THE STATE AND REVOLUTION IN ETHIOPIA

Christopher Clapham

The sustained restructuring of the military regime which has taken place in the 1980s is an essentially 'leninist' project with three components: new and enhanced structures of institutional and centralised control, down to the grass roots level *kebelles* and peasant associations but one that has not succeeded in many regions; a drastic, state-controlled restructuring of the economic base; plus a limited but significant expansion of political representation essentially through the new Workers' Party.

Some of its institutional forms and the economic and social changes (e.g. land reform) are probably irreversible but there has been over-reliance on the use of state power as the solution to all problems.

Introduction

Ethiopia has since 1974, and especially since the creation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984, made the most sustained attempt by any African state to create a Marxist-Leninist structure of government along broadly Soviet lines. This enterprise has often been criticised, from the left no less (in fact, generally more) than from the right, as the brutal imposition of an autocratic military leadership, using a largely meretricious Marxist rhetoric — a charge summed up in John Markakis' widely cited phrase, 'garrison socialism'. Much of this criticism is justified. The Ethiopian regime does indeed have a substantial military element in its top leadership and has readily resorted to force as a response to the chronic economic and political problems which it has faced — and which its own rigidly centralist attitude has often exacerbated. But it is not enough to use this as a pretext for dismissing the Ethiopian experience as a serious attempt to apply 'socialist' solutions to the peculiarly intractable problems facing African states. It may be more helpful, indeed, to regard socialism (in its Leninist form) as a doctrine specially apposite to state consolidation in the third world, which may be expected to appeal to elites whose primary goal is the creation of a centralised and disciplined structure of political control. This is of course a goal which the military, as the most hierarchically organised section of the state bureaucracy, may be expected to share. The problems of revolutionary state consolidation in Ethiopia, along with many of its achievements, must be ascribed at least in part to the Leninist model itself.


ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA
AND THE
REPUBLIC OF DJIBOUTI
SAUDI ARABIA
YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC
PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN
Red Sea
SUDAN
ERITREA
Agordat
Keren
Massawa
Asmara
Bisha
Tessenei
Adi Ugri
Decamere
Mersa Fatma
Adigrat
Adowa
Edd
Abiy Adi
Mekele
TIGRAI
Assab
GONDAR
Gondar
Sokota
L.Tana
WOLLO
Debra Tabor
Bahar Dar
GOJJAM
Dessie
ETHIOPIA
Debra Markos
REPUBLIC OF DJIBOUTI
DJIBOUTI
L.Abbe
Alula
Bosaso
Erigavo
Berbera
NORTH WEST
SANAG
BARI
Gardo
Burao
Hargeisa
Dire Dawa
Ankober
Miesso
Harar
Jijiga
TOGDHER
NUGAL
Las Anod
Garoe
Asosa
WOLLEGA
ADDIS ABABA
Nekempti
Debre Zeit
Dembidolo
Gambela
Gore
ILLUBABOR
Jimma
SHOA
ARSI
Aselle
Dagabur
HARARGE
Hamurre
Galkayn
MUDUG
KAFFA
Awasa
Yirgalem
Goba
Ginir
Soddu
GAMO GOFA
Arba Minch
Maji
BALE
Imi
Gorrahei
Gidole
Negelli
GALGUDUD
Obbia
Belet Uen
L.Stefanie
SIDAMO
Dolo
BAKOL
SOMALIA
HRAN
Mergeh
Ganane
Indian Ocean
Lake Rudolf
UGANDA
Baidoa
GEDO
Jowhar
Itala
MIDDLE SHABELLE
BAY
Bardera
MOGADISHU
Merca
KENYA
LOWER SHABELLE
Brava
LOWER JUBA
Afmadu
Jilib
Jonti
Kismayu
Lake Victoria
0 50 100 150 200 250 Miles
0 100 200 300 400 Kms
International Boundary
Provincial Boundary
Road
Railway
International Airport
Other Airports, Airfields
Delination of the boundaries shown on this map must not be considered authoritative.

That military rulers do not more often use Leninism as a tool for state formation may be due, not so much to the unacceptability of the goal, as to the difficulty of reconciling this means to achieve it with the military's existing interests and alliances. Military regimes which depend on Western (and especially American) support readily regard 'communism' as the arch-enemy. They may be engaged in warfare against guerilla opposition movements which draw their inspiration from Marx and look to anti-communism as an ideological prop to their own nationalist mission. The officer corps often have strong links with social classes whose interests are the first to be threatened by a Leninist ideology which seeks to centralise economic power in the hands of the state. And a Leninist party structure undermines the institutional autonomy of the military itself, which must be subordinated to the control of the party apparatus in a way which undercuts the military command.

All of these obstacles stood in the way of a Leninist military regime in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian military's longstanding dependence on the United States was reinforced, at the time the revolution broke out in 1974, by heavy Soviet support for Ethiopia's main regional rival, the Somali Republic. The insurgency in Eritrea, supported by radical Arab states with Cuban assistance and the indirect backing of the Soviet Union, was articulating an increasingly Marxist reationale for its struggle for separate independence. The army, whose members had been regularly rewarded over the previous century with grants of land in the conquered territories of the south and west, had an evident interest in maintaining the highly exploitative relations of production which this system of land tenure created.

In the hands of the revolutionary regime, Leninism nonetheless provided a means to consolidate and extend the power of the state, while divorcing it from the bankrupt formula of absolute monarchy which had previously been used to maintain it. Though the outcome of the revolution was at one level the result of bloody power struggles between contending groups and individuals, it also represented an effective synthesis of the Marxist-Leninist ideologies promoted by a wide range of Ethiopian intellectuals, and the military's determination to maintain state power and national integrity. In adopting a Leninist path to this end, the military reversed its superpower alliance (exposing itself in the process to the Somali invasion of 1977-78), took over the ideology associated with its secessionist enemies, pushed through a series of far-reaching reforms which destroyed the economic base of the aristocratic and landholding classes, and created a Leninist vanguard party which is rather more (in my view) than a mere front for the maintenance of military dictatorship. Though the regime's overriding goal is, as under Haile Selassie, the maintenance and extension of a centralised Ethiopian state, the revolutionary transformation of the means to achieve this goal deserves rather greater recognition than it has usually received.

This transformation consisted in three interlocking elements: first, the creation of a new structure of institutional control; second, the drastic reorganisation of the economic basis of state power; and third, a selective widening of the base for political representation. All of these ends were systematically and (for the most part) sincerely pursued, and contributed to the vast extension of state power and effectiveness which has taken place since the revolution. All likewise contained flaws which help to explain the current crisis of the Ethiopian state.

Institutional Transformation

The first point to make about state consolidation in revolutionary Ethiopia is that it could draw on a powerful indigenous tradition of statehood, derived from the broadly feudal social and economic structure of imperial Ethiopia, built on highland ox-plough agriculture. It was, after all, the organisational strength of the pre-revolutionary state which enabled the central Ethiopian highlands to sustain a recognisable political structure over a period of some two thousand years, and to preserve Ethiopia's independence through the colonial scramble for the continent. The revolution turned a previously largely personal set of relationships, within a characteristically feudal structure of deference and subordination, into institutional relationships of much greater complexity and effectiveness; but it did not have to cope with the problem of creating either the state itself or the attitudes to authority which sustained it.

The key base-level institutions of revolutionary Ethiopia are the peasants' associations and the urban dwellers' associations (or *kebelles*), which were both established as agencies of local self-administration, replacing mechanisms for rural and urban control which had been destroyed by the great revolutionary reforms of 1975. The rural land reform, which abolished all private land ownership and the private hire of agricultural labour, could only be implemented through an organisation which allocated land within a given area (notionally of 800 hectares, but in practice very variable) among the peasant families which farmed it. The urban land reform, which abolished privately rented housing, likewise required an organisation to allocate housing and collect rents on a communal basis.

These two institutions have now become so firmly established that their disappearance is inconceivable, regardless of what further upheavals Ethiopia may yet have to suffer. They were given from the start a wide range of administrative functions in addition to the basic ones for which they were established, and these have steadily been added to, as each new government programme calls onthem for its local level implementation. Every urban house is numbered and registered. The *kebelle* provides (and can, as a punishment, take away) the ration cards which families in major towns need to buy their allocation of subsidised food. It has its own administrative headquarters, its judicial tribunal, its shop, and its women's and youth organisations. It provides the structure through which to run aid projects and literacy campaigns, to get out the crowd for obligatory demonstrations, and to enforce the military conscription. Its armed guards police the streets at night, enforce the curfew, and help to make Ethiopian cities remarkably free from violent crime.

The peasants' association provides a similar range of services, with additional responsibilities imposed by the requirements of control over the rural economy. Its most important function is to allocate the basic economic resource — land — among its member families. It may also select families in eroded highland areas for resettlement in the south and west, and serves as the basic unit for the villagisation programme, under which scattered homesteads are being concentrated in villages laid out on a uniform grid — a process which brings peasants much more directly under the control of their associations. And while *kebelles* supervise the distribution of food to their inhabitants, peasants' associations have the much less popular task of extracting quotas of grain from farmers at government controlled prices.

While pre-revolutionary landlords and local governors had a position which depended to a large extent on their personal status, the role of *kebelle* and peasants' association chairmen is much more directly created by state power. They are therefore more easily displaced, and more amenable to incorporation into an administrative hierarchy. Initially, they had a good deal of autonomy, but since the end of the terror in 1978 they have become government agents under an electoral veneer. *Kebelles* are grouped into 'highers' (or *keftenyas*), or in the largest cities, zones. Peasants' associations come under the regional administrative hierarchy. These hierarchies are in turn being progressively permeated by party (rather than state) officials. A similar process of centralisation and party penetration has taken place in other mass organisations such as the trade unions, and the women's and youth associations. Participation by women in leadership positions is almost entirely restricted to the women's associations, and to posts in the party structure concerned with women's affairs.

The second major institutional structure is the party, established under the guise of the Commission for Organising the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE) from late 1979 and formally launched as the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in September 1984. A vanguard party constructed on strictly Leninist lines, this is straightforwardly directed from the top. Ritual references to the 'broad masses' barely disguise a political structure which is run by and in the interests of classes dependent on state employment. Government figures attest the small proportion of party members, and still less of party leaders, who are either peasants or workers. But although emphatically a party of the state apparatus, it is not simply a party of the military. The Political Bureau includes several influential survivors of the group of civilian Marxist intellectuals who were prominent in the early years of the revolution, and as one moves down the party hierarchy, the proportion of military appointees steadily diminishes. Of the 30 regional party first secretaries announced late in 1988, for example, 18 are former soldiers, while the great majority of the hundred or so provincial first secretaries are civilians. Most of these are former petty functionaries of the kind who take local level leadership positions in political parties throughout the continent, including schoolteachers, other technical agents of state administration such as health and agricultural employees, and some officials who have crossed the dividing line from the ordinary bureaucracy. Most of them found their way into active politics (some at a very early age) during the upheavals of the mid-1970s.

Party officials take the lead at every level in local administration. Political power in rural Africa is nothing if not visible: Who has the biggest office? Who gives the orders? Who demonstrates deference to whom? In Ethiopia, all of these signs point to the supremacy of the party, even when the provincial first secretary is a former teacher, and the provincial administrator (his counterpart in the state administration) is an ex-army officer. And though the real commitment of party officials to Marxist-Leninist dogma is something that they may well keep to themselves, they certainly go through an extensive programme of ideological and organisational training, either in the USSR and Eastern Europe, or in the ideological schools in Ethiopia itself. The total membership of the party was about 30,000 late in 1985, rather less than 0.1% of the total national population, and given fairly stringent requirements for entry, it has probably grown only slowly since that time. Ordinary party members have been expected to take a leading role in implementing government policies such as agricultural resettlement (when groups of cadres were sent to set up special party units in resettlement zones), or villagisation and

the establishment of agricultural producers' cooperatives (or collective farms). Many of those whom I have seen, especially in outlying rural areas, perform these tasks with considerable dedication.

Within the military, party officials form a distinct cadre. The former military men (almost all of whom were officers) who hold high positions in the WPE leadership went into politics from 1974 onwards, and (except for the few who still hold military appointments) have long since dropped their military ranks and uniforms; most of these were members of the Derg, though some (including several personal associates of Mengistu Haile Mariam have come in through other channels. Though they hold party positions, the survivors of the Derg are steadily declining in importance with each successive government reshuffle or organisational change, even when — like Melaku Teferra, the Derg's most brutal strongman and former party first secretary in Gonder — they are not dismissed altogether. Within the armed forces, distinct career patterns separate officers in command positions, from those in the party hierarchy which has developed from the former Military Political Administration of the Armed Forces. Though leading military commanders are members of the Central Committee of the WPE, this is no more than a titular recognition of their status and their commitment to any form of Marxism-Leninism is sometimes paper thin.

The third leg of the new institutional structure is the military and the civil bureaucracy, vastly expanded in the case of the military from some 45,000 before the revolution to probably about 300,000 from the late 1970s onwards. Despite the Somali war of 1977-78, these are, of course, overwhelmingly committed to the demands of internal control, at which in the late 1980s they have proved decreasingly effective. With the partial demobilisation of the peasant levies raised in the late 1970s, numbers have been kept up from the mid-1980s by a regular though selective process of conscription, which has proved increasingly difficult to enforce following successive disasters in the north.

The civilian bureaucracy has also expanded considerably. The only authoritative figures that I have been able to find show an increase from 109,322 to 167,860 between 1977-78 and 1982-83 in the number of civilian employees financed from the central government budget, an annual growth rate of some 9.5%. Even though civil service salaries have remained unchanged (despite a high rate of inflation) since the revolution, this rate of increase is likely to have been cut in the later 1980s, owing to pressure on tax revenues. It excludes the large growth of employment in *kebelles* and peasants' associations, other mass organisations, and state corporations. And along with the expansion of state regulatory power, 'breaches of regulations' (together with misappropriation of public property and 'crimes against the economy') have overtaken private offences such as assault and theft as the commonest category of crime.

The Economic Basis of State Power

This vast expansion in the institutional structure of the state was built on a productive base of (even for an African state) quite exceptional fragility. Ethiopia was, and remains, one of the poorest states in the world — on current World Bank figures, it is by some way the poorest. It has virtually no commercially exploitable minerals, and at the time of the revolution, when all foreign companies were nationalised without compensation, there were scarcely any companies of any

importance to nationalise; the major American enterprise, for which compensation was later agreed at a mere $5 million, was Kalamazoo Spice, a buying agency for peasant-grown herbs and spices. The level of incorporation into the global economy was one of the lowest in Africa, with some 60% of exports coming from a single crop, coffee, much of which was gathered wild. And that this relative economic autonomy did not hold any evident potential for indigenous economic growth was most starkly demonstrated by the predominance of a peasant mode of production barely able to assure its own subsistence, and vulnerable (as in Wollo and Tigray in 1973-74) to catastrophic famine.

Since the revolution, the whole of the economy (apart from some areas of petty trade) has been brought under state control. Industry is managed through state corporations, and small-scale and handicraft producers have been induced (though not formally compelled) to join together as cooperatives. Though compensation has been agreed for some of the foreign enterprises nationalised in 1974-75, the former management has not returned, and no new businesses have been established. Trade in the commodities most important to government, notably grain and coffee, is closely controlled, and the regime has pursued a policy of voluntary agricultural collectivisation, aided by tax and other inducements. Peasants' association chairmen, for example, can be encouraged to form collectives, and thus gain both official favour, and greater control over their own members. A formal structure of command planning was introduced in September 1984 (with the aid of a team of Soviet Gosplan advisors), though its implementation has been impeded both by the impracticability of the plan itself, and by the need to divert resources to meet crises such as famine.

Under the imperial regime, the revenue base of the state was derived largely from a small group of taxes on urban income and consumption. The subsistence sector was virtaully untaxable, and even taxes on coffee exports accounted for no more than 6-7% of total government revenues. The revolutionary regime, however, both created and required a vastly greater capacity for surplus extraction, expressed in a rise in government tax revenues from 779.8 million birr in 1973-74 to 1996.6 million birr in 1982-83. Much of this increase came from the expropriation of the assets of the former economically dominant classes which after the revolution accrued to the state. By 1982-83, nearly 20% of total government revenues came from 'profits, interest and rent', or in other words from nationalised businesses and urban houses. Direct taxes on trade also rose sharply, and the percentage of coffee export values retained by the producer dropped from an average of 62.3% in 1960-74, to only 41.3% in 1978-84. By far the greater part of the increase in government revenues came immediately after the revolution, in the form of a once-and-for-all rise in extractive capacity; thereafter, the rate of increase tailed off sharply, along with the economy from which the revenues were drawn. Although central government income from the subsistence sector remained at much the same low level (about 5%) of total revenues after the revolution as before, actual exactions from the peasantry were increased by a variety of local demands and special levies, and also by the imposition of quotas for grain which peasants (especially in surplus producing areas) were required to sell at official prices to government buying agencies. The efficiency of the government's extractive apparatus was indicated by its ability to collect a high proportion of the taxes due even from badly famine-affected regions.*

All that this amounted to, however, was the expropriation of an increasing proportion of a diminishing surplus. The underlying level of per capita grain production declined steadily during the late 1970s and the 1980s, independently of the considerable fluctuations due to weather conditions and other local factors. So did the level of coffee and other export crop production (with the possible exception of the narcotic *chat*, which was exported largely to the Arabian peninsula), and stringent controls on internal trade and local consumption were needed to extract enough coffee from the domestic economy to meet Ethiopia's export quota under the International Coffee Agreement. Internal customs posts (a feature of Ethiopia's political economy before 1935) have been reintroduced to control trade in coffee, grain and contraband imported goods, and in the process demonstrate the level of physical control which the government needs to police the economy. These revenues were used overwhelmingly for consumption purposes and especially to maintain the military, which by 1988 accounted (on Mengistu Haile-Mariam's admission) for about half of government expenditure and 15% of gross domestic product. Such funds as remained for investment were disproportionately channeled into a small number of highly capitalised enterprises, with low rates of return, including the state farms and a few showpiece industrial projects built with Eastern European assistance.

A further critical aspect of revolutionary surplus expropriation is its geographical distribution. The economy that matters is concentrated almost entirely in the centre, south and west of the country, in areas that have remained under firm government control. The major coffee producing regions, notably Kaffa and Sidamo, are in the southwest. By far the greater part of surplus grain is grown in the three central regions of Shoa, Arsi and Gojjam, together with adjacent areas of northern Bale and Welega. *Chat* (a mild stimulant) production is heavily concentrated in highland Hararge, while such industry as Ethiopia possesses is almost all in Addis Ababa, or strung out along the road and rail links south and east of the city. The areas of major insurgent activity, both in the north — Eritrea, Tigray, northern Gonder and Wollo — and in the Ogaden, produce virtually no marketable surplus, and are also the regions most chronically short of food. The most important exception is the farming complex around Humera on the Sudanese border in northwest Gonder, where sesame seed cultivation expanded dynamically in the years immediately before the revolution. In the 1980s, however, even before Humera was lost by the government early in 1989, the state farms in the area, together with those in western Eritrea, were maintained at a substantial loss for symbolic purposes. Despite the enormous drain of resources to fight the wars in the north, the amount of direct damage that they have done to the sections of the economy required for state maintenance has therefore been surprisingly slight.

The Structure of Representation

The major impetus for revolutionary transformation comes from a massive expansion of popular participation in political life. People become involved in politics to an extent, and in ways, that were previously inconceivable. This has

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* This point is made in an interesting recent paper by Adhana Haile Adhana, 'Peasant Response to Famine in Ethiopia 1975-1985', International Conference on Environmental Stress and Security, Stockholm, December 1988.

certainly occurred in Ethiopia, even though this participation is not free or democratic in any Western liberal sense of the words. The elections to institutions such as the National Shengo (or supreme soviet) established since 1987 under the constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia are very little more than rubber-stamping of central nominations. Even within local level institutions such as *kebelles* and peasants' associations, the leadership (though drawn from local residents) is effectively put in place by higher state or party officials. But nonetheless, the 'broad masses' (as they are usually termed) have been brought into politics through measures such as land reform and the abolition of private rented housing, through frequent meetings of *kebelles*, peasants' associations and other mass organisations, and through the expansion of education and literacy.

The central political problem for any revolutionary regime is to combine this increased level of participation with the requirements of state consolidation. At one level, this has been achieved in Ethiopia through the institutional structure already outlined. The draft constitution of the PDRE, for example, was discussed at meetings of mass organisations throughout the country (and indeed abroad), and a number of amendments (none of which affected the basic provisions of the document) were made as a result. The most significant was the abandonment of a commitment to monogamy, in deference to Moslem wishes. At another level, that of formal state ideology, there seems to me to have been very little attempt to articulate any sophisticated application of Marxism to a society at Ethiopia's level of development. The inculcation of Marxism in schools and mass organisations is simplistic and mechanical, and constant invocation of the 'broad masses' substitutes in official rhetoric for any serious class analysis.

But by far the most critical area is the representation of ethnic or regional interests, commonly described as 'nationalities'. For the past century (precisely, since the emperor Menilek's accession in 1889), the political and geographical centre of Ethiopia has been in Shoa, a region of mixed Oromo, Amhara and other peoples, most of whose population is of Oromo origin, even though much of it is assimilated to Amhara language and culture. Many Shoans are ethnically unidentifiable. Given its ethnic heterogeneity, its geographical centrality, its dominance of the state, and its key position in the modern externally oriented economy, this Shoan core has had an evident interest in articulating a composite Ethiopian nationalism — just as, conversely, the regions to the north have developed their own peripheral nationalisms, in response to their increasing economic marginalisation and their distance from the new centres of political power. This Ethiopian nationalism has likewise — and equally understandably, in keeping with their own interests and mission — become deeply entrenched in central government institutions and notably the armed forces.

The revolutionary leadership sought from the start, under the slogan *Ityopya tikdem* or 'Ethiopia First', to mobilise this composite nationalism as a source of popular unity, and to extend its appeal by removing elements of traditional political identity, such as adherence to Orthodox Christianity, which prevented it from serving as a fully national symbol. This leadership was itself drawn from a wide variety of ethnic origins. The first chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council, Aman Andom, was Eritrean; the second, Teferi Benti, was a Shoan Oromo; Mengistu Haile-Mariam is generally regarded as of Wollamo origin, from Sidamo in the south; the former second-ranking member of the Derg and current Vice-President, Fisseha Desta, is from Tigray; the third ranking member

and current Prime Minister, Fikre-Selassie Wogderes, is a Shoan of indeterminate ethnicity from a largely Oromo area. Given this range of origins, as well as the regime's willingness to overthrow the previous structure of domination indicated by land reform, there is no reason to regard its commitment to an undifferentiated Ethiopian nationalism as merely the cover for 'Amhara domination' which it is frequently portrayed as by its opponents.

This nationalist commitment was allied to a Jacobin emphasis on centralisation. Apart from a brief period early in the revolution, when the Derg (under the influence of its then civilian ally, *Meiseon*) appointed governors of local origin to the major southern regions, its concern was almost exclusively with central control. Where, as in much of southern Ethiopia, the revolution brought evident benefits to the mass of the population by abolishing the previously exploitative structure of landholding, this centralisation was broadly acceptable, and enabled many areas of the country to be much more effectively incorporated into a national political structure than ever before.

Where, as in Gonder or Tigray, land reform had little to offer a peasantry which already largely controlled its own means of production, and traditions of local autonomy were well entrenched, centralisation was catastrophically counterproductive. Regional representatives of the Derg, reacting repressively to what they saw as 'narrow nationalism', regional chauvinism, peasant backwardness or outright counterrevolutonary activity, succeeded only in driving large areas of the country into the arms of the opposition.

It is worth emphasising the striking discrepancy between the charges of ethnic domination often brought against the Ethiopian central government and the actual distribution of effective regional opposition to the regime. The areas of effective opposition — highland Eritrea, Tigray, northern Wollo and Gonder — are for the most part Orthodox Christian regions, inhabited by Tigrinya and even Amharic speaking peoples, which have been closely associated with the Ethiopian state since the earliest times; their people have been readily recruited to central government institutions (though in appreciably smaller numbers than the Shoans), and they have suffered little evident economic exploitation. The recently conquered regions of the south and west, on the other hand, have been culturally far less closely attuned to the dominant group, have been subject to a vastly greater level of economic exploitation, and have been virtually excluded from central government office; yet attempts by Oromo and other opposition movements to mobilise ethnic identities against the central government have achieved nothing remotely approaching the success of the opposition movements in the north. It is economic marginalisation, not ethnic discrimination, that accounts for the 'national question' in modern Ethiopia.

Despite the high level of regional opposition, there is no reason to suppose that the regime has abandoned its centralist priorities. The constitution of the PDRE introduced in 1987, though it makes provision for 'autonomous regions' in addition to ordinary administrative regions, at the same time makes clear that Ethiopia is a unitary state, and both the powers and the boundaries of the regions can at any time be changed by the National Shengo in Addis Ababa. The WPE is likewise a unitary organisation, guided by the principles of democratic centralism, to which local party organs are subservient. I am not aware of any pronouncement by Mengistu Haile-Mariam, or anyone else in the top party leadership, indicating that local autonomy or the identities of individual nationalities are to be valued in

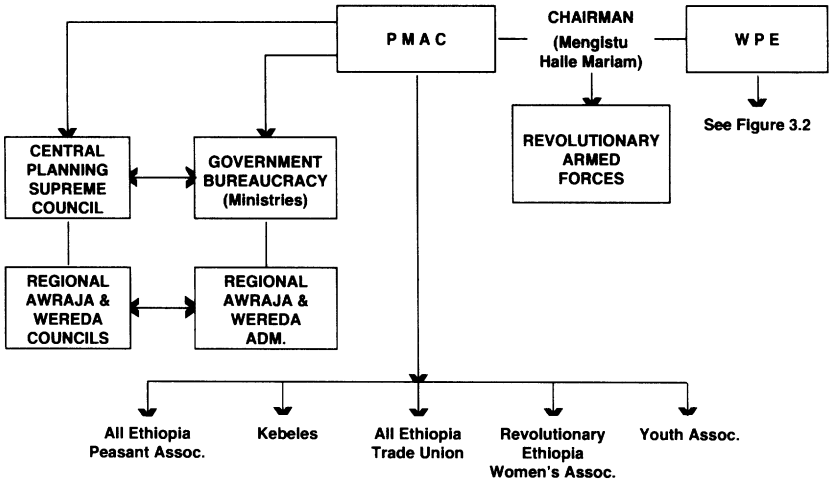
themselves, rather than forced on the leadership in response to conditinos that it cannot control.

Nonetheless, the central government has been obliged to make at least some formal concessions to demands for regional autonomy. From early in the revolution, the regime started broadcasting in other languages than Amharic; and from 1979 the national literacy campaign was conducted in fifteen 'nationality languages', even though its main function was to make people literate in Amharic. With the introduction of the PDRE, a formal structure of local government was created, which entailed an almost complete redrawing of the regional boundaries which had existed (with minor modifications) since the early 1940s. These boundaries were drawn up by a think-tank manned largely by academics, the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities, which did its work with considerable sophistication. The areas inhabited by different peoples were carefully demarcated, and used (in conjunction with other criteria, such as transport networks) to create a set of thirty regions which corresponded as accurately as possible to the mosaic of Ethiopian nationalities.

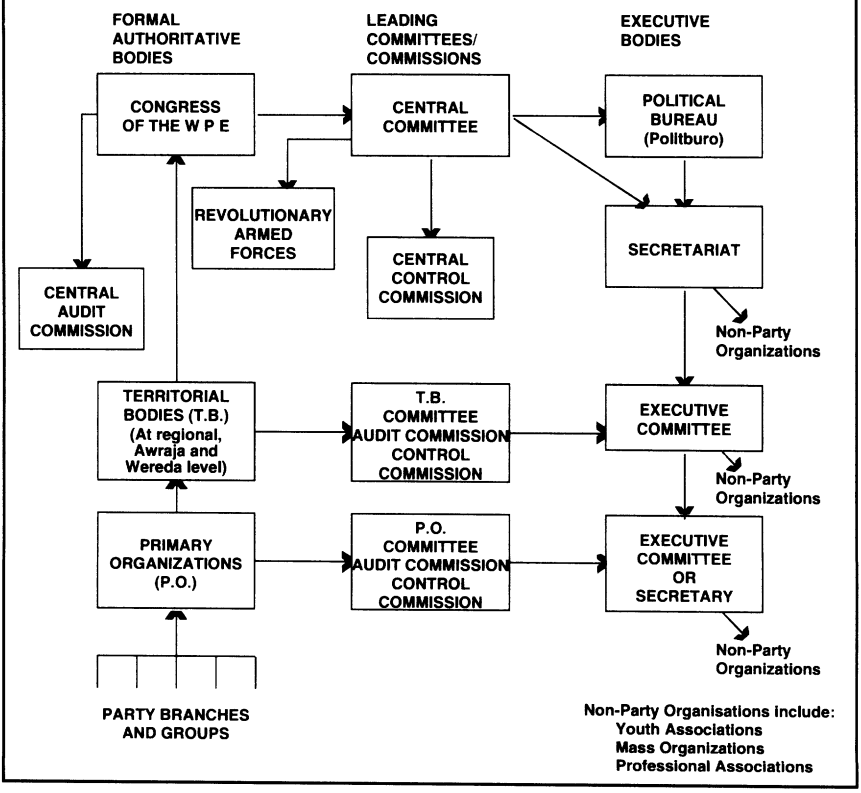
They had an evident political rationale as well, in that by offering local peoples their own region, they could provide a counterweight to the demands of the various separatist movements. The Afar, a nomadic people scattered across the Red Sea plain, were offered an autonomous region drawn from Afar-inhabited areas of Eritrea, Tigray and Wollo, thus denying the claims of the EPLF to an Eritrean state which followed the old Italian colonial boundaries. The remainder of Eritrea, which was accorded the status of an autonomous region with special powers, was subdivided into three subordinate administrative regions, which broadly corresponded to the needs of ethnic representation, political allegiance, and strategic control; but the fact that these boundaries were redrawn late in 1988, in response to requests from a delegation claiming to represent the Moslem-dominated ELF, shows how the new regional structure could be altered at will from the centre. The Somali-inhabited areas were divided into different regions corresponding to the Issa clan (which has maintained a peaceful *modus vivendi* with the Ethiopian government), the Isaq clans (which generally support the anti-Siyad Barre Somali regime, Somali National Movement), and the Darod clans (which have most strongly supported the incorporation of the Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia into the Somali Republic). Peripheral peoples such as the Boran in the south, and the Anuak and Nuer in the Gambela salient on the Sudanese border, also gained regions of their own. The whole exercise indicated a political sensitivity such as the Ethiopian government has very rarely shown; and if Ethiopia under any regime is to have a structure of local government which roughly corresponds to its ethnic diversity, this demarcation has as good a chance of providing it as any.

The problems lie in its implementation. Before the long process of reorganising local government had even started, it was postponed following the military disaster at Afabet in Eritrea in March 1988, while the government concentrated all its resources on stabilising the position in Eritrea — an apt commentary on the subordination of long term planning to desperate crisis management, which echoed the coincidence of the announcement of the ten year plan and the famine crisis in September 1984. The names of the WPE first secretaries in the new regions were announced late in 1988, and indicated the contrasting priorities of representation and control. In some regions, such as the Afar autonomous region

SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA: THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, 1984



ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKERS' PARTY OF ETHIOPIA, 1984



and Gambela, the new first secretaries were local men with previously very junior status in the party; neither was even an alternate member of the Central Committee. In regions such as Eritrea, Tigray and Ogaden, they were drawn from the senior political cadres of the armed forces, and had virtually no local standing at all. Elsewhere, there was a mixture; though several old Derg members remained, they were mostly assigned to regions with which they had some connection, while the number of civilians was increased.

Had the structure been introduced much earlier in the revolution, and at a time when there was general acquiescence with the basic goals of the regime, there would have been at least a chance that it might have provided an acceptable balance between the demands of national unity and the recognition of regional diversity. Coming so late in the day, from a regime with an intense commitment to central control, its prospects are much more uncertain, even outside areas such as Tigray and Eritrea where simple lack of government control prevents its implementation.

Conclusion

Though the revolutionary Ethiopian state is recognisably the successor to the imperial regime which it displaced, this in no way diminishes its revolutionary status: in Ethiopia, as in France, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China, revolution has served as a means of centralising state power on the foundation provided by a decaying monarchy. The Ethiopian revolution has failed to live up to the example of those three earlier revolutions, not because it has been too ruthlessly autocratic, but because (in a sense) it has proved unable to be autocratic enough. Despite an intense concern for political organisation, and a massive expansion in the apparatus of state power, it has been unable to surmount the limitations imposed, first by the extremely fragile and undeveloped economy on which the state is perched, and second by regional resistance movements which have become increasingly effective as the weaknesses of the central state have been exposed.

Much that the revolution has achieved has now been established beyond any serious possibility of reversal. Ethiopia has a highly effective structure of rural and urban government, and an equitable system of landholding. The educational system has been greatly expanded, and literacy vastly increased. Many of the reforms introduced by the central government have been adopted by the regional opposition movements in Eritrea and Tigray, which — trying to construct a similar political apparatus on a similar social base, and confronting much the same problems of military survival and decaying peasant agriculture — often resemble the regime which they oppose.

The regime's most basic failure, however, has been to see state power as the answer to all its problems. It has regarded the imposition of a centralised state and party structure as the solution to the problem of national unity, almost regardless of regional diversities which demand, at the very least, substantial opportunities for local autonomy. It has regarded a centrally directed economy as the only answer to the problem of development, almost regardless likewise of the demonstrable inefficiencies of state-directed economies, especially in agriculture. The demands of revolutionary state consolidation have in turn required the construction of a greatly expanded state apparatus on an economic base which is

increasingly obviously unable to support it. Over the last two or three years, the Ethiopian government has sought to come to terms with its own inadequacies, by agreeing to a World Bank sponsored reform of the agricultural marketing system and by introducing the new structure of regional government. But both of these are marginal retreats from state power, grudgingly introduced, which are likely to be effective only within a very different political context than the present Ethiopian leadership can provide.

'The real danger posed by state socialism in a society with fragile institutions is not a danger of making the government too strong but the risk of making it more conspicuously ineffectual' (Mazrui and Tidy). The institutions of revolutionary government in Ethiopia are not fragile, and the government is conspicuously strong, but much of Mazrui's warning is still valid. In so starkly demonstrating its own limitations, it has delivered a severe and possibly terminal blow to the idea that the creation of a powerful state and party apparatus on broadly Leninist lines offers a plausible solution to the crisis of African development.

Bibliographic Note

Most of this article draws on my book, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge 1988) and sources noted in the book are not footnoted here.

John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge 1987); Mengistu Haile-Mariam, Speech to the 9th Session of the Central Committee of the WPE, 7 November 1988; Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa* (Heinemann 1984), p.294.