have no doubt that they will be able to reach a suitable compromise in discussion."

The same memo contains minutes that celebrate Mr. Stafford's success,

"Mr. Stafford has apparently been successful in convincing Dejeje Tessema (the leader of the Liberal Progressive Unionist Party - M.A.) that his best course is to support union with Ethiopia, and has split the Party."

See Great Britain, F0371/80872.

76. Ibid.

**PART IV: CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER 7

THE ERITREAN QUESTION: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

What are the historical and contemporary imports of the modern political history of Eritrea, the topic of this study? What are the origin and nature of the Eritrean problem in Ethiopia? Existing literature on the subject obscures rather than clarifies the issues involved. This chapter attempts to draw critical conclusions in the light of the narrowly defined debate between the Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean nationalists.

Nationalist regimes and movements thrive on myth. They engage in selective writing of history. I do not entertain the illusion that a mere counter factual presentation constitutes a proof against the arguments of the Eritrean nationalists or those of the Ethiopian regime. That method, moreover, implicitly accepts the terms of the debate defined by the two camps. The purpose here is to redefine the central problem, the Eritrean question in Ethiopia. This may be done by presenting an internal critique - i.e., first, to bring out the contradictions between what the Eritrean nationalists claim and what they actually do in practice, and then to reformulate the Eritrean question by focusing on the pre- and post-1974 policy practice of the Ethiopian state at the center.

The major argument of this chapter is that the Eritrean question is a crisis related to the process of "state-building" in the political history of multi-ethnic Ethiopia where capitalist relations of production have been least developed. This conclusion will be drawn from the preceding study complemented by analysis of the post-"federation" period.

The serious student of Eritrean nationalism needs to distinguish between its secessionist demand and its democratic aspect, the former based on the notion of a separate Eritrean historical identity.

#### THE SECESSIONIST DEMAND

In his conversation with an Australian writer, Essayas Afewerki (a highland Eritrean), the secretary general of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), notes

"...if a European nation did to us what the Ethiopians did in 1962, it would have been universally condemned by African states." (emphasis added) <sup>1</sup>

The statement, typical of the nationalist literature, attempts to manipulate history. It starts out with two separate categories -- "us" and "the Ethiopians". As a result it obscures the modern political history of Eritrea, particularly 1941-52. This need not be surprising. For the nationalist whose separatist demand is based on grounds of historical identity, a critical look at the modern poli-

tical history of Eritrea will reveal a disconcerting picture painful to reconcile with the nationalist assumption. Essayas' preference of the date, 1962, and his comparative example (i.e., Europe/Ethiopia), however, is highly instructive. It contains an implication least intended by the author. It underlines the historical specificity of the Eritrean question.

Eritrea was a European colony like all other African colonies. Its historical failure to give continuity to its modern state established by over half a century of European colonialism is in stark contrast to the history of modern states in Africa including Lybia and Somalia, the two other former Italian colonies. Today, despite their persistent claim, Eritrean nationalists, as will be clear below, are engaged in a struggle to create a national identity rather than develop an already existing one. Even in this effort, sectarian politics rooted in the Eritrean political culture continues to plague them.

The modern political history of Eritrea is the history of the crisis of Eritrean nationalism. Haile Selassie was able to dismantle the "federation" not because he was so strong, but because Eritrean nationalism was too weak at best, or nonexistent at worst. The presence, in the forties, of a Christian minority in the independence bloc may, at best, indicate an element of Eritrean

nationalism. But an all embracing nationalism did not materialize. There was no Eritrean national self, nor did the politicians seriously attempt to create one. The unanimous rejection of partition by the major political parties need not be taken as a reflection of Eritrean nationalism. Both the Unionists and anti-Unionists perceived Eritrea as significantly composed of their respective ethnic communities.

Anti-Unionist movement, as a manifestation against anti-secularism and ethnic discrimination in Ethiopia, has been uniquely a historical phenomenon primarily associated with Eritrean Moslems. The political history of Eritrean Moslems is reminiscent of that of the Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland. As a cultural minority, union represented the inevitability of their subjugation under a declared Christian Ethiopian state. If Eritrea had been composed of a significant Moslem majority, Eritrean nationalism might have long posed a more intractable problem and a more formidable threat to Ethiopia, given, particularly, Eritrea's geographical proximity to the Islamic world. Historically, it was the presence of an aggressive Ethiopian nationalism within Eritrea itself (i.e., the highlands) that has been the counter force.

The political history of highland Eritrea is reminiscent of that of the Protestants in Northern

Ireland. Historically, the highlanders' conception of national freedom has never been Eritrean nationalism, but the unification/restoration of Ethiopia. If Eritrea had been composed of a significant Christian majority, it is a plausible speculation to conclude that the "federation", particularly in its detailed form (e.g., the Eritrean constitution and flag), might not have been realized. In this sense, the "federation" was a concession to the Moslems rather than to the highlands which all along demanded reunion.

One of the central arguments of my study has been that the modern political history of Eritrea forcefully contradicts the claim advanced by the nationalists, i.e., the notion of Eritrean national consciousness. Analysis of the post-"federation" period further reinforces my argument.

The Eritrean question is often referred to as the longest war of national liberation in Africa.<sup>2</sup> The term is highly misleading. Since the dismantling of the "federation" (in 1962), and despite the abolition of Tigrigna as one of the official languages, Eritrean nationalism, in its separatist form and as an active mass political movement in the highlands, was hardly significant. A 1969 eye-witness report from Asmara had this commentary,

"... the vast majority of Christian Eritreans -- they comprise half of Eritrea's population -- see more threat from the Muslims than from the Ethiopian Amharas with whom they share a common religion, culture, and history."<sup>3</sup>

The popular reference, in Asmara, to Tedla Bairu, the former Unionist leader (when he defected to the Eritrean Liberation Front [ELF] in the late sixties) as "Sheik Tedla" is highly illustrative.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the reign of Haile Selassie, ELF, which was organized in 1961, remained, both in its leadership and support, a predominantly Moslem one. Its military base was in the lowlands where it enjoyed popular support. The active involvement of the highlands was, as in the forties, essentially peripheral and was largely confined to the educated urban youth who resented the dismantlement of the "federation", particularly the abolition of Tigrigna as one of the official languages in Eritrea.

The minority status of the Christian elements in ELF was openly admitted by "Nihnan Illamanann" (popularly believed to have been written by Essayas) the manifesto of the Christian minority who seceded from ELF in March 1969 to form a new front later known as EPLF.<sup>5</sup> According to the manifesto, the major cause for the group's secession was the aggressive "Pan-Islamic" policy of ELF leadership which had close ties with Arab countries (e.g., Iraq and

Syria) in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Christians were persecuted as "Habasha" or "Kafir" - interchangeable terms for a traitor, an Ethiopian fifth column.<sup>7</sup> The manifesto claims the execution, between 1966-67, of over one hundred Christians in the Front.<sup>8</sup> In his 1971 Beirut press conference, (only three years away from the 1974 Ethiopian revolution) Wolde ab Wolde Mariam had this to say on the character of Eritrean nationalism,

"According to the political philosophy and teaching of these elements, (a reference to ELF leadership - M.A.) the Eritrean revolution is, and must be a Moslem Revolution, or a Revolution of the Moslems and for the Moslems alone. For the Christians there should be no place in the Front and not even in the Western Province of Eritrea which they consider as a Moslem area and where most of the crimes against the Eritrean Christians were committed."<sup>9</sup>

Disillusioned by the aggressive "Pan-Islamic" orientation of the Front, many Christian youth, in the late sixties, had to surrender to the Ethiopian Embassy in Sudan.<sup>10</sup> Observers, from various political perspectives, have concurred on the predominance of the Moslems in ELF during the reign of Haile Selassie.<sup>11</sup>

The current relative popularity of anti-Ethiopian sentiment among the highlanders is, essentially, a post-1974 phenomenon. It coincided with the 1974 revolution.<sup>12</sup> The revolution had sealed the fate of the ancien

regime, including the highland Eritrean beneficiaries under Haile Selassie. The inept policy of the post-1974 Ethiopian state has significantly contributed in alienating highland Eritreans (more on this below). Today, according to various reports, the Christian elements dominate EPLF.<sup>13</sup> Until its disintegration as a military force, in 1981, ELF leadership continued to be dominated by Moslems.<sup>14</sup>

Since the inception of EPLF, the relationship between the two Fronts had been marked by recurrent tragic civil wars.<sup>15</sup> This is not the place for detailed documentation. It has been recounted by reporters, historians and others alike. Here, it suffices to cite Haggai Erlich, a historian of the region, whose perceptive characterization of Eritrean nationalism is a telling commentary,

"Against the background of deep-rooted Eritrean sectarianism, all efforts to establish some sort of unity proved fruitless.... the Eritreans had no unifying nationalist tradition to help them, nor did they enjoy a socio-political mechanism enabling the emergence of an all-Eritrean leader. Eritreanism, a very young emotion, was essentially the negation of Ethiopianism (anti-democratic Ethiopian state is more appropriate - M.A.) rather than a historically rooted supra-tribal, supra-linguistic and supra-religious sense of Eritrean affiliation. Lacking such slogans as 'our mother, Eritrea', the Eritrean nationalists remained the captives of sectarian interests that they justified with borrowed ideologies. .... Failing to unite in 1977 when victory seemed imminent, the

Eritreans also failed to unite later in defeat."<sup>16</sup> (emphasis added)

Despite their persistent claim, the notion of Eritrean historical identity has, in practice, eluded contemporary Eritrean nationalist intelligentsia. The notion is nowhere contradicted as in the actual practice of the nationalist themselves. More can be said besides the long history of recurrent inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

A nationalist movement, particularly one whose separatist demand is based purely on grounds of historical identity, would naturally enrich its nationalist struggle with its past national history -- symbols. National symbols are indispensable. They possess a self-reference quality.<sup>17</sup> They can be a formidable resource for "us-them" syndrome,<sup>18</sup> a critical unifying ingredient, particularly in a badly divided nationalist movement. Despite the tradition of internal regional politics, Somali nationalism, for example, possesses Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan whom the British dubbed the "Mad Mullah".<sup>19</sup> The history of his resistance against Britain, Italy and Ethiopia has earned him immortality in modern Somalia. He is the forerunner of modern Somali nationalism. One rarely finds a modern nationalist movement that is as bogged down in the search of symbolic history as that of Eritrea.

The serious student of Eritrean nationalism has

yet to encounter Eritrean national folk songs, poetry, or prose fiction whose central themes deal with national self-reference symbols. The contemporaneity of the themes in the nationalist literature and cultural displays is striking. For example, their songs describe the beauty and richness of Eritrea; condemn the military repression by the current Ethiopian regime; praise EPLF fighters, the dead and the living; long for or affirm the inevitability of national emancipation. The themes in the dramas dwell on wars, defiance, and heroism. Their cultural displays are conspicuously devoid of examples of symbolic national history.<sup>20</sup>

Recently, there has been a tendency towards literary enrichment of their nationalist struggle. For example, an EPLF Tigigna publication<sup>21</sup> alludes to Wolde Michael Solomon (a highland Eritrean and member of traditional nobility)<sup>22</sup> as a pre-colonial Eritrean nationalist who fought the Ethiopian emperor, Yohannes IV. Its success is tenuous. Wolde Micheal could hardly be a traditional Eritrean nationalist hero, revered by both Christians and Moslems alike. In the wake of the Italians' arrival, he fled to Ethiopia. He fought the Italians on the side of Ethiopia and retired at the center of Amhara/Tigrean culture, Axum.<sup>23</sup> What is more, he could hardly be perceived by Eritrean Moslems as their traditional hero.

He was the scourge of the Moslems - notorious for "his bloody assaults and cattle driving".<sup>24</sup> There is no modern biographical work on Wolde Michael. It is interesting to note that Eritrean nationalists have not published one. Eritrean nationalism, in its secessionist form, has posed a crisis not only to the current Ethiopian regime but also to itself. Its modern political history is highly illustrative of the visible contradictions between what the nationalists claim (i.e., historical identity) and what they do in practice. The latter should constitute the starting point for the serious observer and the analyst alike.

Despite its contradictory character, however, the Eritrean question objectively possesses a democratic aspect that cannot be annihilated in the name of Ethiopian territorial integrity, an obsession of the current regime. It has a direct bearing on the issue of political democracy in Ethiopia.

#### THE DEMOCRATIC ASPECT

The "federation" was not a compromise between two states. Nevertheless, under the institutional arrangement, Eritrea was an autonomous region within the larger political framework, the Ethiopian state. The dismantlement of the "federation" clearly constitutes an anti-democratic act

by the Ethiopian state at the center. This imparts a democratic aspect to the Eritrean question in Ethiopia. The debate on federalism, in the early fifties, between the Unionists and the anti-Unionists is highly instructive.

The content of the demands of the Moslems, for example, was primarily directed against the anti-secularism and ethnic discrimination in Ethiopia. This is nowhere better symbolized than in their position towards the Ethiopian flag,

"The flag of the Federation must be far removed from any religious or racial symbol, whether Christian, Moslem, or Hebrew, and thus it can include Moslems, Christians, and even Pagans, if there are any within the Federation. ....the Ethiopian flag bears particular racial signs and religious symbols which make it unfit to be the flag of either the Federation or Eritrea." 25

A clear expression for a secular state in Ethiopia. The Eritrean plateau was not altogether without a demand for a measure of local autonomy.

The emergence of the Liberal Progressive Party expresses the history of regionalism rooted in the linguistic identity of the highlands - Tigrigna language. Interestingly, we find this tendency for local autonomy even in the Unionist Party, the embodiment of Ethiopian nationalism in Eritrea. Despite its persistent and aggressive demand for unconditional union, the Party was

not prepared to sacrifice its language as a medium of official communication in Eritrea. The Party fought for an Ethiopian flag rather than an Eritrean one. It insisted on the active representation of the emperor in the Eritrean executive body. But it also chose Tigrigna and not Amharic as the official language in Eritrea. In the broader sense, therefore, the "federation" can also be seen as a concession to regional autonomy - a demand by the Moslems and Christians alike. The dismantling of the "federation", therefore, clearly raises the central issue of political democracy in the modern Ethiopian history of "state building".

Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic society. Historically, conquest constitutes the background in the formation of the modern Ethiopian state. This is not a uniquely Ethiopian phenomenon. The early history of modern states in Europe, for example, equally constitutes conquest and acquisition. Historically, the central problem has not been conquest. The central problem has been the mode of retention. The political history of Ethiopia, past and present, suggests that a viable multi-ethnic Ethiopia requires the democratization of the state at the center. The Eritrean case is highly exemplary, particularly so in the case of the Eritrean Moslems as a minority ethnic group in northern Ethiopia.

Historically, there has been no state policy that seriously attempted to resolve the Moslem minority question in the North. The solution sought by Abyssinian kings and nobility alike had been the forceful imposition of the Amhara/Tigrean culture. This was met by resistance, in the form of the traditional ruling class collaboration with the staunch historical enemies of the Abyssinian state - the Ottoman Empire, the Egyptians and Italians. Haile Selassie's policy was scarcely removed from his predecessors.

In principle, the Moslems' acceptance of the "federation" expressed two tendencies. It expressed the willingness of the Moslems to forego their separatist demand and live peacefully, as a minority group, within the professed Christian Ethiopia. The value of the "federation", particularly as articulated by Ibrahim Sultan's nine points, lay in its protective institutional mechanism. For the anti-Unionists, the arrangement appeared as an ideal institutional design against the conspicuously anti-secular and autocratic Ethiopian state. On the part of Ibrahim Sultan and his cohorts, the Moslem faction of the Eritrean claimants to the state power, the acceptance of the "federation" expressed their willingness to be co-opted within the larger framework of the Ethiopian state. The dismantlement of the "federation" and the

subsequent anti-Moslem policies of the Ethiopian state, under Haile Selassie, were clear confirmations of earlier anticipatory fear of the Moslems.

In his attempt to subdue anti-Ethiopian sentiment, Haile Selassie subjected the lowlands to frequent military attacks. Moslem villages were razed in the Western lowlands.<sup>26</sup> Describing, in his diary, his personal experience with the Ethiopian scorched earth policy towards the Moslems, an Israeli officer, an ex-advisor to the Ethiopian army, is said to have written in April 1967 that,

"The 2nd Division is very efficient in killing innocent people. They are alienating the Eritreans (lowland Moslems - M.A.) and deepening the hatred that already exists. Their commander took his senior aides to a spot near the Sudanese border and ordered them: 'From here to the north -- clean the area'. Many innocent people were massacred and nothing of substance was achieved. There is simply no way the Ethiopian army will ever win the struggle over Eritrea by pursuing this line."<sup>27</sup>

According to Erlich, the Ethiopian army in 1967,

"...was allowed freedom of action in the Muslim-populated western regions, and its 'pacification campaign' brought burning villages, massive aerial bombardments, and brutal massacres throughout the district between Keren and the Sudanese border."<sup>28</sup>

In early 1970, the burning of villages and the bloody massacre of population were carried out in the region of Keren, Sahel and the coast (Moslem populated areas).<sup>29</sup>

The phenomenon of war refugees from the lowlands has a long history. As early as 1967, according to observers, over 9,000 nomads had to flee to the Sudan.<sup>30</sup>

As to the highlands, Haile Selassie abolished Tigrigna and imposed Amharic as the official language in Eritrea. Hence, creating a fertile condition upon which future Eritrean nationalism in the highlands was to thrive. With the active collaboration of the Coptic Orthodox Church, his reign, nonetheless, managed to sustain Ethiopian nationalism in the Eritrean plateau. He constantly propagated the fear of "Islamic encirclement".<sup>31</sup> A concrete example can be cited. In the late sixties, an Ethiopian airliner was damaged by a time bomb at the Frankfurt Airport, presumably by ELF. Subsequently, the Ethiopian state organized anti-Arab demonstrations throughout the major Ethiopian towns.<sup>32</sup> In the government propaganda, the ELF was portrayed as the old enemy (Islam) in the modern setting. Past history and Eritrea's geographical proximity to the Islamic world were effective weapons. The Ethiopian state organized Israeli-trained commandos, composed of Eritrean Christians, to fight ELF.<sup>33</sup> Haile Selassie had Eritrean police and security forces staffed largely by Christians.<sup>34</sup>

The beneficiaries of post-colonial Eritrea, particularly in the fields of political and educational

TABLE 7.1

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT 1941-66

<u>PROVINCE</u>	<u>NO.</u>	<u>% (Approx.)</u>
Shoa	85	62
Gojam	6	4.3
Begemdar	5	4
Tigrai	7	5
Eritrea	19	14
Walaga	6	4.3
Sidamo	2	1.4
Ilubabor	2	1.4
Others	<u>6</u>	<u>4.3</u>
TOTAL	138	100

Source: Derived from Christopher Clapham, Haile Selassie's Government, New York, Praeger, 1969, p.77. The figures represent total official appointments with the rank of Minister, Minister of State, and Vice Minister.

resources, were largely the Christian elements. The marriage of Dr. Seyoum Haregot, a highland Eritrean, to the granddaughter of Haile Selassie, symbolized the comparative integration of the highland elements into the Ethiopian state bureaucracy. Key positions within the provincial administration of Eritrea had invariably been occupied by Christian elements from the highlands. Asfeha Wolde Micheal, the emperor's personal vice-representative in Eritrea, Tesfa Yohannes Berhe, the deputy to the governor

of Eritrea, Asrate Kassa, Brig. General Zara-Mariam Azzazi, the police commissioner, and Haregot Abbay, the mayor of Asmara -- are outstanding examples.<sup>35</sup> The Ethiopian state bureaucracy was based on the tradition of virtual exclusion of Moslems as such from the political resources.

The administrative directory of 1964, for example, glaringly reveals the monopoly of the political resources by the Christian elements in Ethiopia as a whole.<sup>36</sup> They were visible (as ministers, vice ministers, assistant ministers, provincial governors, police chiefs, army generals, directors-general and heads of departments) in the parliament, in the prime minister's office, in the various ministries, in government agencies, in the police and the army. According to Table 7.1, between 1941 and 1966, regional representation in the highest Ethiopian governmental offices shows that Eritrea enjoyed a relative advantage compared to other Ethiopian regions except the leading province, Shoa. Regional comparison, however, conceals a glaring political inequality within Eritrea. For example, between 1941 and the end of 1966, 138 senior officials were appointed - with the rank of minister, minister of state, and vice minister. According to Clapham, only 4 % constituted Ethiopian Moslems per se.<sup>37</sup> Out of the 19 senior Eritrean officials, there were only 3 Eritrean Moslems -- 84 % were highland Eritreans.<sup>38</sup> Saleh Henit,

the Minister of Posts, was the first Eritrean Moslem to be appointed in 1966, almost a decade and a half after the "federation".<sup>39</sup>

The Eritrea Moslem elite did not form part of the Ethiopian state. They were outside the political system. This was not the result of a voluntary act. They did accept the "federation", after all. It was rather the consequence of ethnic discrimination. In their eyes, the Ethiopian state represented the same old story -- the monopoly of political power by the Christian Amhara/Tigrean elements.

Ethnic inequality was no less visible in the field of educational resources. The regional distribution of secondary school students in Ethiopia (see Table 7.2) shows that Eritrea is second to the Shoan province. Here, too, regional comparison conceals the educational inequalities within Eritrea. As a rule, secondary schools in Ethiopia are found only in the larger towns. The Eritrean highlands, with its higher percentage of urbanized population than the lowland areas, continued to enjoy an advantage. In 1963, for example, 81% of Asmara population constituted Christians.<sup>40</sup> Secondary and vocational training schools and the only university in the Eritrean province were located in the highlands, Asmara.<sup>41</sup> At the Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, the number of Moslem students

TABLE 7.2  
GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION OF  
ETHIOPIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS  
1963-64

Addis Ababa (the capital city)	4,933	41%
Shoa Province	1,543	13
Eritrea	1,666	14
Remaining 12 provinces	<u>3,785</u>	32
TOTAL	11,927	

Source: constructed from the Ethiopian Statistical Abstract, Central Statistical Office, 1965. The capital city is located in the Shoan province.

was negligible.<sup>42</sup>

A study on whether the Eritrean Christian elements were also the economic beneficiaries of post-"federation" period has yet to be done. I do not possess adequate material to make a confident conclusion. Given the political and educational advantages that the Christian elements enjoyed, it is most likely that they might have come a long way up the ladder, at least, as competitors in the business world, otherwise traditionally monopolized by Moslems. The case of the Eritrean Cement Company of late sixties is highly suggestive.<sup>43</sup> The company was a government owned enterprise, with 78% of the stock controlled by the Ethiopian government. The Company's capital amounted to Eth.\$3,000,000. It was a small enterprise. It

is hardly a representative sample of public enterprise in Ethiopia. What is more, it has little to say about private enterprise. Nevertheless, the example may shed some light on the trend in post-colonial Eritrea. 16% of the Company's stock was divided between the Christians and Moslems. A comparison between them reveals that 58 % of the total stock owned by both Christians and Moslems was controlled by the former.

Despite the comparative advantages the highland elements enjoyed, there was a growing regional resentment against the Ethiopian state, particularly among the post-"federation" educated urban youth. They resented the imposition of Amharic language in Eritrea.<sup>44</sup> They resented what they perceived as the political monopoly by the Shoan region. However, the popular mood in the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution, according to observers, seemed to prefer regional autonomy.<sup>45</sup> Historically, separatist politics, as noted earlier, was the sole monopoly of the Eritrean Moslems.

In the Ethiopian history of "state-formation", the 1974 revolution, with its slogans of land to the tiller, secular state, regional autonomy, peasant and urban associations, seemed to promise the political resolution of the Eritrean question. Some positive measures have taken place. The Ethiopian state is legally secularized. The

regime has called upon the Eritrean nationalists to accept regional autonomy.<sup>46</sup> But the Eritrean question has persisted. Post-1974 Ethiopia, in fact, has witnessed the height of the deterioration of the crisis. The imperatives of "state-building" have continued to elude the Ethiopian state at the center. In retrospect, the 1974 revolution was "a missed opportunity".<sup>47</sup> An outline of major policy failures is illustrative.

The regime has failed to recognize publicly the anti-democratic act of the dismantlement of the "federation" under the old regime. Obsessed by the notion of Ethiopian territorial integrity, the regime views the "federation" as the creation of an international conspiracy.<sup>48</sup> Its dismantlement, arbitrary in the eyes of Eritreans, is regarded by the regime as an act of voluntary reintegration by the Eritrean people.<sup>49</sup>

The post-1974 Ethiopian state bears the major responsibility for alienating the Eritrean highlanders. Its frequent resort to violence is in stark contrast to Haile Selassie's policy towards highland Eritrea. The "execution" in November 1974 of General Aman Andom (a highland Eritrean with a long record of Ethiopian patriotism), the role of "Afagn" (he who abducts and kills) in Asmara in the early years of the revolution, indiscriminate imprisonment of civilians, the regime's lingering policy of

a military solution of the Eritrean question, manifested by its several major offensives - have been highly detrimental. Describing the immediate consequences of the regime's repressive policy towards Eritrea in the early years of the revolution, a French journalist reported,

"...the frightening carnage... drove the 'modern' elites in Eritrea (university and secondary school students, civil servants, cadres and technicians) to join the guerillas en masse. After the battle of Asmara, most of the Eritrean forces which had managed as best they could to stay at an equal distance from the Fronts and the central government, swung over to the nationalist camp." (emphasis original) <sup>50</sup>

According to Erlich, the number of Eritrean guerilla fighters until 1974 was no more than 2,500.<sup>51</sup> By Early 1977, the estimate ranged between 38,500-43,000.<sup>52</sup> It was since post-1974 that the growing number of active Christian elements in the field began to be felt. The phenomenon of war refugees from highland Eritrea is basically a post-1974 product.

Despite the declaration of a secular state, the regime's policy towards the Moslems in Eritrea seems to betray its ingrained Christian Amhara/Tigrean cultural perspective. This has expressed itself in a number of ways. Official publications, for example, seldom refer to the plight of Eritrean Moslems, as a minority ethnic group, in the Abyssinian/Ethiopian political history. The

regime's appraisal of the Eritrean domestic politics of the forties and early fifties is also striking.<sup>53</sup> The Unionist cause is regarded, to quote an official publication, as "a liberation movement in the true sense of the word".<sup>54</sup> The anti-Unionists are dismissed as colonial puppets - "tools of imperialists and other outside forces".<sup>55</sup> The official appraisal does not appreciate the democratic aspect in the anti-Unionists movement. The anti-Unionist movement was critical of the relationship between state and society under Haile Selassie. In the historical context of anti-secular and autocratic Ethiopia, the movement represented a legitimate and liberal criticism. It had prefigured some of the democratic questions raised by the 1974 revolution, e.g., the secularization of the state and ethnic equality. The Unionist movement, albeit its Ethiopian nationalism, was highly chauvinist and subservient to autocratic Ethiopia. Its active attempts to obstruct Eritrean regional autonomy and maximize the emperor's power during the drafting of the Eritrean constitution are indicative. Other examples that seem to betray the regime's Amhara/Tigrean cultural perspective can also be cited.

By its own admission, the government's attempts, since 1976, for negotiated settlement were largely confined to EPLF.<sup>56</sup> In 1985, the workers party of Ethiopia issued

an appeal to Eritrean youth. It was meant to isolate the leaders of the Fronts. At the end of the conclusion, it read -

"The history of the struggle for unity of your gallant fathers will pass judgement on you!" (emphasis added) <sup>57</sup>

It is obvious. The appeal was directed towards the high-land youth. It, unfortunately, leaves the Moslems out of the picture. It is not that difficult to conclude how the Moslems, particularly the elite elements, will perceive the Ethiopian state.

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution had raised the question of state/society anew, but it has not resolved it. The persistence of the Eritrean question is a living testimony. The intractability of the problem (over twenty-five years since the collapse of the "federation") seems to raise a broader issue - the problem of "state-building" in the peripheries (i.e., underdeveloped countries). I do not intend to dwell on this issue in detail. The subject is a topic by itself. What follows is merely a concluding remark and, at best, suggests a line for further fruitful research.

Gramsci makes a distinction between strong and weak states.<sup>58</sup> The former combines coercion with "consent" in the "civil society" i.e., political democracy. By contrast, the weak states are conspicuous for their

frequent use or threat of force. Conservative or radical states in the peripheries characteristically belong to the second category. They are invariably authoritarian.<sup>59</sup>

At the general level, history informs us that the evolution of the modern state in Europe was protracted and was marked by two distinct "stages". Democratic revolution, for example, was preceded by the establishment of the centralized national political power - the absolute state and the French revolution. In an age of rising democratic expectations ( i.e., from anti-apartheid mass movement in South Africa, global human rights movements to Glasnost in the Soviet Union itself), the European path of two "stages" seems to be unavailable to the state in the peripheries. The state in the peripheries is confronted with double tasks - to assert the authority at the center and, at the same time, institute political democracy - double tasks alien to the European history of "state-building". The Eritrean question appears to insist on such a trend. The historical predicament of the ancien regime in Ethiopia is instructive.

The state under Haile Selassie had a constitution, a modern bureaucracy and the division of governmental institutions, i.e., the executive, legislative, and the judiciary. Its evolution, however, was rooted in the specific socio-economic structure - incomplete capitalist

development and the theocratic and autocratic Ethiopian political culture.<sup>60</sup> Behind the constitution lay the personal power of the emperor. The division of governmental institutions was merely formal. Behind the modern bureaucracy, personal and patrimonial appointments prevailed. The state acted on society from without. Trade union, freedom of the press and free associations were controlled. The basic character of the state inhibited the development of autonomous groups in the "civil society". Despite its centralized nature and modern institutions, it did not possess a semblance of autonomous existence. The traditional power of royalty, the nobility, and the Coptic Orthodox Church (in a multi-ethnic society) was pervasive.

Under such historical conditions where the state dominated society, the Ethio-Eritrean "federation" was a clear anomaly. It had to be destroyed or the state at the center had to be democratized. Haile Selassie dismantled the "federation". Since the sixties, with the growing anti-regime social movements (i.e., the 1960 abortive coup d'etat, the armed struggle in Eritrea and the student movement),<sup>61</sup> the Ethiopian state increasingly began to lose its external autonomy. Haile Selassie was highly dependent on the United States for economic and military aid.<sup>62</sup> In the peripheries, there seems to be a correlation between internal crisis of hegemony and increasing

external dependency of the state. This applies to both conservative and radical regimes.

The Eritrean question has outlived the state under Haile Selassie and was one of the major causes for the downfall of the latter. The post-1974 Ethiopian state is no less confronted with the centrality of political democracy. If the state is to free its hands from any sort of increasing external dependency and focus on national development, it has to confront the double tasks of the state in the peripheries - to assert the power at the center and also establish political democracy. In the age of rising democratic expectations, the alternative is continued crisis of hegemony and increasing external dependency of the state. Whether the recently declared Republic in Ethiopia<sup>63</sup> will, in practice, free the state from the political culture of the ancien regime and contribute to the resolution of the Eritrean question has yet to be seen.

#### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

As a theoretical and methodological guide, economic reductionism dismisses the status of the political and the ideological in Marxist discourse. It regards their roles as epiphenomenon, mechanically derived from the "economic base". Hence, international capitalism (as

economic force) is said to determine the domestic politics of underdeveloped countries; ethnic ideology is either seen as the direct expression of economic class interest of the dominant class or dismissed as a false consciousness. In all three, the "economic base" becomes an omnipotent and omnipresent force. This study, whose focus has been the modern political history of Eritrea, has tried to provide an alternative explanation to that advanced by the reductionist perspective. This has been done by employing political and ideological analyses, without rejecting the value of economic analysis.

The result has been fruitful. Political and ideological analyses have enabled me to raise and answer questions of particular domestic concerns - which otherwise cannot be raised, let alone answered, within the framework of the reductionist approach - e.g., the nature of the political parties and the content of their actions; the role of ethnic ideology and its material and socio-psychological bases; the problem of Eritrean national consciousness and the fate of the "federation" etc.

Specifically, the study has tried to underline the following major points against the reductionist perspective -

Firstly, it has argued that international capitalism did set the broader limits to the Eritrean

political drama. The "peasant mode of production" which formed the socio-economic basis for the Eritrean domestic politics was, to begin with, the consequence of Eritrea's integration into the international market through the medium of colonialism. Within this historical context, however, the Eritrean domestic politics had a life of its own that cannot be annihilated by constant reference to the region's economic dependency on international capitalism.

Secondly, the study has tried to show that ethnic ideology was neither purely a ploy by the dominant class nor simply a false consciousness, as reductionists would tell us.

The members of the Eritrean petty bourgeois class did invoke ethnic ideology in their intra-class contradictions for control of the state. Their methods of political mobilization were clearly marked by recurrent appeals to ethnic histories and symbols. But the members also believed in ethnic allegiance. Within Eritrea, they fought against each other (i.e., Unionist vis-a-vis anti-Unionist) as two hostile ethnic groups. The members did not act as an ideologically unified class ready to establish an independent Eritrean state. They were not unified enough even to defend the Ethio-Eritrean "federation" which had provided Eritrea a measure of regional autonomy in the context of the anti-secular and autocratic Ethiopian state.

Among the members there was no fundamental consensus on the question of what constituted the Eritrean national self. Haile Selassie did not confront a unified nationalist voice within Eritrea. In the face of the recurrent crisis of hegemony of the petty bourgeois class, the collapse of the Ethio-Eritrean "federation" was a foregone conclusion.

The role of ethnic ideology cannot be dismissed as mere false consciousness. It was a formidable political force. Unlike the reductionist formulation, the study has tried to investigate and explain the material and socio-psychological bases upon which the role of ethnic ideology thrived.

The purpose of the study has been an attempt to intervene in the ideological debate between the Ethiopian regime and the Eritrean nationalists. By rejecting the terms of the debate narrowly defined by the two camps, I have tried to redefine the central problem involved. I have argued that the Eritrean question cannot be explained by reference to Eritrean national consciousness. The position advanced by the Eritrean nationalists is clearly contradicted by the modern political history of Eritrea.

At the same time, the Eritrean question cannot be dismissed in the name of Ethiopian territorial integrity, the obsession of the central government. The Eritrean problem poses the centrality of political democracy in a

multi-ethnic society, Ethiopia. The Eritrean question is rooted in the crisis of "state-building" in the political history of Ethiopia.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Quoted in Thomas Kenneally "In Eritrea" The New York Times Magazine, (September 27, 1987):58.

2. That is, since 1961. See for example Pool, op.cit.

3. Braham Taylor, "Ethiopia's Rebellion", Africa Report (December 1969):6.

4. Ibid. The connotation is that he has become an Ethiopian traitor by allying with the Moslems.

5. An English translation of the complete text, "Our Struggle and Its Goals" is reproduced in Liberation 2 no.3(March 1973):5-23. The editorial introduction sets the historical background for the text.

6. Ibid, pp.12-20.

7. Ibid, p.12.

8. Ibid, p.16.

9. See his Beirut press conference, op.cit., p.2.

10. "Our Struggle and Its Goals", op.cit., p.18.

11. Read for example, Jack Kramer "Hidden War in Ethiopia: Venture (May 1969):18-23; Africa Report 1969, op.cit., pp.5-6; John Franklin Campbell, "Rumbling Along the Red Sea: The Eritrean Question" Foreign Affairs 48, no.3(April 1970):537-546 and his "Background to the Eritrean Conflict" op.cit., pp.19-20; Fred Halliday, "The Fighting in Eritrea" New Left Review no.67(May-June 1971):57-67. For an extended historical analysis see Haggai Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea, 1962-1978, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1983.

12. A detailed account of 1974 Revolution is found in Rene Lefort Ethiopia: A Heretical Revolution? London, Zed Press, 1983. For analytical treatment of the revolution see Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneaux The Ethiopian Revolution, London, New Left Books, Verso Edition, 1981.

13. Read for example Erlich, The struggle over Eritrea, op.cit.; Fulvio Grimaldi, (an Italian journalist) "Unity: Calm Optimism" Sudanow (December 1977):25; Mekal Harnet "Reflections on the Eritrean Revolution" Horn of Africa 6, no.3(1983-84):3-15; Tesfatsion Medhane Eritrea: Dynamics of a National Question Amsterdam, B.R. Bruner, 1986.

14. Since 1975 an increasing number of highlanders had began to join ELF. Strategic posts such as military commands and treasury were controlled by the Moslem elements. As a military force ELF does not exist today. It was destroyed by its counterpart, EPLF. The reasons for its disintegration are not clear. As a guerilla movement, it had a longer history than EPLF. The relationship between its emerging bi-ethnic character and its sudden disintegration, as a military force, has yet to be studied. Tesfatsion mentions the recurrent politicization of ethnic ideology within ELF after the highlanders joined the Front. See Tesfatsion, op.cit., pp.60-63.

15. Some writers have suggested that the civil wars may have claimed more lives than the war with the Ethiopian government. See Mekalh, op.cit. p.10.

16. Erlich, The Struggle Over Eritrea op.cit., pp.18-19.

17. John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State New York, St. Martins Press, 1982. Chapter 16 contains a discussion of nationalism and symbols.

18. An apt expression in Walker Connor "Nation Building or Nation Destroying?" World Politics 24, no.3 (April 1972):341.

19. Saadia Touval, Somali Nationalism Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963; also see Said S. Samatar, Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The case of Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hasan, London, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

20 I had the opportunity to watch closely EPLF cultural displays on video tapes. Apart from recurrent incantations on historical identity (unsupported by concrete uniquely Eritrean evidence), their literature is equally devoid of symbolic historical examples. The reader may consult ELF or EPLF publications.

21. EPLF Hezbi Eritrea Degim Ayetaleleen Iyu, Mimeographed copy, 1986.

22. A brief account on the life of Wolde Michael is found in Longrigg, op.cit., pp.100-112; William Dye, Moslem Egypt and Christian Abyssinia, New York, Atkins and Prout, 1880, pp.283-288; Kolmodin, op.cit.; August B. Wylde, '83 to '87 in the Soudan, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969, pp.322-342; Haggai Erlich, Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875-1897, op.cit.

23. Kolmodin, op.cit., pp.264-265.

24. Longrigg, op.cit., pp.101-102.

25. Great Britain FO742/23 Moslem League Memorandum, 1951, op.cit., pp.12-13.

26. The Washington Post, April 30, 1967. See also The New York Times, April 30 and August 27, 1967.

27. Quoted in Erlich, The Struggle over Eritrea, op.cit., p.58.

28. Ibid, p.40.

29. Ibid, p.41.

30. The New York Times, April 30, 1967 op.cit. Others have estimated as many as 30,000. See for example, Halliday "The Fighting in Eritrea", op.cit., p.62.

31. In the past, the specter of Islam had haunted the Abyssinian rulers and was an effective propaganda at their disposal. Emperor Menelik is said to have defined Ethiopia as "an Island of Christians in the Sea of Muslims". see Trimmingham The Christian Church and Missions in Ethiopia, op.cit., p.7.

32. Africa Report 1969 op.cit. p.6. For the incident at the Frankfurt Airport and a brief analysis on ELF and Haile Selassie see Bowyer J. Bell "Endemic Insurgency and International Order" Orbis 18, no.2(Summer 1974):427-450.

33. Erlich, The Struggle over Eritrea op.cit., p.38.

34. Ibid, p.39.

35. Some prominent names are cited in Erlich's The Struggle over Eritrea, op.cit.
36. Imperial Ethiopian Institute of Public Administration, Administrative Directory of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, Addis Ababa, January 1964.
37. Clapham, op.cit., p.83.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. For Asmara population by religion in 1963 see Imperial Ethiopian Government, Central Statistical Office, Survey of Major Towns in Ethiopia, Statistical Bulletin, Addis Ababa, 1968, p.49. For statistical figures on urban population in Eritrea in 1967 see ibid, p.2. According to Horowitz, literacy in the 1970's in the Moslem quarters of Asmara was below the average for the city. The same was true for the quality of housing. See Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p.253.
41. Aradom, op.cit., pp.24-26.
42. For example, according to a 1968 survey of 500 students only 6% were reported as having a Moslem family background. There is a brief analysis on ethnic and religious affiliations of university students in Balsvik, op.cit., pp.43-49.
43. Imperial Ethiopian Institute of Public Administration, Organization of Imperial Ethiopian Government, op.cit., pp.389-393.
44. A passing grade of Amharic was required to enter the University in Addis Ababa.
45. This is the assessment of the Ottaways after their random interviews in Eritrea. See David and Marina Ottaway, Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution, New York, African Publishing Company, 1978, p.207 footnote no.5. In my telephone conversation with David Ottaway, I was told that the interviews were carried out mainly in highland Eritrea.
46. Read, for example, the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, September 12, 1987.

47. An appropriate phrase in Lefort, *op.cit.*, p.143.
48. Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eritrea: Then and Now, *op.cit.*, p.13.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Lefort, *op.cit.*, p.147.
51. Erlich, The Struggle over Eritrea, *op.cit.*, p.16.
52. *Ibid.* Today, the war in Eritrea is mainly between two militarily organized forces - i.e., the Ethiopian regime and the EPLF. The former's insistence on military solution may serve as a major catalyst in the formation of a truly Eritrean nationalist movement.
53. The reader may consult Ethiopia, Revolution Information Center, *op.cit.* and Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eritrea: Then and Now, *op.cit.*
54. *Ibid.*, p.16.
55. Ethiopia, Revolution Information Center, *op.cit.*, p.8.
56. Workers Party of Ethiopia, The Sole Truth and Only Solution, Addis Ababa, August, 1985, pp.16-28.
57. *Ibid.*, p.36.
58. Read the secondary sources on Gramsci or his own works cited earlier in the references on hegemony, *op.cit.*
59. The term refers to a social category rather than merely a method of rule. There is an extended analysis on the character of the modern state in the peripheries in Clive Y. Thomas, The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1984.
60. For the traditional and modern economic, social and political Ethiopian history, the reader may consult the bibliography in this study.
61. For the 1960 abortive coup d'etat and the subsequent rise of the student movement see Balsvik, *op.cit.*
62. Marcus, *op.cit.*

63. Declared in September 1987, the new constitution, among others, guarantees ethnic rights, freedom of speech, ethnic representation in the National Assembly and regional autonomy. See The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, op.cit.

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