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ETHIOPIA: REVOLUTION, CLASS, AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

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A Theoretical Framework

MANY AFRICANIST scholars seeking to explain the dynamics of political and economic change have pointed to ethnicity as the most salient explanatory variable. There is no doubt that the ethnic factor does explain much in African politics, but the *basis* of ethnic conflict and just *how much* it explains are open debates. Initially some scholars argued that ethnic affinities were primordially based,[1] and that ethnic groups tended to be locked in hard and fast categories based on factors such as language, religion, race and/or assumed blood ties.[2] These disparate groups were made to cohere, it was only thought, by the coercive authority of the colonial state. Inter-group conflicts, when they occurred, were conveniently labelled 'tribal conflicts' without much attention devoted to getting at the origins of such conflict. More recently, however, this perspective has come in for a great deal of criticism. First, some scholars, while acknowledging the political saliency of ethnicity, suggest new interpretations of the fundamental forces underpinning contemporary incidents of ethnic conflict in Africa;[3] and, second, neo-Marxist class analysts suggest that contemporary incidents of ethnic conflict in Africa are more the product of class contradictions disguised by false consciousness than they are of ancient, primordial antagonisms.[4]

The first, non-Marxist, set of revisionists generally recognize that most ethnic conflict, instead of being based on primordial sentiments, is based on the competition among various ethnic groups over the scarce resources of the modernizing sector. We might call this phenomenon the *new ethnicity.* Although kith and kin in rural areas continue to be a salient reference group for urban-based relatives, ethnic conflicts generally occur only in urban areas and involve debates over economic resources found there, such as jobs, patronage, education, and so forth. In addition, revisionists suggest that ethnicity as a variable affecting political behaviour is fluid, intermittent, and experiential.[5]

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1. See for example, Clifford Geertz, 'The Integrative Revolution, Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States', in C. Geertz, (ed.), *Old Societies and New States* (New York, 1963).
2. See for example, L. Kuper and M. G. Smith, (eds.), *Pluralism in Africa* (Berkeley, 1969).
3. See, Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison, 1976); and R. Melson and H. Wolpe, 'Modernization and the Politics of Communalism', *American Political Science Review*, **64**, (1970), pp. 1112–30.
4. See for example, Archie Mafeje, 'The Ideology of Tribalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, **9**, (1971), pp. 253–62.
5. An excellent assessment of the state of the art on this theme is: Nelson Kasfir, 'Explaining Ethnic Political Participation', *World Politics*, **31**, (1978–9), pp. 365–88.

Traditionally a large proportion of African peoples organized themselves along clan and not tribal lines. The clan was generally conceived to be the terminal community. But with the advent of colonialism, it became common for groups to be identified (and eventually for them to identify themselves) in terms of an expanded ethnic community which came to be known as the tribe.[6] Often this revised conception of the ethnic group led to the incorporation of peoples and whether voluntarily, inadvertently, or involuntarily, into expanded ethnic communities for one reason or another'.

The colonial state and eventually the independent nation-state in black Africa contributed greatly to the emergence of the modern conception of ethnic identity. At the same time, however, revisionists emphasize that the new ethnicity is not *always* the basis for political action. Often competition is based on clan identities; thus, we might witness intra-ethnic (clan) competition more frequently than we witness inter-ethnic (tribal) competition and conflict. What seems to determine the scope of the individual's ethnic reference group at a given point in time are the nature of the stakes involved and the nature of the existing political climate. For example, the various clans of the Kikuyu find themselves in regular competition, through political patrons, over the delivery of social services from the central government. But when, for one reason or another, the political climate begins to emit cues which force individuals from various clans to identify more closely with one another, the change in fundamental allegiance has been dramatic. In 1968, for instance, when Tom Mboya, a well-known Luo politician was killed in Kenya by a Kikuyu, the Kikuyu clans as a group felt threatened and began to organize for possible collective action as an expanded ethnic community.[8]

Revisionists also alert us to the fact that ethnically-based political action is intermittent. Individuals and groups may, for instance, act on the basis of individual preference at one point in time; at another they may make choices based upon clan-based considerations; or they might even decide to act in a given manner based upon their perception of the *class* interests at stake. The scope and intensity of political competition centering around the new ethnicity is most often determined by how ethnic *elites* define political situations. But it is important to remember that the new ethnicity is not always operable in politics.

Hence, the revisionists acknowledge that social class as well as ethnicity could be the basis for political action in contemporary Africa; but they tend to leave it at that. Little effort is made to delve into the nature and consequences of

6. See Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, pp. 23–37.
7. See, I. Wallerstein, 'Ethnicity and National Integration', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* (1960); Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (New York, 1957); and P. C. Lloyd, *African in Social Change* (Penguin, 1967).
8. The Kikuyu have a tradition of 'oathing' during times of crisis. There are two basic oaths: the 'Oath of Unity' and the 'Warrior Oath'. The former is more customary, but the latter is invoked when the group is severely threatened. It seems that in this case only the 'Oath of Unity' was administered on any scale. For a discussion of Kikuyu oathing see, C. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau* (New York, 1966).

classes in Africa. Some neo-Marxist scholars, however, have recently attempted to fill this void by 'bending' Marx to fit Africa. What has resulted is generally a hodge-podge of classificatory schemes intended to establish the existence of classes in Africa and to infer contradictions which will lead (are leading, or have led) to class conflict.[9] Few such studies have tried to analyse the dialectical, historical process by which African classes were formed or the nature of current class dynamics. This is not to say that the neo-Marxists as a group are guilty of this deficiency. Some are beginning to reexamine critically the applicability of Marxist class analysis to Africa and have suggested new directions for research.[10] The basis for their suggestions is the assumption that we must consciously address several 'anomalies' in Marx's theory of social change and construct a model which is culturally relevant to Africa (or more specifically to a given African society), while at the same time preserving the essence of the Marxian methodology. Aiden Foster-Carter, for example, presents a cogent critique of the relevance of orthodox Marxist theory to the African situation.[11] He notes that the transition to capitalism in Africa differed significantly from the European pattern. Instead of capitalism being born of feudalism in Africa as in Europe, it was imposed from the outside. Moreover, rather than destroying traditional modes of production and social relationships, in many cases colonial capitalism *utilized* these structures to advance its own objectives.[12] Resulting contradictions, according to Foster-Carter, are responsible for current patterns of underdevelopment in Africa.

A fundamental hindrance to applying Marx's European-based model in Africa is its conceptualization of social change as an essentially endogenous process and its inability to conceptualize what Marx himself called the 'fact of conquest'. History is replete with examples of significant social change resulting from foreign intervention. Foremost amongst these must be the incorporation of Africa into the world capitalist system as a result of European colonialism and the consequent interruption of the normal progress of human events. Marx's model does not allow for such 'skipping of stages', nor does it account for the coexistence of politically salient ethnic *and* class affinities.

This is not to say that Marxist ideas are irrelevant to Africa. On the contrary,

9. See for example, G. Arrighi and J. S. Saul, 'Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa'. in R. Miliband and J. Saville, (eds.), *Socialist Register* (London, 1969) and B. Magubane, 'The Evolution of the Class Structure in Africa', in P. Gutkind and I. Wallerstein, (eds.), *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (Beverly Hills, 1976).

10. For exceptions see Robin Cohen, 'Class in Africa: analytical problems and perspectives', in Ralph Milliband and J. Saville, (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1977* (London, 1978); I. Wallerstein, 'Class and Class Conflict in Africa', *Monthly Review* (February 1975) pp. 24–42, and Richard Sklar, 'The Nature of Class Domination in Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, **17**, (1979), pp. 531–52.

11. Aiden Foster-Carter, 'Marxism and the "Fact of Conquest" ', *The African Review*, **6**, (1976).

12. See, Aiden Foster-Carter, 'The Modes of Production Controversy', *New Left Review*, **107**, (January–February 1978), p. 63.

what is being suggested here is that the 'fact of conquest' preempted the natural evolution of African societies, creating numerous contextural anomalies which must be addressed if Marxist ideas are to be made relevant to Africa. As a result of European conquest, African societies were controlled from outside. Foreign forces came to determine how society was organized and functioned on so many dimensions. As colonial power was consolidated, so contradictions arose which served to crystallize national consciousness among African peoples all over the continent, while simultaneously social classes were being formed.

Colonial states, in contrast to what had existed before, were organized into territorial units which were clearly defined. Capitalism was introduced, but initially it did not completely dominate traditional modes of production. Some traditional social relations were maintained, some were adapted and others transformed; and as capitalism took root, social classes began to form. On the eve of the independence era, African social relations were in a process of transition, with traditional and quasi-traditional social relations still being dominant. It was natural, therefore, for Africans to seize on the 'national question' as a justification for their desire for self-determination. For freedom and independence, they were prepared to 'die as clans and tribes and be reborn as nations' (admittedly, for some this 'death' was ephemeral).

Significantly, colonial capitalism gave rise to contradictions based not only on class, but also on race and/or the new ethnicity. Under European colonialism, broadly speaking whites controlled the productive processes and blacks provided the labour; and thus race and class were intertwined. Moreover, for administrative purposes Africans were organized into expanded ethnic categories. The result was a complex interplay between, and among, many factors. Consequently, we cannot hope to understand the true nature of African politics without understanding how race, ethnicity and class interact. For the most part, the race question has been solved through nationalist revolutions, but ethnic and class contradictions are still potential sources of conflict. These factors might influence political dynamics singly or together and must therefore be considered together.

What is being suggested here is what we might call a *relational* perspective. This is based on the assumption that any theoretical perspective must be closely related to the sociocultural context to which it is being applied. Such a model would seem to apply to all African countries which experienced *European* colonialism. But does it apply to those few which were virtually untouched by European colonialism such as Liberia or Ethiopia? Ethiopia, for example, up until recently was commonly referred to as 'the Hidden Empire' because of its relative isolation; it was seen as a feudal autocracy, unintegrated into the world capitalist system. Also, as a result of having defeated an invading Italian force in 1896 at Adowa, the Ethiopian state was mythicized as the epitome of African independence and self-determination. Leaders such as Emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie I worked hard at projecting Ethiopia's image in the

world community as a viable, unified nation-state which could trace its origins to antiquity.

The myth of unity and viability was broken, however, with the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974. The question is: How do we explain the revolution? Is classical Marxist class analysis more applicable to Ethiopia than other areas of Africa or can we understand this period of conflict solely in terms of an 'ethnicity' paradigm? Or, is our relational perspective more relevant? It is argued here that the same relational approach we suggested for the rest of Africa, which considers the relevance of 'the fact of conquest', applies to Ethiopia as well. This becomes clear when we cut through some of the *myths* which surrounded the Ethiopian Empire.

There are several *facts* which must be borne in mind. The first is: *Ethiopia did not escape a colonial era.* Instead of this era being characterized by European dominance and exploitation, multiple indigenous peoples were dominated by the militarily superior Amhara-Tigre peoples. Therefore, the 'fact of conquest' is relevant to Ethiopia as it is also to other African states. This phenomenon had similar consequences in Ethiopia as it did elsewhere. For instance, both social classes and expanded ethnic affinities (the new ethnicity) were crystallized during the colonial era.

Second, *the Ethiopian Empire was not a well integrated political community, but a state only precariously held together by military and bureaucratic power, with ever-present fissiparous tendencies.* Therefore, as the new ethnicity crystallized, the potential for ethnically based conflict increased. This explains why incorporated ethnic communities such as the Eritreans, Somalis, and Oromos pressed their claims for national self-determination even as revolution engulfed the Ethiopian Empire.

Third, *in spite of the dominance of a feudal mode of production, by the mid-20th century, Ethiopia was integrated into the world capitalist system.* Capitalism and feudalism coexisted in time and space, and the contradictions inherent in both contributed greatly to the dynamics of the Ethiopian Revolution.[13]

It is one thing to make such assertions, but it is another to *prove* them. Such is the aim of this article. The intention is to analyse the dynamics of the Ethiopian Revolution by focusing on the historical underpinnings of the 'fact of conquest', of class formation, of the crystallization of the new ethnicity, and of the *interaction* of all of these factors through the prism of our *relational* perspective.

13. The question of the relevance of the feudal paradigm to Ethiopia has been the subject of much debate, and the issue remains unresolved. There are those who suggest that what appeared at first glance to be feudalistic relationships such as characterized medieval Europe were merely 'feudal-like relationships which could not stand the rigorous application of the feudal paradigm', (i.e., G. Ellis, 'The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia,' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, **14**, (1976) pp. 275–95). Others staunchly maintain that pre-revolutionary Ethiopia was feudal in character or at least 'semi-feudal' (i.e., Legesse Lemme, 'Review', *Ethiopianist Notes*, **2**, (1978). For our purposes we will accept the latter interpretation.

The Fact of Conquest

The state of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) can trace its origins back more than two thousand years. But what we know as the modern-day Ethiopian Empire was largely a product of the past 100-plus years. Between 1855 and 1974, the state increasingly took on the characteristics of a centralized, bureaucratized state.

The core of the traditional state originally centered on the ancient city-state of Axum in what is present-day Tigre Province. The Axumite kingdom, based on trade and conquest came into focus during the 6th century BC, flourished between the first and eighth centuries AD, and was finally decimated in 970 AD by hostile neighbouring groups.[14] At this time we could not speak of a centralized bureaucratic empire, but a patrimonial conquest empire, held together by force, particularistic loyalties, and trade. Nevertheless, it was during the Axumite era that the inhabitants of the state began to refer to themselves as Abyssinians, and began to refer to their preeminent leader as 'the King of Kings' or Emperor.

Abyssinia maintained relatively close trading links with the Roman Empire and this may have contributed to the adoption of Christianity as the official religion during the middle of the 4th century.[15] From this point on the Christian religion and the Geez language—the language of the Church—became the vehicles through which Abyssinian culture was spread to conquered peoples.

From the time of the collapse of Axum in 970 until 1135 the Christian empire fell on hard times. Muslim Arabs threatened it from the north, Muslim Somalis threatened it from the south-east, and it was otherwise surrounded by hostile, largely animist, neighbours who entered the region from the south. By 1135 what remained of the original state had been pushed to the south and west, but was able to reconstitute itself, although in seriously weakened form.

Between the early 14th and 15th centuries, the state had once again become strong enough to venture expansion. During this period the core was significantly reconsolidated, and the Amhara-Christian culture was diffused to all regions of the state. This phase of expansion was dominated by Amhara kings, and there was a conscious effort to *Amharize* conquered peoples.[16] They were often forced to abandon their animist beliefs and to adopt Coptic Christianity.

By the beginning of the 16th century the Abyssinians were again severely

14. See Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: the evolution of a multiethnic society* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 70–1.

15. Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 21–68; and Sergew Habte Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, 1972). A century later the Christian Church in Ethiopia identified with the Monophesites of Alexandria, Egypt and became known as Coptics.

16. *Amharization* is a term which is well known and much used among Ethiopianists. It merely refers to the acceptance of Amhara culture and custom by non-Amharas. This process is facilitated through education, language, the Coptic religion and the taking of Amhara Christian names. There is a great deal of ethnic chauvinism involved as those other ethnics who readily accept Amharization are more fully integrated into the mainstream of society and have better life chances as a result. See, D. Levine, 'Ethiopia: identity, authority and realism', in L. Pye and S. Verba, (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, 1965).

challenged by hostile peoples who were also in the process of expansion, the Ottoman Turks, the Somalis and the Oromos. In 1557 the Turks captured the Eritrean seaport of Massawa, and also succeeded in penetrating the fringes of the Tigre highlands. For the most part, however, they confined themselves to the coast. But they provided the Afar and Somali peoples with arms which enabled these groups to pressure Abyssinia from the east.

The Turkish invasion coincided roughly with a series of invasions by the Eastern Cushitic Oromo people.[17] By the mid-16th century the Oromo had penetrated as far north as Shoa and into the Abyssinian core around Begemder and Gojjam. They also controlled the area in the east around Harar. The Oromo did not possess superior military technology, but, confronted by an already beleaguered and divided adversary, they could rely on the might of numbers to win battles.

Even as the Christian Abyssinians and the Muslim Somalis spent themselves in suicidal struggle, the Oromos were making inroads into the territories of both contestants. At the height of their expansion the Oromo occupied as much as one-third of the Abyssinian heartland.[18] They established their own ethnic enclaves mostly in the central part of Abyssinia, and, although they preserved much of their traditional culture, they selectively borrowed and adapted a great deal of the Abyssinian culture to suit their needs and tastes. As long as they remained in their enclaves, the Oromo were able to preserve some elements of their traditional culture and thus to maintain their distinctiveness. But in certain instances where they penetrated Abyssinian strongholds such as Gojjam and Begemder—usually as prisoners of war or as royal retainers—they were more fully integrated into Amhara society, often intermarrying with the Amhara and accepting the Christian religion. In such instances the door was open for Oromo influence in Amhara life and politics. Significantly, in the late 17th century and early 18th century the already substantial political influence of the Oromos in the Amhara core increased dramatically as Emperor Asmah Giorgis recruited Oromos into his army and his court in an effort to break the power of the Amhara nobility.[19] From this point on, the influence of the Oromo in the royal court grew. There was a good deal of intermarrying between Amhara royalty and people of Oromo stock. Eventually, this resulted in a line of royalty—and even emperors—who were not purely of Abyssinian descent. This had an unsettling influence on the viability of the state, however, and by 1769 the central authorities had all but lost control over most of the state.

Between 1769 and 1855 the Abyssinian Empire became moribund, and eventually ceased to exist in all but its name. This was the 'Era of the Princes'

17. See Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 78.
18. Herbert Lewis, *A Galla Monarchy* (Madison, 1965), p. 23. The Oromo are often referred to as 'the Galla' but they prefer 'Oromo'.
19. See A. H. M. Jones and E. Monroe, *A History of Abyssinia* (New York, 1969), pp. 118–19.

(*Zemene Mesafint*), and provincialism reached crisis proportions.[20] Political power became decentralized as the state regressed into feudal, regional compartments, and local warlords and traditional nobility competed among themselves for supremacy. Only Shoa, which was separated from the other Amhara-Tigre provinces by an Oromo enclave, remained relatively stable and unified. Abyssinia was then only nominally a state, being ruled by fifteen different figurehead emperors during the period. The dynasty which had assumed the role of 'king-maker' was centered in Begemder and ruled in the mid-19th century by Ras Ali.[21]

In 1853, Ras Ali was defeated in battle by Kasa, the Governor of Ye-Maru-Qimis, and this marked the beginning of the end of the *Zemene Mesafint.* Buoyed by his success, Kasa dedicated himself to crushing the kings of Tigre and Shoa. He subdued Tigre in 1855, and had himself crowned 'King of Kings' in the traditional manner, thus bringing to an end almost one hundred years of fratricidal conflict in the Abyssinian core. He took the title of Emperor Theodore claiming, according to one of the religious documents which form the basis of Ethiopian myth and custom *Fikkere Iyesus* (the Interpretation of Jesus), that he was the righteous, just and popular king who would come to the throne after a period of divine punishment had been heaped upon the Abyssinians for their evil deeds. It was prophesied that this king would be called Theodore and that he would rule for forty years, restoring Abyssinia to its former unity and greatness.[22] This was the beginning of the modern Ethiopian Empire.

Theodore instituted two main measures aimed at strengthening his imperial sovereignty. First, he fragmented traditional administrative divisions and thus deprived many local princes and kings of their bases of power. Administrators for the reconstituted units were chosen, except in rare circumstances, by the emperor himself. Most of these were also trusted officers in his military or members of the royal family. They were responsible for collecting tithes and taxes on behalf of the crown and were instrumental in Theodore's efforts to break the power of patrimonial, feudal lords. He also succeeded in jailing most of his potential enemies. This facilitated the maintenance of law and order in the countryside, and buttressed the centralizing effort.

Second, Theodore began to create a disciplined, professional state army for the first time. He often employed Europeans and Turks, with military expertise, to train his men and he also provided his soldiers with regular salaries, clothes and equipment. This did much to strengthen both his empire's military and administrative capacity.

Theodore's centralization policies were continued, but not significantly improved, by Yohannes IV who succeeded him in 1872.[23] During the reign of

20. M. Abir, *Ethiopia: the era of the Princes* (London, 1968).
21. Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976), p. 323.
22. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, p. 157.
23. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1976).

Yohannes, centralization in fact began to break down and some powerful provincial aristocrats began to regain their strength and semi-autonomy. Most of the emperor's efforts were directed towards territorial expansion. He pushed the periphery of his domain to the west from his capital in Tigre region, leaving hegemony over the south to his powerful vassal Menelik.

Yohannes's most outstanding accomplishments were in the field of foreign policy. Before him Theodore had been unsuccessful in securing diplomatic recognition from European powers which were already beginning to show interest in the Horn. Yohannes followed the course of patient diplomacy, buttressing his authority and legitimacy with a relatively strong and modernizing army. This, in effect, deterred reckless European adventures into Abyssinia. He entered into a peace treaty with Egypt and trade agreements with Britain. He also purchased arms from both public and private European agents.

Yohannes's diplomatic and military moves provided him with a measure of security, but he was still threatened on his western border by Sudanese Mahdists. In 1889, Yohannes was killed in a western campaign against these antagonists. Before his death he had agreed that after him the throne would pass to Menelik of Shoa.

As King of Shoa, Menelik had already begun to expand and consolidate the territory under his control. Between 1868 and 1876, he succeeded in conquering Wollo; then he turned his attention south and west, by 1882 having conquered Somali and Oromo territories to the south and east. By the end of 1887, Menelik had added Gurage, Arussi and Harar to his possessions. These latter conquests enabled him to control the most significant south-easterly trade route and gave him outlets to the sea which were independent of Yohannes's sphere of influence. With this route under his control, he was able to exploit the vast wealth of gold, ivory and coffee obtainable in his southern and western holdings.[24]

After he became emperor he not only took over Yohannes's domain, but also continued to bring more and more territory in the south and east under his control. Through conquest and/or diplomacy, between 1890 and 1906, he added the Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo, Wollamo, Kaffa and Illubabor to his holdings, thus stretching the state of Ethiopia to its present configuration, except for Eritrea.

Eritrea had passed from one imperialist power to the next since antiquity. In 1885 Britain controlled the Eritrean port-city of Massawa, and Italy, its ally, had begun to express interest in establishing a colony on the Red Sea. In 1885 Britain turned Massawa over to the Italians, and they in turn began to solidify their control over the Eritrean lowlands. It was clear that the Italians were not prepared to stop there, but had designs on the domain of Yohannes as well. For instance, Italy concluded several independent treaties with then King Menelik of

24. H. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* (Oxford, 1975). pp. 28–173.

Shoa between 1883 and 1887. These were essentially agreements of 'friendship and commerce'. Italy saw this as a means of playing off one Abyssinian power against another. Menelik, on the other hand, saw these treaties as mechanisms for securing arms and ammunition. It seemed that he had nothing to lose at the time. In another treaty in 1887 Menelik agreed to remain neutral in a dispute which surfaced between Italy and Yohannes over Italian encroachment into the Abyssinian hinterland.

Over the next two years this relationship between Menelik and Italy continued to grow, and in 1889, just seven weeks after he became emperor, Menelik concluded the Treaty of Wichale with Italy.[25] The treaty was officially described as a treaty of 'perpetual peace and friendship'. According to the agreement Italy officially recognized Menelik as Emperor of Abyssinia, granted Abyssinia duty free privileges for any goods passing through Massawa, granted Abyssinia a substantial loan, and promised Abyssinia future arms and military supplies. For its part Abyssinia ceded part of the Tigrai Highlands to be used as a buffer to Italy's interests in Massawa, and granted certain commercial, industrial, and judicial privileges to the Italians. The sphere of the Italian occupation and influence, however, was to be confined to a small, well circumscribed area down at the coast which was already occupied by Italy at the time the treaty was signed. This was the beginning of the Italian colony of Eritrea.

Seemingly this treaty had something good in it for both signatories. It was not long, however, before it was apparent that this was not the case. Before the year had passed, Italy had penetrated deeper into Abyssinian territory. Moreover, Menelik discovered that the treaty which he had signed in both an Italian and an Amharic version, contained different language in the two versions with regard to the relations between the two states. The Amharic version suggested that Abyssinia *could use Italy* as an agent in foreign relations *if it desired.* But the Italian version suggested that *Abyssinia was obliged to go through Italy* in its foreign relations with other countries. In other words, through duplicity, Italy had declared Abyssinia its protectorate.

This controversy resulted in war between Italy and Abyssinia. The first skirmish occurred in December 1895, and by early March of the following year the war was over. Menelik's well armed and numerically superior forces handed the Italians a resounding defeat at Adowa. This sterling victory sent shock waves throughout Europe and caused the reigning Italian government to fall. In October 1896, at Addis Ababa, a peace treaty was signed between Abyssinia and Italy. The Treaty of Wichale was abrogated and Italy was allowed to maintain possession of Eritrea as long as it did not penetrate the Abyssinian hinterland.[26] Between 1896 and 1897, Menelik quickly entered into other agreements with France, Britain and the Mahdists in an effort to ensure the territorial integrity of his empire.

25. Sven Rubenson, *Wichale XVII* (Addis Ababa, 1964).
26. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II.*

In securing recognition from the European powers, Menelik had succeeded in accomplishing what his predecessors—and indeed so many other African leaders of his time—had failed to do. This contributed greatly to the almost mythical image of Ethiopia as the epitome of African independence. What is generally ignored, however, is the fact that in large measure Ethiopia, particularly under Menelik, was a participant in the colonial 'scramble for Africa', enveloping its newly acquired territories through military conquest and also through the medium of a legalistic shroud. Until this time, geographic as well as ethnic boundaries were fluid and had never been so rigidly defined in the Horn between one group of people and the next.

The Structure of Dominance

Menelik realized that, if the modern state was to survive, he had to be concerned with more than international diplomacy. He also had to develop effective mechanisms of authority and control for domestic purposes. To this end, he proceeded to develop and strengthen resources such as his army and his territorial bureaucracy. Under Menelik these institutions were made more permanent and more professional than at any other time in the Abyssinian history.

Central to the survival of the imperial state was the emperor's military. At any one time Menelik could raise a force of more than 600,000 riflemen and innumerable traditionally armed warriors. These troops were supported by modern artillery. He maintained a professional standing army of more than 200,000. Of this number, between 10–12,000 were at the direct disposal of the emperor himself.[27]

Menelik was also able to begin a training system for his soldiers which involved introducing them to new weapons and the strategy and tactics of modern warfare. This programme was financed mainly with foreign aid from France and Czarist Russia. Advisors from these countries were utilized as instructors, but there was no formal military academy.[28]

In an effort to further professionalize his army, Menelik introduced a policy of paying them a regular salary. In traditional times, soldiers had to fend for themselves and they often were guilty of victimizing the very subjects they were supposed to be protecting. But now, salary was both in cash and in kind, clothing, weapons, and ammunition being also provided. Officers serving in peripheral areas, it is important to note, were given land and also a selected number of subjects from whom they could collect tribute for their personal use. The important point here is that, by paying his soldiers a regular salary,

27. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, p. 218; R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 556; and Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire, 1813–1889* (London, 1975), p. 16.
28. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 562.

Menelik was attempting to improve his army's discipline and reliability. This was essential if his empire was to hold together as a modern state.

The army also played an integral part in the initiation and establishment of a centralized bureaucratic authority system under Menelik. Given the ever-present threat of European colonialism, and the vastly expanded domain of the empire, Menelik realized that a permanent administrative presence had to be established, especially in the periphery. The most trusted generals in his army were appointed governors-general of provinces, which constituted the largest administrative division in the empire. Below the governor of a province were found district governors, also appointed by the emperor. District governors were responsible for appointing the heads of the lowest administrative divisions called *shum*. The *shum* consisted of either one large village or a cluster of small villages in the same general area. The head of a *shum* was paid a token salary and exempt from tax and tribute obligations.[29]

Imperial authority was further exercised and demonstrated through *ketemas*, garrison towns, which were erected throughout the country, but which became particularly important in administering Oromo and Somali areas in the newly acquired peripheral areas of the south.[30] These towns housed soldiers dispatched to certain areas to act as 'watchmen' for the crown as well as to maintain law and order as necessary. Those who manned the *Ketemas* did much to curb centrifugal tendencies which had always characterized Abyssinia and its environs.

Ketemas, then, became administrative centres during Menelik's time, housing in the periphery the delegates of the crown—most of whom were of Amhara-Tigre descent—their families and other settlers. In the south, the contrast between indigenous populations and the agents of the state, who were for the most part foreign to them and who resided in and around *ketemas*, was exceedingly sharp. There were no efforts to integrate subject peoples into the expanded political system except to forcibly impose the Amhara-Christian culture upon them and to extract economic resources from them. This in large measure inhibited the development of a sense of national identification with the Abyssinian state among the peoples in the newly conquered areas. In an environment in which 'might' was 'right', conquered peoples merely aquiesced in Abyssinian authority; they did not accept it as legitimate.

Menelik was the first Abyssinian monarch to introduce the practice of paying taxes to the state. Rural cultivators were also expected to contribute a certain amount of labour each year to the state. Taxes and tribute were collected at each level of administration. The *shum* leader collected such resources—mostly in kind—at the local level, keeping a designated portion for himself, and forwarding the rest to the district level and so forth. The provincial governor forwarded two-thirds of his collection to the capital at Addis Ababa. The

29. Dankwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire*, pp. 123–30.
30. S. Charles and W. McClellan, 'The Ethiopian Occupation of Northern Sidamo: recruitment and motivation' (Mimeo, 1978).

conduit for transmitting taxes to Addis was branches of the Imperial Treasury which were established at the provincial level under Menelik.[31]

In addition to strengthening the administrative capacity of the state in the periphery, Menelik also saw a need for differentiating the office of emperor at the centre. In 1907, he announced to foreign powers that he was contemplating the formation of a cabinet. Eventually, he appointed a nine member cabinet consisting of men who were not widely known but who were doggedly loyal to him.[32] Menelik relied on his ministers only to a token degree; but the creation of these posts set in motion forces which led rapidly to the emergence of a nascent secularized, central bureaucracy.

In order further to consolidate and perpetuate his absolute rule, Menelik saw the need to encourage the development of a new educated elite steeped in western values and progressive in outlook. Such a class was critical to the functioning of the state bureaucracy, the diplomatic corps and the economy. As early as the 1890s, young Abyssinians has been sent abroad to Europe, Russia and Sudan.[33] Also, Menelik is credited with establishing the first modern school in Ethiopia in 1908. The school was essentially a school for the children of the nobility and had an enrolment of about 100. Schools were also opened at about this time in regional capitals at Harar and Dire Dawa. Students learned Amharic, various European languages, reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other subjects. Once graduated, these new elites were to be the corner-stones of the modernizing autocracy.

Menelik began the process of consolidating and modernizing imperial dominance in Abyssinia, but he died before his creation had matured. The task of completing the wedding of modernity and tradition was left to Emperor Haile Selassie I who became Emperor in 1930 after serving 14 years as Regent in the Government of Menelik's daughter, Empress Zauditu.

As Regent and as Emperor, Selassie was dedicated to continuing the centralization and modernization policies begun by Menelik. This meant the further development of a secularized, professional bureaucracy, a professional army and an indigenous middle-class committed to modernization. Moreover, he had to cultivate foreign alliances which provided him with capital for economic development and defensive arms for his police and military. The latter not only aided in the protection of national borders but also in maintaining domestic order.

Selassie's plans were interrupted in 1936 when he was driven into exile by the invading Italian army of Mussolini. The Italian Fascists occupied Abyssinia until 1941, when they were driven out by allied forces led by Britain. This enabled Selassie to return and to begin to consolidate his power. From this

31. R. Pankhurst, 'Tribute, Taxation and Government Revenues in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Ethiopia, (Part I)', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, **5**, (1967), p. 43.
32. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, pp. 227–8.
33. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 674.

point on, it was clear that Selassie was bent on establishing linkages with foreign powers and outside capital. These resources were to provide him with the autonomy needed to neutralize the power of the traditional nobility and to legitimize the integrity of the modern Ethiopian state.

To a limited degree Selassie had begun to strengthen his authority as early as the 1930s. Among his major early achievements were the expansion of a modern education system, the abolition of slavery, the construction of roads and other public works, the organization of local police forces and local government, and the publication of newspapers in Amharinya. But perhaps the most significant early reform, and one which clearly aimed at strengthening his position *vis-à-vis* religio-traditional classes, was the proclamation of a constitutional monarchy in 1931.[34] The constitution was the first document of its kind, and in effect it lessened the role of the Church in legitimating the emperor and centralized more power in the hands of the absolute monarch. Partly as a control mechanism and partly in an effort to create a semblance of political modernization, national quasi-representative institutions were created: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Deputies were chosen by the nobility and local chiefs. Senators were appointed from among the nobility and local chiefs by the Emperor. In spite of these reforms, the Emperor continued to face considerable opposition to his innovative efforts from provincial autocrats.

The power of the nobility was based on a combination of status and wealth. The Emperor reserved the right to make political appointments and to bestow prestigious titles. Yet he was limited by traditional criteria which demanded that he grant preference to aristocratic families. For example, in some areas it was a matter of custom that the governorship be given to certain families, especially in core areas. This enabled such regionally powerful families to acquire, at least in their own areas, a measure of legitimacy which superseded that of the Emperor. In some cases they used this authority to forestall the centralizing tendencies of the crown.[35]

After 1941, Selassie continued systematically to curtail the power of the aristocracy. He introduced three major structural reforms in imperial administration. First, he established a standing army which was completely under the emperor's control, making regional armies and their commanders obsolete. The training of the new national military was carried out by the British. However, Selassie was anxious that Ethiopia not become a *defacto* protectorate of Britain, and signed lend-lease agreements with the United States. In 1953, a mutual defence pact was signed, guaranteeing US military assistance which resulted in Ethiopia receiving more than $200 million in military aid over a twenty-two year period. This military aid and other such aid from Sweden, Israel, India, the Soviet Union and other countries enabled Selassie to

34. J. Paul and C. Clapham, *Ethiopian Constitutional Development, Vol. 1* (Addis Ababa, 1967).
35. D. Levine, *Wax and Gold* (Chicago, 1965), p. 155.

use the national army not only for border defence, but also to suppress domestic rebellions.[36] This significantly enhanced the potential of the bureaucratic empire to survive.

In addition, an imperial bodyguard was reestablished and expanded. A separate air force was developed to give the Emperor additional defensive capabilities. Soon it was clear that the reconstituted military possessed a monopoly of modern military technology and expertise. This allowed the bureaucratic empire a potential measure of control and defence capability it had never known.

A second major post-war reform was the establishment of a new fiscal system under the Ministry of Finance. For the first time, taxes paid in a new currency were collected by salaried civil servants in the Ministry of Finance and forwarded directly to the state treasury. The significance of this measure was that it professionalized the bureaucracy and theoretically deprived district administrators of the right to command arbitrary amounts of goods and services from subjects in their jurisdictions. They could now only rely on their monthly salaries, on rents they collected from tenants on land they held privately, and on what they could produce from land they cultivated for income.

Third, the provincial administration was reorganized under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Provincial boundaries were redrawn so as to reduce the power of aristocrats in certain areas which were traditional administrative regions. Administrators at all levels were simply made employees of the Ministry of Interior and were provided with supporting staff such as clerks and secretaries who were also paid salaries directly by the state. To go along with these changes, many discretionary powers of local governors were curtailed.

On the diplomatic front, Selassie sought to present the image of being the ruler of a viable and cohesive nation-state. After the war, Ethiopia was among the first states to join the United Nations. Subsequently it was designated the headquarters of the Organization for African Unity, and several other international and regional organizations also established offices in Addis Ababa.[37]

In addition to Ethiopia's diplomatic policies and reforms of the administration and military, the Emperor attempted to use domestic policies to strengthen his political economy. Agriculture has historically been the major economic activity in Ethiopia, and it was initially felt that the state had to improve its extractive capability in that area; later, decisions were taken to encourage commercialization of agriculture and to develop a nascent industrial base.

Significantly, the government was not concerned at first with the level of production in the agricultural sector, but merely with increasing the tax revenue it could derive from farming activities. To this end, Selassie introduced several

36. J. H. Spenser, *Ethiopia, The Horn of Africa, and U.S. Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 22–6; and T. Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa* (New York, 1976).
37. See: Haile Selassie I, *The Autocracy of Emperor Haile Selassie I: my life and Ethiopia's progress, 1892–1937* (Oxford, 1976), for Selassie's diplomatic orientations.

agricultural taxes between 1944 and 1970. None of these, however, had the effect of markedly increasing the amount of tax revenues gained from agriculture.[38]

Foreign investors were also invited to participate in the development of an urban industrial sector. Most of this development took place between 1960 and 1974. As with commercialized agriculture, indigenous entrepreneurs were not greatly involved in industrial development. They simply lacked the necessary capital. Government participation in new industrial activities was more frequent. Moreover, loan policies did not encourage the development of small industries, thus inhibiting the growth of a sizeable class of indigenous entrepreneurs. The few Ethiopians who did invest in industrial development tended to come from among the wealthy aristocracy and the royal family.[39]

Selassie's idea of modernization revolved around an educated elite—predominantly Amhara and Tigre—and during his reign he emphasized education for this group and more or less ignored the poor and culturally subordinate ethnic groups. As often as he could, Selassie recruited young, educated individuals who had exposure to Western values to fill positions of responsibility in his government. Instead of being random members of the nobility as had once been the case, these persons were usually commoners or exceedingly loyal aristocracy.[40]

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Selassie's social policy was that it almost completely ignored *the national question.* In spite of the fact that a large part of the Empire consisted of culturally subordinate ethnic groups which had been incorporated between the late 1800s and 1952, there was no conscious policy of national political integration save for the Amharization of certain select groups. Although there was an endless stream of rhetoric devoted to the idea of a *United Ethiopia*, actual policies to encourage this were lacking. For the most part, the state provided the non-Amharized with only meagre social services and even fewer opportunities to improve their life chances. Instead, emphasis was placed on the control and exploitation of subordinate populations.

Land, Class Formation and Dependence

As is the case in most, if not all, African countries, land is of supreme social, economic and even political significance in Ethiopia. Land ownership or access to land has traditionally meant social and economic security. For some it has also meant power and privilege. The land question was perhaps the most critical underlying factor contributing to the revolution of 1974. To understand better the importance of landholding and access to land, it is necessary to

38. See J. Cohen and D. Weintraub, *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia* (The Hague, 1975).
39. J. Markakis and N. Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (London 1978), p. 55 and M. Ottaway, 'Social Classes and Corporate Interests in Ethiopia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, **14,** (1976), p. 472.
40. J. Markakis, *Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1974), p. 212.

consider briefly the historical patterns of landholding and land tenure in the North and South.

The customary land tenure system of the Amhara, which greatly influenced land relations in the rest of society by the mid-twentieth century, is extremely complex.[41] There are many regional variations in the pattern of land tenure, but the basic structure is relatively the same.

Theoretically all land belonged to the emperor, but in practice this was not entirely so. Ethiopia's pre-revolutionary land tenure systems could be broken down into three major categories; kinship and village tenures, private tenure, and government tenure. Kinship and village tenure systems predominated in the highland plateau regions occupied by the Amhara and Tigre. Private tenure could be found in parts of the plateau region and in large portions of the peripheral regions which had been brought under effective control during the reign of Menelik. The extreme peripheral areas of the Empire were considered government lands and remained so until the emperor saw fit to dole out some of this land as private grants or to put portions of it under cultivation as state enterprises.

Traditionally among the Amhara there were two basic types of rights to land, *rist* rights and *gult* rights. These were not two types of land but complementary types of land rights. *Rist* rights were merely hereditary usufruct rights which were shared by what Hoben calls a 'descent corporation'.[42] Individual peasants resided on land which they acknowleged as having been claimed by the founder to their clan or village. Anyone who could establish his position in the descent group had inalienable rights to a segment of the group's land. He could move from one community to another and still claim *rist* rights to land as long as he could prove his pedigree in the new community. Not only was there a built-in security mechanism in this type of system; it was also an integral part of the traditional social, economic and political structures of society. As such, peasants especially have historically been unwilling to alter the system significantly.

In contrast to *rist*, *gult* refers to land from which one can collect taxes and tribute. *Gult* rights were usually given to members of the aristocracy as a reward for loyal service to the crown and to religious institutions as endowment. Anyone who held *gult* rights to land had the right to collect taxes from those who farmed it while he also possessed authority over judicial and administrative matters on this land. *Gult* land often encompassed *rist* land.

Significantly, it was theoretically impossible to deprive one of his *rist*, but *gult* could be taken away as easily as it was given. An exception to this was *rist gult* or hereditary *gult* rights over land. This was particularly prevalent in the South, but could also be found in the North.[43] Such grants were usually given to

41. Allan Hoben, *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia*, (Chicago, 1973).
42. Hoben, *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia*, pp. 98–129.
43. Hoben, *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia*, p. 188.

members of the royal family, their close associates, or provincial elites, and included large tracts of land. The most valuable *rist gult* land was that which was arable and under intense cultivation.

The *gult* system was characterized by built-in inequalities. Yet, in the north it was not the basis for continuous divisive social conflict. The reason for this was that such status and privilege differentials were rationalized in Amhara myth and culture and were upheld by traditional social institutions such as the family and the Church.[44]

Private land was that land which was held by the Church or by individuals on a freehold basis. The land was usually a grant from the crown from its reservoir of crown land. Approximately 65 per cent of the total population lived in private tenure areas in 1974.[45] This was mainly in the peripheral areas added to the empire during Ethiopia's colonial expansion.

All conquered land became the property of the state. Beginning with Menelik, this enabled the emperor to strengthen his reservoir of flexible resources by doling out vast tracts of land as gifts to soldiers (*neftenyas*), northern settlers in the South, civil servants and aristocrats. Peasants continued to cultivate the land and taxes were imposed upon it. The emperor in effect strengthened his base of elite support while at the same time expanding his royal treasury. He could thus begin to strengthen his army and bureaucracy.

The effect of the forceable change in land tenure relationships in the South was the creation of conflictual landlord-tenant relationships. The incidence of tenancy in the South at one point ranged between 50 and 75 per cent.[46] The only indigenous people who retained rights to land were *balabbats*, indigenous elites who cooperated with the crown, and ethnic groups which did not resist conquest. Individuals who held land in the South as *gult* or *rist gult* usually took on the role of absentee landlords, collecting rent, taxes and tribute from the peasants who farmed the land. At first there was a great need for labour intensive cultivation of the land, but as commercialization of agriculture took hold after World War II, tenants were expendable and eviction was common.

Selassie's initial economic policies were aimed more at improving the extractive capabilities of the state than at development. Between 1941 and 1961, the government revised tax laws several times in an effort to increase the amount of state revenues garnered from agriculture, to create a more uniform tax system, and allegedly to stimulate agricultural productivity.[47] Strategically, Selassie did not initially attempt to curtail directly the privileges of the nobility. For instance, taxes were not levied on land owned, but on land under cultivation. Only those who worked the land were taxed for it, and unused land

44. Cohen and Weintraub, *Land and Peasants*, p. 33.
45. Cohen and Weintraub, *Land and Peasants*, p. 34.
46. John Cohen, 'Ethiopia After Haile Selassie: the government land factor,' *African Affairs*, 72, (1973), p. 370.
47. Cohen and Weintraub, *Land and Peasants*, pp. 82–3.

was not subject to tax. This meant that the heaviest tax burden fell to the peasantry in both the North and South, but it was most severe in the South where most peasants were tenants. On several occasions this led to open protest among peasants as new demands were placed upon them by the central government even as they continued to hold their traditional obligations to landlords. Not until the tax reforms of 1966 and 1967 were enacted, however, did the landholding classes raise their voices in vigorous protest.[48]

The Land Tax (Amendment) Proclamation of 1966 abolished *rist gult* landholding rights.[49] But those who held *gult* land at the time often retained large portions or their holdings as private land. Significantly, the crown continued to exacerbate rather than reduce rural inequalities by doling out land as gifts and encouraging commercialization of agriculture. At the same time, existing land tenure systems and landlord-tenant relationships remained virtually unaffected.

The 1967 Income Tax Amendment abolished the tithe and replaced it with a graduated tax on agricultural earnings, including rent from land.[50] Other taxes related to income (health, education, land) were unchanged. It was hoped that this reform would yield more revenue and, at the same time, alleviate the heavy burden of tithe from the shoulders of the peasantry. Landholders, many of whom were of the nobility, saw this action as a serious threat to their elite positions, and the usually passive and compliant parliament was catalyzed into opposition against the 1967 bill.[51] Conservative elements in the legislature succeeded in weakening the income tax bill to the extent that the landholding classes were virtually unaffected by it.

Clearly, traditional elements remained obstacles to any meaningful attempts at economic reform. If Selassie's regime could not significantly increase the extractive capacity of the state, dramatic redistributive policies such as land reform were required in order to secure the confidence of aid donors and to ensure them of his honest intentions in the face of grave obstacles. In reality, though, little was done officially to promote rural development with equity. For instance, a 1945 order made it possible for landless and unemployed people to claim at least 20 hectares of government land for private cultivation.[52] Had this order been publicized and peasants encouraged to take advantage of available land, the pattern of land distribution no doubt would have been dramatically altered. The government continued to parcel out government land as gifts, but seldom was it given to landless peasants.

In spite of the fact that the traditional rural sector proved to be extremely umalleable, Selassie viewed the modernization of agriculture as a necessity. The government's alternative was the commercialization of agriculture, mainly

48. See P. Schwab, *Decision-Making in Ethiopia* (Rutherford, 1972).
49. J. Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 123. All *gult* land was made *gebber* or freehold land subject to tax. See also: Cohen and Weintraub, *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia*, pp. 37–40.
50. See Markakis, *Ethiopia*, pp. 127–9.
51. Markakis, *Ethiopia*, pp. 127–9.
52. Cohen and Weintraub, *Land and Peasants*, p. 60.

with the aid of foreign capital and foreign technical assistance. Local entrepreneurs, mostly young educated members of landholding families and merchants, were also allowed to invest a limited amount of money made through commerce into profitable agricultural ventures.[53]

Between 1961 and 1974, commercial agriculture grew rapidly as a result of the activities of multinational agribusiness concerns and government enterprises. This development took place mainly in the Awash Valley. In the process, Afar peasants and nomads were stripped of their land and often did not participate in these projects even as common labourers.[54]

Ethiopia's economic development under Selassie was heavily dependent on coffee production. Most of the coffee was produced in peripheral areas occupied by the Oromo people and characterized by landlord-tenant relations between mostly Amhara-Tigre settlers and Oromo tenants. It was in these areas that rural class formation centred almost exclusively around production, for the market came into full bloom after World War II. Settlers, investors, and coffee speculators reaped the profits of a coffee boom while poor tenants and independent peasants fought more desperately than ever simply to survive.[55] Between 1961 and 1972, the volume of Ethiopian coffee which entered the world market increased from 75,000 tons to more than 111,000 tons. Of the latter amount, more than 50 per cent of the production came from two predominantly Oromo provinces, Kaffa and Sidamo (see Table 1). What is more significant is the fact that over the period coffee consistently provided Ethiopia with more than 50 per cent of its export revenues.

The period which characterized Ethiopia's most dramatic economic growth also coincided with its full integration into the world capitalist system. This can clearly be seen in Table II which shows the pattern of Ethiopia's growing involvement in the world economy between 1948 and 1974. Over this period Ethiopia's exports rose in value from $33 million to $283 million, and the value of imports grew from $45 million to $281 million. Most of this trade was with the United States. By 1971, for example, the US received 44 per cent of Ethiopia exports and more than 60 per cent of all her coffee exports.[56] This economic dependence on the US coincided with the simultaneous expansion of Ethiopia's dependence on US military aid.

A nascent industrial sector emerged in the 1950s with the development of manufacturing industry and gave rise to a small urban working class. Industrial growth peaked during the 1960s, averaging 11 per cent growth per year over the

53. See Markakis and Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, p. 55.
54. See: John Harbeson, 'Territorial and Development Politics in the Horn of Africa: the Afar of the Aswah Valley', *African Affairs*, 77, (1978), pp. 479–98; and T. Beshah and J. Harbeson 'Afar Pastoralists in Transition and the Ethiopian Revolution', *Journal of African Studies*, 5, (1978), pp. 249–67.
55. See for example, M. Stahl, *New Seeds in Old Soil*, (Uppsala, 1977); and S. Pausewang, *Peasants and Local Society in Ethiopia* (Bergen, 1978).
56. *U.N. Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, 1977* (New York: 1978), p. 362; and *Statistical Abstract: Ethiopia, 1975* (Addis Ababa, 1975), p. 122.

TABLE 1
Export Coffee Production by Province of Origin
Tons

Province	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
Gemu Goffa	2,391	2,595	2,042	959	1,261	1,546	1,906	1,952	1,218	1,058	1,522	2,415
Harar	11,307	13,596	9,756	12,569	8,305	6,756	7,498	11,861	9,221	6,055	7,478	7,421
Illubabor	7,053	6,274	9,648	6,637	8,809	8,309	12,046	6,010	8,267	8,684	6,672	12,467
Kaffa	24,367	25,063	20,452	32,245	27,745	31,786	32,166	41,552	22,860	41,566	40,884	39,473
Shoa	1,733	2,972	2,431	1,960	965	2,944	1,736	3,612	2,676	3,265	2,242	4,549
Sidamo	16,464	19,284	22,389	25,041	16,010	26,215	20,467	22,694	35,603	25,481	26,555	25,918
Wollega	11,866	11,790	15,808	13,491	14,820	21,659	18,406	16,306	23,898	18,279	15,126	18,936
TOTAL	75,181	81,574	82,526	92,902	77,915	99,215	94,245	97,987	103,743	102,388	100,479	111,179

Source: Statistical Abstract: Ethiopia (Addis Ababa: Central Statistical office (1970) p. 110; (1975) p. 111).

TABLE 2
Ethiopia's World Trade 1948–1974
Value in million US dollars

Trade	1948	1958	1963	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Export	33	63	90	106	119	122	126	166	239	283
Import	45	75	111	173	155	172	198	189	213	281

Source: UN Statistical Yearbook (New York: UN, 1978) pp. 470–471.

period. Wages were consistently low, while profits on investment were relatively high.[57] Between 1962 and 1974, the average industrial worker earned between E$1 (US$.40) and E$1.25 daily. Although labour union activity was allowed in 1962, the government continued to regard job actions as illegitimate forms of protest, and the use of force in suppressing such activities was common. By the 1970s, industrial growth had stagnated, and urban unemployment expanded. Low wages and widespread urban unemployment created another set of tensions which threatened the stability of the empire.

Contradiction and Change: class and the national question

Throughout his reign, Selassie demonstrated a strong commitment to royal absolutism, while at the same time publicly espousing modernization and economic development. Contradictions and conflicts necessarily emerged from these seemingly incommensurable goals. The processes of the capitalization of colonialism, urbanization, industrialization and commercialization invariably gave rise to the formation of new classes which juxtaposed sharply against older and more conservative status groups. These processes also contributed to the crystallization of the new ethnicity and eventually gave rise to debates over *the national question.* The Emperor attempted to utilize these new groups as support systems in the modernization effort and at first he was successful. But, by the mid-1960s, it was apparent that the progressivism of some elements of the new classes had outstripped that of the Emperor.[58] Instead of buttressing him during the phase of modernization, new educated and urbanized classes tended to highlight the contradictions between the values they had and those values held by the old, feudalistic classes, between conspicuous wealth and inequality, between democratic rhetoric and authoritarian practice.[59]

The contradictions which grew out of Selassie's efforts to break down the power of old classes through regulatory policies relating to agriculture and land tenure have already been addressed. Other contradictions which formed the underpinnings of the 1974 revolution existed in the area of political, social and

57. Markakis and Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, pp. 45–7.
58. See *New York Times*, 8 March 1966.
59. Levine, *Wax and Gold*, provides an excellent analysis of the propensity of traditional Ethiopian society for change. He suggests that some elements in the face of modernization would change readily, while others would be extremely intractable.

economic policies. Among Selassie's political reforms directed at easing the modernization of autocracy, perhaps the most significant were reforms relating to the constitutional monarchy and the quasi-representative institutions which legitimized it. In 1955, in an effort to enhance his domestic authority and his international prestige, Selassie encouraged the revision of the 1931 Constitution. This new version introduced a popularly elected, representative chamber of deputies.[60] Political parties were not allowed, however, and the Emperor reserved the right to appoint and dismiss the prime minister. As in 1931, the traditional aristocracy opposed these changes, but the Emperor's will was allowed to prevail as long as the aristocracy was allowed to maintain most of its traditional rights and privileges. It was these very reforms which for a decade between 1965 and 1974 seem to have contributed most to a sharpening of the contradictions between the feudalistic values held by the old classes and the bourgeois-democratic values held by the new classes.

Young intellectuals and students were the first to question the legitimacy of feudalism and royal absolutism.[61] What came to be characterized as the 'student movement' emerged in 1965 with a demonstration before Parliament. Such demonstrations became common from then on, and in 1969 pamphlets attacking the Emperor directly were distributed openly by students. They called for radical social, economic and political reforms, but at this point we could not speak of an overwhelmingly leftist orientation among them. Yet the contradictions inherent in the old order were clearly identified; all that was left was for precipitating ingredients to be added to this inherently explosive formula.

Other contradictions emerged from the Emperor's socio-economic policies. As indicated above, throughout the post-war period, his socio-economic policies aimed more at extraction, control and gross economic growth rather than at national integration with justice. In no case was this more evident than in the socio-economic policies he pursued in peripheral areas. In all aspects of social and economic policy, Amharas, Tigres, and Amharized-Oromos were favoured over other groups.[62] The Emperor would occasionally pay visits to dissident areas in order to give symbolic assurances to subordinate groups that he was concerned with their plight, but seldom were such visits followed by significant policy changes. As a result, in most parts of the periphery, resentment of the 'Amhara colonialist' was deep-seated.

Despite widespread opposition among several segments of the Eritrean population, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962, thus incorporating the last segment of the bureaucratic empire. The union had been accomplished under the auspices of the United Nations, but it was seen by many Eritreans,

60. See, Paul and Clapham, *Ethiopian Constitutional Development.*
61. See, P. Koehn and L. Hayes, 'Student Politics in Traditional Monarchies', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, **13,** (1978), pp. 33–49.
62. See for example, P. T. Baxter, 'Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: the Oromo,' *African Affairs*, **77,** (1978), pp. 283–99.

particularly non-Christian groups, as a mere confirmation of Ethiopian imperialism. Opposition groups generally preferred their own nation-state, and resistance movements were formed even before the union was consummated. Significantly, Eritrea possessed more political freedom and democratic, participatory institutions than Ethiopia. Following the union, political parties were banned, and other institutions had to be changed to conform to the Ethiopian pattern.[63]

In the Ogaden, Somalis who had briefly been united with the other parts of the Somali nation under British tutelage after World War II had engaged in sporadic resistance against Ethiopia since the British returned the area to Ethiopia in 1942.[64] Such opposition escalated after the regime of Mohammed Siad Barre came to power in Somalia in 1969. Somalia began a more militant campaign for a unified 'Greater Somalia' and gave outward support to the Ogaden secessionist movement.

Nationalistic, anti-colonial sentiments also emerged on an expanded scale among other subordinate groups, most notably the numerically superior Oromo. The Oromo are the single largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, making up between 45 and 50 per cent of the total population of 30,000,000. Periodic protests against Ethiopian policies had always characterized some Oromo areas such as Bale or Sidamo, but by the 1960s Oromo nationalism became more militant and unified. Although political parties were not allowed, the Oromo succeeded, under the leadership of the nationalist Tadesse Biru, in establishing a self-help ethnic association, *Mecha Tuloma*, which brought together Oromos in all regions and of all social classes.[65] The Oromo had always seen themselves as a cultural unity, but they had never been known to act as a *nation*.[66] The organization was dedicated to promoting Oromo self-identity and improving the lot of the Oromo *vis-à-vis* the politically dominant Amhara. It attracted particularly enthusiastic support in the South where the Oromo were generally relegated to the status of tenants on land which had once been theirs, but which was now held by northern landlords. *Mecha* came to be seen by the government as a threat to political stability, and it was banned in 1966. Its leader, Tadesse Biru, was jailed. But by then the seeds of the new ethnicity had already been sown, paving the way for further conflicts over the national question. In fact, an Oromo-based guerrilla war raged in the province of Bale throughout the period 1964–1970.

This rise in Oromo nationalism coincided with economic policies allegedly

63. R. Lobban, 'The Eritrean War: issues and implications', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, **10**, (1976), pp. 335–46.
64. J. Drysdale, *The Somali Dispute* (New York, 1964).
65. See, Marina and David Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*, (New York, 1978), pp. 82–98.
66. G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia* (London, 1955). This only refers to the colonial period; before this time there had been some measure of state formation among the Oromo.

designed to benefit peasants and tenants throughout the country. At the insistence of USAID and the World Bank, Ethiopia had embarked on a path which was to lead to 'green revolution'.[67] Small-scale farmers were to be provided with improved seed varieties, fertilizers, access to credit and technical assistance which was intended to help them increase the productivity of their farming activities. What resulted was just the opposite. The tendency was for rich landowners to evict tenants and to purchase the land of financially troubled peasants who had incurred loans, usually through unofficial sources, which they could not repay, and to put this land under commercial cultivation, thus taking advantage of the booming market for coffee and pulses during the 1960s. This, or course, further sharpened class contradictions in the rural sector.

By the early 1970s, Ethiopian society was rife with contradictions, and the Selassie regime appeared less and less capable of resolving these accumulating contradictions through its policies. The Emperor had until now been able to rely on the support of significant flexible resources (the military, the police, the church, the bureaucracy, the educated classes, and diplomatic military alliances) to help him survive. But now many of these resources began to fail him.

The cumulative effects of the failure of Selassie's policies to resolve the multiple contradictions, which were themselves by-products of the process of modernization, could be considered the underlying causes of the 1974 revolution. These, however, did not begin to come together with all important precipitating and facilitating factors until about 1973. In this period, two main precipitating causes manifested themselves. First, a catastrophic drought gripped large segments of the periphery and parts of the core beginning in 1973. As a consequence more than 100,000 people died of malnutrition, disease and starvation, while the regime appeared to ignore the tragedy. By 1974, students and intellectuals had brought this problem to the attention not only of other Ethiopians but also of the world community. Second, in urban centres there was unemployment, inflation, petrol shortages and food shortages of basic commodities; and groups such as teachers, students, taxi drivers and industrial workers pressured the government to address their economically-based corporate grievances.[68] The government either ignored these demands or responded irresponsibly.

In this climate, critical contradictions evolved into open conflict. For example, old and new class interests clashed in Parliament over land policy, government corruption and democratic reform. Traditionalists attempted to block or moderate land reform proposals, and progressives pushed for more decisive policies to overcome Ethiopia's chronic underdevelopment and growing dependence on foreign capital. Some deputies went so far as to call for a total

67. J. Cohen, 'Effects of Green Revolution Strategies on Tenants and Small Scale Landowners in the Chilalo region of Ethiopia', *Journal of Developing Areas*, **9**, (1975), pp. 335–58.
68. M. Ottaway, 'Social Classes and Corporate Interests in the Ethiopian Revolution', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, **14**, (1976), p. 472.

reexamination of the role of representative institutions *vis-à-vis* the imperial regime.

When a series of military mutinies in various regions rocked the country in February 1974, the government found itself in an untenable position. If it was to survive, a minimal requirement was a loyal military.[69] The mutinies were led by junior officers and enlisted men who revolted not for revolutionary purposes, but because of corporate grievances relating to salary and terms of service. However, the fact that this action not only succeeded in forcing the authorities to succumb to the soldiers' demands within a month, but also brought down the reigning government in the process, demonstrated the vulnerability of the regime. This inspired other groups with similar grievances to continue their strikes, demonstrations and criticism of the regime.

The new government was formed by Endelkachev Makonnen, a nobleman, who promised wider reforms. The Emperor himself had endorsed a parliamentary committee which had been set up to consider revising the constitution once again. The Emperor now conceded that the prime minister, the head of government, should be held responsible to parliament and not to the crown. The aristocracy, however, balked at such an idea, fearing that this would further weaken their own privileged position.

Progressives on the committee wanted a constitution which went beyond the wishes of both the emperor and the aristocracy. They proposed an abolition of royal absolutism and the introduction of parliamentary democracy, with the Emperor possessing only figurehead status. There would also be a separation of powers among the branches of government, universal suffrage, guaranteed civil rights, and a complete separation of Church and State. In August 1974, the commission published its recommendations, and it was clear that bourgeois democratic ideas had triumphed. Widespread civil unrest had raised issues and stirred consciences, and the mood favoured dramatic changes in the social order.

Even as the committee deliberated during the middle part of 1974, other groups were becoming politicized and coming to realize their revolutionary potential. Significantly, the working class never seems to have acquired a revolutionary consciousness, confining its attention to economically-based grievances throughout the period. A large segment of the bourgeoisie envisioned revolution, but not one which went beyond bourgeois democratic reforms. In many rural areas of the South, however, it was clear that even in early 1974 some tenants and peasants had already begun to act on a class basis, intending nothing short of a total reversal of the social order. In certain areas poor tenants, peasants and landless farmers began appropriating land and other property owned by Amhara-Tigre *neftenyas* and settlers, and indigenous *balabbats*. They attacked the symbols of colonial authority and of the landed

69. This is a point which is made by several theorists of revolution. See for example: Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass., 1978); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1979).

classes. They burned tractors, destroyed the villas of landlords, and in some cases drove out government officials.[70] Such practices were not, however, as widespread as they would become in the wake of the coup d'état which actually brought an end to imperial domination and colonial capitalism.

The military officers and enlisted men who had mutinied in February 1974 also became more and more politicized as the year wore on; so much so, that they were moved to preempt the enactment of the new constitution in September only one month after its provisions were made public. This group, now calling itself the Armed Forces Coordination Committee, had increasingly come under the influence of radical intelligentsia as public unrest spread and as public debate intensified.[71] From April 1974 on, the Committee had exerted a great deal of influence on government policy, but these military gatekeepers continued publically to profess their loyalty to the crown until the moment of the September coup. By September, the Coordinating Committee had matured into a nationalistic political force, the *Derg*, and adopted as its motto *Ethiopia Tikdem* (Ethiopia First). No clear, systematic, all encompassing new social myth, however, had yet emerged; but there was a sense of revolutionary mission and this was critical. Over the next three years, under the influence of revolutionaries in an advisory *politbureau*, and through successively more radical policies, the *Derg* began clearly to demonstrate its Marxist-Leninist tendencies. The intention was to move directly from feudalism and nascent capitalism to socialism under the leadership not of a vanguard party but under the guidance of the *men in uniform!*

Conclusion

The dynamics of change in Africa cannot be adequately explained by models which focus exclusively on ethnic or class factors. Instead, if one hopes to understand this multi-dimensional process, one must employ a holistic *relational* approach which attempts to capture the complex contextual indices of change. This is clearly demonstrated in an analysis of the Ethiopian Revolution which toppled the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

Ethiopia, like other African societies, was not immune from the 'fact of conquest'. However, rather than being artificially created by European colonizers, it was constructed as a result of the efforts of four nineteenth and twentieth-century indigenous Emperors, ending with Haile Selassie, who consolidated autocratic rule and fixed the geographic boundaries of the state we today call Ethiopia. In essence, then, Ethiopia, like most other African nation-states, is an artificial creation, a product of the 'fact of conquest'. It is composed of multiple ethnic clusters, with the Amhara-Tigre cluster being politically, socially,

70. See Yhonnes Noggo, 'Agrarian Reform and Class Struggle in Ethiopia', *African Environment* (September, 1978), Occasional Paper, No. 27.
71. C. Legum, *Ethiopia* (New York, 1975), p. 48.

economically and culturally dominant. The 'fact of conquest' and the pattern of colonial rule tended more than anything else towards a perpetuation of the dominance and exploitation of subject peoples both in the centre and periphery of the Empire, especially those peoples who were added to the empire during the period of late expansion.

The fact that successive Ethiopian emperors placed less emphasis on redistributive and politically integrative policies than they did on policies of extraction and control contributed greatly to the development of antagonistic relationships between peripheral populations and the dominant Amhara-Tigre ethnic group. This antagonism was based on both ethnic and class criteria. In agriculturally orientated areas of the periphery, for example, indigenous populations were stripped of their land during the process of conquest. This land became crown land, and was subsequently used by Emperors as a form of patronage to reward loyal supporters. These supporters tended to be overwhelmingly of Amhara-Tigre descent. For much of the colonial period, rural cultivators in the periphery were allowed to remain on their land as autonomous producers, but they became tenants who were required to pay rent and tribute to a new class of landlords. In other words, they no longer had complete control of their surplus product. This contributed to the perpetuation of a feudal relationship much like that which had characterized the core areas before the period of conquest; but there was one significant difference. Peoples in peripheral areas ceased to hold traditionally based land security. In the core areas this never changed.

Traditionally, Ethiopian society was characterized by blurred class relationships. If anything, before the twentieth century, the most certain class categories were: the rulers and the ruled; those who held only rights to use land (*rist*); and those who held rights to use land and also to collect tribute from designated others (*rist-gult*).

Prior to the centralization efforts of the 19th and 20th centuries, power was extremely fragmented in the Ethiopian core, and it was characteristic for regional lords to exercise what amounted to feudalistic control over their regions. This continued to be the case even as society began to move over into the capitalistic mode of production. Ethiopia was not characterized by the maturation of the feudal mode of production, which broke under the pressure of class conflicts resulting from endogenously generated contradictions. The feudal epoch did not lead smoothly into the capitalist epoch. Feudal relations coexisted in time and space with a nascent yet clearly definable capitalist mode of production.

Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie initiated policies specifically intended to integrate Ethiopia into the world capitalist economy. This was particularly so with Haile Selassie who was a shrewd political actor. He realized the only way to protect the autonomy and absolutist nature of the Emperorship was to engage in a revolution from above very much in the same way as occurred in 19th-

century Japan.[72] In Japan, the traditional landed aristocracy in conjunction with the monarch yielded to pressures for modernization and thereby preempted the possibility of peasant revolution. But whereas the Japanese monarchy readily gave way to constitutional democracy, Haile Selassie, until the end, attempted to maintain and even strengthen his absolutist position.

Key elements in the emperor's strategy for preserving the institution of royal absolutism was the construction of an efficient bureaucratic empire and the creation of new classes to help modernize the economy. In this manner he intended to break down the power of the religio-traditional classes. Modernization was also characterized by a turn to capitalist development both in the rural and urban sectors. In the rural sector, the trend towards commercialized agriculture exacerbated and sharpened class contradictions as tenants were either evicted to make way for capital intensive agricultural production or were forced to produce more in order to pay higher rents. Those peasants who tried to take advantage of market opportunities often found themselves victimized by unscrupulous usurers or overburdened by the tax and regulatory demands of the State.

Side by side with indigenous cultivators, large and small, there existed agribusiness operations financed by foreign capital. This strategy was allegedly designed to accelerate economic growth so that its fruits might be used to 'develop' the whole of Ethiopian society. In practice, however, few social programmes of any consequence were initiated during the height of Ethiopia's economic boom, and the most dramatic domestic result of the mechanization of agriculture with foreign capital was the swelling of the imperial treasury. Few Ethiopians were allowed to participate in the nascent industrial sector between 1960 and 1974. Here again, the emphasis was on foreign investment and state ownership of the means of production.

The simultaneous existence of a modernizing, capitalist sector and a traditional, feudalistic sector necessarily gave rise to contradictions both within and between spheres. Within the modernizing, capitalist sector there developed contradictions relating to the corporate, economic grievances of segments of the new classes. There also emerged contradictions in tenant-landlord relationships as agrarian capitalism expanded and took hold. Between the two sectors there occurred contradictions relating to the desirability of bourgeois democratic reforms. All of these factors contributed greatly to the class basis of the Ethiopian revolution.

At the same time, it is necessary to consider the relevance of the *national question* as a contributing cause in the demise of the Ethiopian Empire. Ethnic dominance was intertwined with social, economic, political and cultural dominance. Therefore, the significance of this factor cannot be ignored and indeed must be incorporated into any model which seeks to explain the dynamic

72. B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, 1966).

of revolutionary change in Ethiopia. Cries for the self-determination of several of the peripheral groups in the Ethiopian Empire had been an ever-present fact of history. The Somalis, Eritreans, and Oromos (to a lesser extent the Afars) had never accepted the idea of Ethiopian hegemony. No doubt this was in part due to the fact that they were never considered full citizens as groups. But, by the late 1960s, ethnic identities among these groups had expanded and to a degree they changed. For the first time there emerged what might be considered nationalist movements with both urban and rural bases. Urban based groups such as *Mecha Tuloma* among the Oromo originally pressed for democratic reforms so that their group would be included in the government's network of social services and in the opportunity structure. *They wanted their group's fair share.* In this sense we could consider this to be a manifestation of the *new ethnicity. Mecha* incorporated multiple Oromo clans and represented them in a way which had never been done before. Whatever unity they had in pre-colonial times was severely compromised as a result of the 'fact of conquest'. The leaders of the movement were from a new, small, educated class of Oromos who were inspired into large measure by their efforts to compete for the spoils of modernization.

There were others among the Oromo, however, who were motivated in the nationalist direction more directly by the 'fact of conquest'. In other words, *competitive communalism* had little to do with their motivation for independence; it was more an outgrowth of the resentment over Amhara colonial exploitation. Significantly, however, such movements were extremely localized, and did not represent attempts to speak for *all* Oromos. Nor did they see the creation of an independent, unified Oromo state as a desirable alternative to Ethiopian colonialism as does the currently flourishing Oromo Liberation Front.

Nationalist movements in Eritrea and among the Somali in the Ogaden have similar origins and patterns of development to that found among the Oromo. They are different, however, in that Eritrea has always had a strong secessionist faction which never attempted to compromise with the colonialist. To the extent that there was compromise, it was generally by a Christian minority. The basis of the Eritrean independence movement is essentially a desire not to have modernization stifled by colonialism. Among the Somali, irredentist sentiment has always been strong, and they have never been incorporated to any meaningful degree into the Ethiopian system. Today the Oromo, Somali and Eritreans are engaged in struggles of national liberation against the reigning Ethiopian regime. Class issues, to the extent that they were important, have receded, succumbing to the current salience of the national question. The important point is that class and ethnic identities in Ethiopia, as in other parts of Africa, are fluid, intermittent and experiential. The importance of each (or both or these factors together) in explaining political behaviour is highly contingent on the nature of the stakes involved and the existing political climate at a given point in time. At one time and under certain circumstances, clan

identities or the new ethnicity might provide the basis for action; at another, a sense of national identity or social class interest might spark conflict and change. Further, it is conceivable that all of these factors could be operating at once as is demonstrated by the Ethiopian Revolution.