THE BACKGROUND TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN ETHIOPIA
Part One: The Imperial Heritage

by Asamenew G. W. Gebeyehu

The empire of Ethiopia has been violently shaken since the 1974 popular uprising against the autocratic regime of the late Emperor Haile Selassie. In less than a year, and without much difficulty, the legendary and centuries-old monarchy was abolished and replaced by a military dictatorship. In the past sixteen years, this regime has been engaged in dismantling the traditional symbols of legitimate authority, national identity, independence and unity, on the one hand, and in constructing new symbols and a basis of legitimate authority, on the other. The destruction of the old and seemingly discredited symbols and their replacement by new ones, however, has not been an easy task to achieve even for a regime which arbitrarily uses coercion, terror and fear as instruments of policy. The traumatic experience of the entire nation in the past sixteen years clearly indicates the failure of the military regime to construct the institutions of change on solid foundations and to direct such changes towards peace, democracy and development.

The revolutionary experience in Ethiopia has meant a total breakdown of the fabric of society. It has resulted in unending fratricidal wars, physical and psychological torment, famine, and exile at a rate unprecedented in the entire history of Ethiopia. In 1978, Amnesty International informed the world community that "large-scale political detention, torture, harsh prison conditions and, mainly, political killings exist in Ethiopia."[1] That was a mere sample of what was yet to come. In the following years, the revolution would devour millions of Ethiopians. The military regime and its opponents launched a campaign of genocide and destruction which led to the depletion of the country's human, economic and social potential, to famine, holocaust, and to the near break-up of the empire.

How can we explain the failure of the revolution and the crisis of the Ethiopian state and society today? Can it be attributed solely to the incompetence and violence of the regime and its opponents? Or can we borrow the famous Marxian dictum that "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past,"[2] and try to explain it in terms of the historical and cultural heritage of the nation? I hold the view that the latter has had a significant impact on the course of the revolution and its outcome. It is important that an analysis of the Ethiopian revolution and its bloody consequences begin with unmasking

past." This will help identify the roots of the two most important problems fo the post-imperial political order, namely, the question of nationalities and the dictatorial tendency of the new ruling class. An examination of the historical and cultural heritage will indicate why these two important issues have been addressed with violence and continue to be the sources of conflict and instability. Accordingly, our analysis must begin with the making of what Donald Levine calls "Greater Ethiopia."[3]

The Making of an Empire

At the turn of the century, one of the leading Ethiopicists, Conti-Rossini, described the Ethiopian empire-state as a "museum of people" which constitutes a mosaic of ethnic, linguistic, religious and racial groups.[4] Unlike most states in the contemporary Third World, the Ethiopian empire-state historically developed from within, independent of direct external control and influence. One Ethiopian scholar has recently attributed the rise and consolidation of the Ethiopian empire-state to internal social, economic and political dynamics. He argues that the process of state formation in Ethiopia has involved the replacement of "parcellized sovereignty" by "centralized sovereignty," territorial-jurisdictional expansion, and constant "collusion and collision" of interests between different groups and dominant classes.[5] This was a long process which took centuries to perfect, as we shall see below. Others, mostly opponents of the Ethiopian regime(s), tend to negate the historical existence of Ethiopia as a multiethnic political entity before the nineteenth century.[6] This view, shared by many such opponents, holds that contemporary Ethiopa is the result of "Amhara colonialism" carried out by Emperor Menelik in the nineteenth century.[7]

Nonetheless, there is a consensus among historians that the origin of the Ethiopian state goes back at least three thousand years.[8] Tadesse Tamirat, for instance, argues that by mid-fifth century B.C. "an independent political structure had already evolved in northern Ethiopia."[9] By the first century A.D., the Abyssinian state, the nucleus of the present state, was firmly established at Axum in the Tigrean region of northern Ethiopia. The founders of that state were the Abyssinian ancestors of the present Amhara and Tigre nationalities of the central, northern and coastal regions.

Tadesse and Sergew, the two leading historians of ancient and medieval Ethiopia, agree in their assertion that the origin of the Ethiopian state was directly related to the migration and settlement of Semitic people in northern Ethiopia.[10] This view, however, has not gone without being challenged. Donald Levine, citing the studies of I.

M. Diaknonoff and Grover Hudson on pre-historic movements of Semitic peoples, suggests that "the presence of Semitic-speaking population in Ethiopia must be attributed to a return movement of Semitic speakers into Africa from South Arabia."[11] While it is possible that future researchers may prove that the founders of the Ethiopian state at Axum were indigenous people who adopted some of the Semitic customs, for now, at least, the whole "semitic" hypothesis is questionable. Anyway, the question of whether the Semitic people migrated or re-migrated should not detain us here. The historical significance of Axum for our purpose here lies in its political and cultural legacy rather than in its origin. The three most important legacies are the institution of the monarchy, the monophysite church and the dominant Abyssinian culture. Accordingly, regardless of whether the founders of the nucleus of the Ethiopian state were Semitic, Semiticized groups, or indigenous peoples, it is plausible to suggest that they possessed a superior political, military and organizational capability which enabled them to conquer and subjugate other peoples in the region, create an empire, and influence the historical development of states and societies on both sides of the Red Sea.

By the fourth century, Christianity had been introduced into the royal court of Axum and accepted by the reigning monarch and the aristocracy. The royal conversion would lead to the establishment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and aggressive missionary activity throughout the empire. In the next sixteen centuries, Christianity would become not only the religion of the state but also an important component and symbol of Ethiopian nationalism, and as instrument of legitimacy for the ruling classes.

By the seventh century, Axum had begun to decline as a result of domestic rebellions by some of the subjugated ethnic groups, such as the Falashas, the Bejas and the Agaws, and also as a result of external pressure and threats from across the sea, namely from the militant and aggressively expansionist Islamic forces. These two factors eventually contributed to the final fall and disintegration of the Axumite empire in the tenth century. It is perhaps important to note that the very factors which led to the end of the classic Ethiopian state, that is, the right of minorities and expansionist ambitions of neighboring countries, are also the factors which, among others, threaten the survival of the Ethiopian state today. The fall of Axum led to the transfer of the center of the Ethiopian state to the south and to the seizure of the throne by a non-Abyssinian (or, non-Solomonic, as it is often called in the literature) dynasty—the Zagwes of Lasta. This dynasty ruled for almost a century and a half (1137-1270), and this was the only time in the pre-revolutionary history of Ethiopia that non-Abyssinian dominant classes

became the actual ruling class of Ethiopia through their control of the throne.[12]

With the fall of Axum and the loss of power, the Abyssinian aristocracy was divided into two rival factions: the Tigrean faction which remained in the regions of Tigre and Bahir-Midir (the coastal province), and the Amhara faction which reorganized itself in the regions of Gondar, Gojjam, and northern Shoa. Both factions claimed legitimacy to the throne of Ethiopia on the basis of direct descent from the Axumite monarchs, and through them, from the legendary Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem. Both factions cooperated in their resistance against the rule of the non-Abyssinian Zagwes but fought against each other for succession to the throne. In 1270, the Amhara faction of the Abyssinian aristocracy managed to defeat both the Zagwe dynasty and its Tigrean rivals and to restore the Solomonic dynasty or, more appropriately, the Abyssinian dynasty.

The restoration was a landmark in the development of some important historical and political processes which would have lasting impact on state and society in Ethiopia. First, it opened a new era of territorial expansion to the south, southwest and southeast until the empire reached its maximum territorial limit in the second half of the nineteenth century. (The lost province of Bahir-Midir was reunited with Ethiopia under a federal arrangement in 1952.) Second, the restoration led to the ascendancy and consolidation of Abyssinian cultural and political hegemony in Ethiopia. Until the 1974 revolution, the Ethiopian ruling class consisted of the Amhara and Tigrean sections of the Abyssinian elite and other Abyssnianized elites from minority groups. As we shall see later in more detail, the dominant ruling class of the empire that was being established were Abyssinians from both the Amhara and Tigrean factions, and Abyssinianized elites were admitted into the ruling circle as junior partners. Finally, the restoration led to the emergence of a distinctive type of Ethiopian feudalism, especially in the non-Abyssinian southern regions.

Ethiopia's territorial expansion was in two historical stages. The first stage took place between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly during the reigns of Amde Siyon (1314-44) and Zer'a Ya'iqob (1434-68). During this time the central, northern and coastal regions of contemporary Ethiopia, or what is generally called historic Abyssinia, was consolidated as a single territorial entity under the Solomonic dynasty. "Beyond this central region," Levine observed, the Ethiopian state of the time "influenced a wide area of peripheral kingdoms and peoples by impressing them with the grandeur of the imperial center. . . ."[13] The second stage of territorial expansion did not automatically follow the first. In fact, at the end of the first stage,

Ethiopia entered a period of great socio-political instability and decay which lasted until about the second half of the nineteenth century.

Internally, the territorial expansion of the state was not supported by the establishment of an effective administrative system. The loose relationship between center and periphery often enabled local and regional war lords to challenge the authority of the monarchs. This in turn led to civil wars between the warlords and the monarch, on the one hand, and between the warlords themselves, on the other. The period, known as the *Zemene Mesafint* (The Era of the Princes) in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ethiopia, was a typical example of the violent struggle for power and influence between dominant classes.[14] The present war between the state and various "liberation movements" is merely a modern version of the former warlords' struggle for power, influence and control. In both cases, the consequence for the nation have been tragic. The domestic conflict of the past had also opened the door for foreign aggression, such as the Somali, Adal and Oromo invasions of the sixteenth century, and the Ottoman, Egyptian, Mahdist and Italian invasions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The empire survived both the domestic and external challenges, but it was greatly weakened and isolated from the outside world. This was the period which caught Gibbon's attention, prompting him to say, "[e]ncompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten."[15]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the victory of centralized sovereignty over parcellized sovereignty and the acquisition of modern military technology by the state opened the door for the second stage of territorial expansion and reunification of territories lost during the previous centuries. Southern, and mostly Oromo, principalities were integrated into the empire. But the integration was limited to the ruling class; it did not involve society at large. Like the first, the second stage of territorial expansion also led to the strengthening of the power base of the Abyssinian and Abyssinianized ruling elite and the hegemony of the Abyssinian culture.

Various domestic and external factors have contributed to the making of the Ethiopian empire-state. Four broad factors can be identified at this stage. First, the existence of constant power struggle between the Abyssinians and the Zagwes, and between the Abyssinian ruling class factions, had helped to expand the state without disintegrating it. Whenever a specific aristocratic faction achieved hegemony, it moved the center of politics from one location to another and expanded it further into regions which were not effectively controlled by the center previously. Acquisition of new territories and effective control of land and population was an important factor in

determining the outcome of the power struggle at the imperial court. Modern warlords have learned their history well!

A second factor was economic. Tadesse Tamirat argues that the economic need to control trade routes and centers played an important role during the first stage of territorial expansion.[16] Similar considerations played a role in the second stage as well. Especially after the lucrative income of the state from maritime trade across the Red Sea was discontinued by Islam, the southward march of the empire was necessitated by the need for new and alternative resources.

A third factor was the defensive reaction of the Ethiopian state to attempts at invasion by external powers. One of the strategies which Ethiopians had effectively used to protect the survival of their state was by moving the center from place to place, thus making it difficult for an aggressor to extinguish it. By the nineteenth century, the state was strong enough to have its center at a fixed location.. The strength at the center also led to peripheral strength and expansion into new territories with the primary aim of defending the empire from external aggressors.

A fourth factor was the availability of a relatively higher military technology to the Ethiopian state. The success of the territorial expansion and consolidation of the Shoan aristocracy as the dominant members of the ruling class during and since the nineteenth century was largely due to the advantage of access to modern arms. However, it is important to note that military technology alone does not explain the making and survival of the Ethiopian empire. Levine, for example, notes that Ethiopian leaders "from Amde Siyon to Zer'a Ya'iqob established their dominion over many peoples with roughly comparable technologies."[17] No doubt that access to and possession of fire arms determined the outcome of domestic power struggle between rival dominant classes, but it would be a mistake to attribute the survival of Ethiopia against its adversaries to the same factors. Ethiopia could not possibly have had superior military technology to the Egyptians and the Italians, and yet it prevailed over the armies of both in the nineteenth century. This can perhaps be attributed to that almost unique characteristic of Ethiopian nationalism and patriotism which today is being trampled upon by mere lip service from the present regime and its opponents.

The consequences of the territorial expansion and unification process is significant to our overall understanding of the political crisis of the present state. A few general observations are in order here. First, expansion brought different ethnic, religious, racial and cultural groups into the empire. What was originally a small Abyssinian kingdom of semitic and semiticized peoples had grown to become a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural empire. Despite this heterogeneity, however, the Abyssinian elite remained the dominant elite of the empire.

Abyssinian culture also became the dominant culture of the empire. A process of active and sometimes coercive Abyssinianization led to the cultural and political alienation of non-Abyssinians. Since the Abyssinian culture determined the institutional and political development of the state and provided access to power, prestige and wealth, non-Abyssinian elites and masses were systematically forced to undergo a process of acculturation. Second, the ruling class was composed of a "grand coalition" of the dominant elites of various ethnic groups: Abyssinians, Abyssinianized minorities and others who simply accepted the authority of the state without undergoing a cultural transformation, such as the Aba Jifars of Jimma and Hanferes of Adal. However, it is important to note that the Abyssinian elite were the senior and most influential partners in this coalition. Finally, the empire was administered by a centralized bureaucracy which was loyal to the Emperor and the State. The bureaucracy often alienated not only non-Abyssinians but also the Abyssinian masses.

The Roots of Dictatorship

The institutionalization of authoritarian rule was one of the salient aspects of the making of the Ethiopian empire-state. The dictatorial tendency and the violence of the dominant classes which now characterize the political scene has an historical precedent and is deeply rooted in the Abyssinian culture and its symbols. The institutional development of the empire-state was thus determined by the dominant culture of society which legitimizes the dictatorial seizure of power by a ruling elite, and, in turn, the phenomenal violence surrounding the seizure and maintenance of power can also find a cultural explanation. However, it needs to be emphasized at the outset that there is no intention here to find a cultural excuse for the sadistic actions of Ethiopian rulers, past or present. The intention is to indicate how the symbols and values of the dominant Abyssinian culture have been exploited and misinterpreted to legitimize the dictatorial tendency of the ruling class.

In accordance with Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, I use the term political culture to refer to "the specifically political orientations—attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes towards the role of the self in the system."[18] However, unlike Almond and Verba, political culture here will be used to explain authoritarian practices and not democracies. A political culture of society is expressed by its symbols which are held in reverence, at least by the majority of a specific society. Such symbols are exploited by the dominant elite to legitimize its authority, create a national consciousness and mobilize mass support to the existing political order. As Harold

Lasswell writes, "symbols are the 'ideology' of the established order [by which]. . .any elite defends and asserts itself in the name of. . .the common destiny. . .elicits blood, work, taxes, applause, from the masses."[19] It is crucial to note that such symbols can be both the cultural heritage of society or imposed from above by an alien ruling class. Their acceptance by the masses is easier where they are part of the cultural heritage. Where such symbols are imposed from above and outside, force is often used to ensure acceptance by the populace. In light of this, we shall now return our attention to the symbols, nature and use of political authority in Ethiopia.

No other political institution has had as profound and lasting an impact on Ethiopian history, society and politics as has the institution of the monarchy. The monarchy had been the symbol of nationhood, independence, unity and absolute power until it was abolished in 1974. The institution bestowed upon the holders of the throne unlimited and dictatorial powers. Observers and students of Ethiopian affairs have been amazed by the almost divine nature of the institution and its representatives. The eighteenth-century British explorer James Bruce observed quite accurately that "the kings of Abyssinia are above all laws. They are supreme in all causes, ecclesiastical and civil; the land and person of all their subjects are equally their property and every inhabitant of the kingdom is born their slave."[20] Almost two hundred years later another British scholar, Christopher Clapham, observed that the *Fetsame Mengist* (the last Emperor) Haile Selassie "has been the only person with authority to rule over the whole of Ethiopia, and it has been unthinkable to place any formal restraint on his powers."[21] Accordingly, "he was looked up to as the universal provider...defender of the Faith and protector of the people."[22] What was the legitimate basis of such absolute authority and the rational for its acceptance by society?

The official title of the *Fetsame Mengist*, Haile Selassie I, says as much about the divine, mythical and traditional legitimacy of his authority as about the concentration of total and unrestrained power in the institution of the monarchy. He was "The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God and King of Kings."[23] All Ethiopian monarchs since the restoration of the Abyssinian dynasty in the thirteenth century claimed similar legitimacy and held, at least theoretically, absolute power over the people and territories they ruled. The reference to the "Tribe of Judah" is related to the legendary affair between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem. Abyssinian oral tradition, royal chronicles and church documents colorfully explain how that came about.

One such important document, the ***Kibre Negest*** (The Glory of Kings), compiled in the fourteenth century by one Yesehaq,

chronicles that the Queen of Sheba had a son by King Solomon. The son, Menelik I, is said to have been the founder of the Solomonic dynasty, of which Haile Selassie I was the 225th monarch and the *Fetsame Mengist*. The story played an important role in legitimizing the authority and powers of the ruling monarchs. It provided a divine origin to the dynasty and a supernatural basis of legitimacy. The connection with King Solomon was extended to King David and, through him, to Christ, and ultimately to the Almighty God Himself: hence, the claim of Ethiopian emperors to be "The Elect of God." Abyssinians in general, and their monarchs in particular, have also considered themselves as the "chosen people" of the New Testament. The monarchs were then the "chosen leaders" of a "chosen people." This and the connection to the sacred is told in the story of King Solomon's dream in the ***Kibre Negest*** thus:

> And after he slept there appeared unto King Solomon a brilliant sun, and it came down from heaven and shed exceedingly great splendor over Israel. And when it had tarried there for a time it suddenly withdrew itself, and it flew away to the country of Ethiopia, and it shone there with exceedingly great brightness for ever, for it willed to dwell there.[24]

The rulers of such a country so favored and blessed by God himself became His vicars on earth! Accordingly, earthly laws which are applicable to other mortals are not applicable to them, as the ***Kibre Negest*** puts so unambiguously: "It is not a seemingly thing to revile the king, for he is the annointed of God. It is neither seemly nor good."[25] Almost six centuries later, Article IV of the 1955 Ethiopian constitution determined that "by virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as by the annointing which has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power indisputable."[26] The claim to such absolute authority and the exercise of dictatorial power legitimized by it could not have been possible for such a long period of time unless it was mandated by the dominant culture and/or enforced by an unrestrained terror. Both have been important instruments of domination and authoritarianism in Ethiopia.

The dominant culture which still influences the political behavior of individuals and groups in Ethiopia is the Abyssinian culture. Since the thirteenth century, the Amharas have been the willing and voluntary flag-bearers of this culture, but they never claimed to hold exclusive authority over it. The Tigirigna-speaking peoples of northern and coastal Ethiopia are equally the products and legitimate heirs of the Abyssinian culture. The culture finds similar meaning and expression in all the Abyssinian societies of northern and central Ethiopia. Needless

to say, the Amharas have played a prominent role in preserving and expanding the culture at the national level. The seizure of the throne by the Amhara faction of the Abyssinian aristocracy enabled Amhara elites to be the preservers, expanders, interpreters and guardians of the Abyssinian culture. Amharic became the language through which this culture was expressed and transmitted at the national level. Since the Amhara nation as a group had been the pioneer and leading architect of the Ethiopian empire, the Amharic language and the Amhara version of the Abyssinian culture was able to expand and develop more rapidly than others. It is, however, misleading to equate the Abyssinian culture with an Amhara culture as such. This would deny the cultural heritage of other Abyssinians, such the Tigreans and people of the coastal province, who also made a no less significant contribution to the making of modern Ethiopia. It is also equally misleading to speak of an Amhara political domination. What existed in Ethiopia and still exists is an Abyssinian cultural domination expressed through an Abyssinian language.

The language and the culture maintained their dominant role in state and society even after the Amhara aristocracy lost its purely ethnic political hegemony. In fact, after the Gonderian period in the seventeenth century, no ethnically-based Amhara ruling class dominated the political process in Ethiopia. The dominant class since then has been a mixture of Abyssinians (both Amharas and Tigreans of the northern and coastal regions) and Abyssinianized Oromos, Gurages and other ethnic groups. The political rhetoric and propaganda of anti-Ethiopian elements about an Amhara political domination in Ethiopia is fictitious at best. The Amhara ruling class had intermarried and mixed with the ruling classes of other ethnic groups, primarily with the Oromos, Tigreans and Gurages, since the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century to what was then a small Abyssinian kingdom. Haile Selassie himself was the son of an Amhara father and a Gurage mother, and he was married to an Oromo woman. The aristocracy was in fact encouraged and sometimes forced to intermarry with dominant elites of various ethnic groups. The ulterior motive of such marriages was, of course, political, but it also brought the influential representatives of ethnic groups into ruling class "grand coalitions" at the national level.

The Abyssinian culture achieved a dominant role in state and society and continues to influence the political and institutional development in Ethiopia as well as the behavior of the ruling class, not only because the Abyssinians have been politically dominant in the empire, but also because the values, outlooks, and symbols of the culture are strongly attractive to a ruling elite with an authoritarian tendency regardless of ethnic belonging. In other words, the Abyssinian and the Abyssinianized ruling elite encouraged the expansion of the Abyssinian culture at the expense of others because it

legitimized domination, authoritarian dictatorship and mass subservience to authority.

Abyssinian society is a hierarchically-organized, non-egalitarian society.[27] In this society's view, human beings are created equal but for different purposes. Their purpose, position in the social hierarchy, and function depend on their *Iddil* (destiny), with which each and every member of society comes to this world. Division of labor and other functional roles are strictly enforced by the culture at all levels. Hierarchically-structured authority to maintain order and to mediate relationships between superiors and subordinates is mandated by the culture. At each level of the hierarchy, legitimate authority is transmitted vertically. Those in the lower positions are responsible only to those above them. The need for vertically-structured authority is further strengthened by the Abyssinian view that individuals are motivated by their selfish needs and greed for power, wealth and prestige. Left to themselves, such extremely individual-oriented people are said to bring chaos and disorder in society. Allan Hoben notes that "social order, which is good, can be created and maintained only through hierarchically legitimate control, a control that ultimately must be authorized by God."[28] A society which associates legitimate authority with divine intervention, even if it is gained and maintained through fear and uncontrolled terror, had no difficulty in accepting its ruling monarchs as "the Elects of God" and therefore sacred. The ruling class indeed exploited this fatalistic view of society for its own purpose. It is important to note that the authoritarian tendency of the leaders was not limited to the monarchs alone. It was a general characteristic of all office-holders from the palace to the village, and to the household. At all levels of the social and political hierarchy, Abyssinian and Abyssinianized men and women of authority were dictators in their own right. At all levels, authority was abused for individual purposes and associated with terror and fear. Genuine opponents of the present political system perhaps need to be advised to focus on the entire structure of authority and power rather than simply on the top. The change of an authoritarian leader at the top did not and will not change the exercise of authoritarianism throughout the social and political pyramid.

Historically, individuals who were not satisfied with their destiny, i.e., those who were not born into prestige, power and wealth, felt free to change the course of their destiny through violence. The same method was used to resist the tyranny of the ruling class by individuals and societies. Indeed, in a non-egalitarian, undemocratic and primitively authoritarian system which lacks peaceful, democratic and rational means of solving disagreements and achieving individual success in politics, violence--actual or potential--becomes the only

means of correcting injustices grievances and the means for advancement in the political and social hierarchy. The culture itself justified and celebrated the use of such violent methods of achieving success. Banditry, for instance, was a socially acceptable phenomena in Abyssinian culture.[29] Whether it is the violence of the society which justifies the violence of the ruling class or that of the ruling class which justifies the violence of society is not debated here. The important thing is the violence in Abyssinian political culture is an accepted means of communication between individuals in society and between society and state. Almost all the past rulers of Ethiopia indiscriminately killed, burned, maimed and flogged their opponents and innocent civilians without any moral or legal restriction. Most of them came to power through violence, used violence to stay in power and lost their power only through violence. Ethiopians of today will do well if they try to understand the horrors of the past sixteen years within the context of the heritage of violence. The difference between our leaders of the past and the present in their use of violence for political purposes is simply a matter of style and sophistication. Science and technology have indeed perfected the art of killing and torture in Ethiopia, both at the center and the periphery.

The other important aspect of the Abyssinian culture in connection with political authority is the role played by the church in manufacturing and spreading the ideology of the ruling class. The church gave spiritual legitimacy to the monarchy through the annointment of the monarch and became an important instrument in defending and mobilizing support. In its scriptures, hymns and preachings, it confirmed the divine origin and sacredness of the monarch. In the propagation of the ideology of the ruling class, it not only defended the existing order of society with all its imperfections, contradictions and decay, but also glorified the mysterious past. The ***Kibre Negest***, which gave a legal and spiritual legitimacy to the concentration of absolute power in the hands of one man, the monarch, was the work of the church. The book decrees obedience to the monarch thus:

> Our Lord said in the gospel: give to the king what is the king's and to God what is God's. And the apostle Paul said. . . everyone of you must be submissive to the authority of the ruler, since the ruler is appointed only by God. And God has appointed all these rulers and given them authority; one who opposes the ruler and rebels against him, rebels against the ordinance of God. . . . [30]

Such references and misinterpretations of Biblical messages helped to bestow moral justification on the violent deeds of the monarchs and to elevate the institution of the monarchy and its holder to that of a deity and a saint. From this perspective, it is not difficult to see the rationalization of Article IV of the 1955 constitution, which legislated that "the person of the Emperor is sacred."

At times, the role of the church went beyond mere preservation and enforcement of the ruling ideology and interpretation of "justice and truth," by which society was guided, or more appropriately, was held hostage. It became an active participant in worldly power struggles along with other dominant elites. The church was a leading force behind the restoration of the Abyssinian dynasty in 1270 and the victory of the Amhara faction of that dynasty. In other cases it helped to de-legitimize and dethrone ruling monarchs, such as Emperor Susenyos (who had converted to Catholicism) in the seventeenth century and Lij Iyassu (who had allegedly converted to Islam) early this century. In both cases the church felt threatened by the new ideas which the deposed monarchs attempted to introduce. The church also played a key and most determinant role in suppressing the 1960 coup attempted by the Neway brothers.

As an ideological shield of the status quo, the church was often the first to condemn and excommunicate any perceived social, political and ideological deviation. This had undoubtedly helped to keep the population in a state of total docility and apathy towards politics in general. The church was the perfect example of what Marxists would call the opium of society. It played a major role in providing moral justification and legitimacy to one-man dictatorship and state violence and in suppressing the spirit of resistance and change within the society. The total impact was that in the course of centuries, Ethiopian society developed a political culture of servitude, docility and pessimism. An all-powerful and seemingly invincible leader would have no difficulty in ruling and, if he so desires, in annihilating such a society. The tragedy of the Ethiopian society is that it has produced a long line of social and political psychopaths who mastered the art of violence both in office and out of office. The church is, perhaps unwittingly, a partner in the making of this tragedy. More telling, indeed, is the silence of the church in the face of repeated genocide during the past sixteen years.

Conclusion

A number of conclusions which will have direct relevance to the post-imperial societal and political order can be reached from the preceding discussion. First, Ethiopia is composed of various nationalities which are widely different from each other in terms of their cultures, socio-political systems and languages. Despite this diversity, a

single culture, the Abyssinian culture, has been the dominant culture for centuries. Domination in Ethiopia is essentially cultural more than political and economic. In addition to this, Ethiopia has been a unitary bureaucratic empire with strictly enforced vertical relations of power and authority. The revolution has created the condition of an inflated mass expectation about freedom, democracy and cultural self-determination. The success of any post-imperial regime will greatly depend in meeting these expectations. The nationalities issue will be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned by transforming the basis of legitimate authority back to the people and not by destroying the unity and harmonious relationship of peoples. If there is conflict in the Ethiopian society, then it is a conflict between dominant classes, and it is a vicious struggle for political power waged in the name of democracy, liberty and equality. A new political order designed to bring peace to the much-tormented people will create an institutional arrangement in which the power-hungry elites would be satisfied.

Second, the traditional order of society, the dominant Abyssinian culture in particular, legitimized the concentration of power and authority in the hands of an authoritarian leader. The post-imperial political order could either end this practice and decentralize power or continue the old practice through increasing violence. The experience of the past sixteen years indicates the futility of the latter. A new generation of leaders will have to think in terms of democratizing both the state and society. It is unlikely that any democratic process will be achieved at the state level without at the same time attempting to democratize the dominant authoritarian social structure.

Finally, the dominant culture and religion of the traditional society provided previous regimes with a well-structured ideology of legitimacy. A new regime which attempts to make a break with the past will have to have a new ideology to legitimize the change, the directions of change and the institutions of change. An imported and distorted ideology will not do the job. An original idea conceived in the womb of the diverse cultural and historical experience of the Ethiopian peoples is the road ahead.

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[1]Amnesty International, "Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia" (November, 1978), p. 5.

[2]Karl Marx, ***The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*** (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 15.

[3]Donald L. Levine, ***Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[4]For the linguistic and cultural classification of the peoples of Ethiopia, see Levine above.

[5]Teshale Tibebu, "Process of State Formation in Modern Ethiopia," ***Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Horn of Africa.*** (New York: New School for Social Research, 1987), p. 27.

[6]See, for example, Bereket Habte Selassie, ***Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa.*** (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980). Bereket, incidentally, was the Attorney-general under Haile Selassie and also served on the Commission of Inquiry established by the *Dergue* to investigate the alleged crimes of the officials of Haile Selassie's regime. Another proponent of the "Amhara colonialist" thesis is Dr. Amare Tekle who, until 1986, when he went into exile, was a career diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ethiopia.

[7]See, for example, Richard Greenfield and Mohammed Hassan, "Interpretation of Oromo Nationality," ***Horn of Africa***, 3: 3 (1980), pp. 3-23.

[8]See, for example, Tadesse Tamirat, ***Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527***. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972); Sergew H. Selassie, ***Ancient and Medieval History of Ethiopia.***(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[9]Tamirat, ***Ibid.***, p. 9.

[10]***Ibid.***, pp. 5-13; Sergew, ***Op.Cit.***, pp. 26-34.

[11]Levine, ***Op.Cit.***, p. 28.

[12]For an account of the Zagwe dynasty, see Tamirat,Op.Cit., pp. 53-66; Sergew, Op.Cit., Chapter XI.

[13]Levine, ***Op.Cit.***, p. 28.

[14]Mordechai Abir, ***Ethiopia: The Era of Princes.*** (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1968).

[15]Edward Gibbon, ***The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*** (London: J.B. Bury Methuen and Co., 1909), Vol. V, p. 165; cited by Margery Perham, p. 31. (See FN 17 below)

[16]Tamirat, ***Ibid.***

[17]Levine, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 88.

[18]Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, ***The Civic Culture***. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 13.

[19]Harold D. Lasswell, ***Politics: Who Gets What, When, How***. (New York: World Publishing Co., 1958), p. 31.

[20]James Bruce, ***The Source of the Blue Nile***. (1905), as quoted by Margery Perham, ***The Government of Ethiopia***. (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 72.

[21]Christopher Clapham, ***Haile Selassie's Government***. (London: Longmans, 1969), pp. 9-10.

[22]***Ibid.***, p. 181.

[23]See, for example, the constitution of 1955. The Ge'ez word *Neguse Negest* translates to king of kings more fittingly than to emperor.

[24]As quoted in Levine, Op.Cit., p.105. Levine's book has a good summary of the ***Kibre Negest***.

[25]***Ibid.***, p. 108.

[26]Article Four of the 1955 Constitution.

[27]For a useful study of the Abyssinian society and culture, see Donald Levine, ***Wax and Gold*** (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965); Allan Hoben, ***Land Tenure Among the Amharas of Ethiopia*** (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973); and Don Frantz Baur, ***Household and Society in Ethiopia: An Economic and Social Analysis of Tigray Social Principles and Household Organization*** (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1977).

[28]Allan Hoben, "Social Stratification in Amhara Society," in Arthur Tuden and Leonard Plonticov (eds.), ***Social Stratification in Africa***. (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 194.

[29]See, for example, Donald Crummey, "Banditry and Resistance: Noble and Peasant in 19th Century Ethiopia," in Donald Crummey (ed.), ***Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa***. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 133-172.

[30]**Kibre Negest**, p. 272. As quoted in Asmelash Beyene, "Patterns of Authority in the Ethiopian Bureaucracy." Ph. D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, June, 1972, p. 50.