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Solomon Terfa

Mississippi Valley State University, st2151@bellsouth.net

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# The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Liberal Democratic or Authoritarian Regime?

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Solmon Terfa (PhD) is an Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations in the Department of Social Sciences at Mississippi Valley State University. His research interests include the Politics and Government of Africa and also the Politics and Governments of the Middle East. Terfa has also served as a Second Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, (1979-1981), as Senior Expert in the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations of Ethiopia, (1987-1989), and as the Chairman of the Department of Political Science and International Relation of the Addis Ababa University (1989-1993).

## The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Liberal Democratic or Authoritarian Regime?

**Solomon Terfa,**  
Mississippi Valley State University

**Abstract:** *The leaders of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia adopted their constitution on December 8, 1994. This analysis argues that the ethno-linguistic federal political system adopted by the founding members is problematic because the framers superimposed the constitution on the citizens dogmatically without thoroughly examining the country's objective reality. Hence, the author contends that the ethnic federalist paradigm adopted in Ethiopia is diametrically opposed to the wishes and aspirations of the people as validated by a survey he conducted between 1992 and 1993. He draws from this, perhaps the first and only study on this pertinent topic, to argue his case. The author also argues that the framers excluded the citizens from being represented at the constitution drafting convention by bona fide experts because they knew the people would neither be amenable to nor supportive of the political agenda the framers had designed. This reinforces the mutual mistrust between the citizens and the government. Inevitably, authoritarian rule was established.*

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, ethno-linguistic federalism, Ethiopian people's revolutionary democratic front, Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist, the national question, Tigrean people's liberation front

### Introduction

Ethiopia's political history has undergone centuries of authoritarian rule, much of it marked by feudalism—embedded in the country's centuries-old monarchy—that was brought to end in 1974 by a “Marxist” military dictatorship. The later lasted until 1991, when it was toppled by the current rulers of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the dominant faction of the EPRDF representing the *de facto* ruling elites in Ethiopia today under an ethnically-based federal system, has since instituted a controversial nation building effort that stifled the democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people; hence the focus of this study.

Given the above backdrop, this study will show the constitutional framework of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which the TPLF superimposed on the country in December 1994, was an attempt to rule under the guise of democracy, while fulfilling the goal of perpetuating a minority control of Ethiopia's political and economic powerbase. Thus a case can be made that the ethno-linguistic federalist system adopted by the TPLF is not predicated on any empirical study or evidence. Rather, it is the dialectical offshoot of the longstanding Ethiopian students' infatuation with the “Land to the Tiller” and the “National Question” political slogan popular during the 1960s and 1970s when radical revolutionary ideas began to appear inconsequentially in the Ethiopian student movement. The theoretical and ideological underpinning of this call was Marxism-Leninism,

in which the conceptual roots of both slogans are found and the revered works of both Lenin and Stalin are accentuated. The TPLF leaders knew the whole time that most revolutionary and ideologically-oriented Ethiopians, particularly the educated ones, favored the Marxist-Leninist framework to solve the “national/ethnic question” in Ethiopia, a political issue that had bedeviled the Horn of African country and dominated the debate within the Ethiopian students’ movement during the imperial rule of the late Emperor Haile Selassie.

This paper analyzes the motivation of the EPRDF for excluding those who were suspicious and mistrustful of its ultimate objective from the constitution drafting convention. The convention was a gathering of, on balance, ethnically based organizations that shared the TPLF/EPRDF’s objective for establishing an ethno-linguistic federalism. In other words, majority of the Ethiopian people who would have opposed and resisted the establishment of an ethno-linguistic federalism were kept out or not represented by *bona fide* representatives.

This analysis has five parts: (a) the mutual mistrust engendered between the drafters of the Constitution and the people; (b) the questionable premise upon which the ethno-linguistic federalism paradigm was founded; (c) whether the constitution is a hybrid of Marxism-Leninism and liberal democracy; (d) the domination of the country by a single ethnic-based party; and (e) the extent of authoritarianism in Ethiopia under the TPLF/EPRDF rule.

### **Why and When the Mutual Suspicion and Mistrust Began?**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was conceived and born in suspicion and mistrust held mutually between the founders of the FDRE and the people. This came to light when the TPLF was established as an exclusively Tigrean political party with the intention of liberating the province of Tigray and then seceding from Ethiopia. While waging its war against the then military junta, TPLF’s publications, leaflets, and radio broadcasts had depicted or portrayed it as Marxist party of the Albanian type. In addition, upon its takeover of Addis Ababa in 1991, the actions and measures it took and some pronouncements its leaders made seem to have solidified the people’s suspicions. Among others are:

- the desecration of the national flag, the symbol and pride of Ethiopia’s independence, by its trigger-happy soldiers;
- the massacre of protestors who took to the streets to express not only their opposition to the desecration but also their love for and loyalty to the flag;
- the trashing of Ethiopian Air Line (EAL), regarded as national pride in African aviation;
- Meles’s sarcastic challenge made to his political opponents “*mengedun cherq yaragilatchu*” (a bon voyage equivalent to those who were considering the military route) during his nationally televised discussion with three prominent intellectuals, Professors Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Andreas Eshete, and Makkonen Bishaw;
- the caricaturing of the Addis Ababa University as a bastion of chauvinist and petty-bourgeois reactionaries that was willing to send its students to the war front;

- the continued echoing of the Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts' claim that "*Eritrea was a colony of Ethiopia*" by Meles and the TPLF leadership and the enthusiastic support they gave not only to the "*Eritreans-only-referendum*" but also the invitation they extended to the OAU and the UN to observe the process and give credence and legitimacy to the outcome of the whole exercise;
- the expulsion of 42 professors and 18 medical doctors from the Addis Ababa University and the Army hospital, respectively.

Given this backdrop, it can be reasonably argued that the massacre that took place during the ill fated national Election of 2005 was a desperate reaction to power slipping out of the hands of the regime. It could also be surmised as a manifestation of the bottled up resentment to the suspicion the people had harbored. This author, therefore, contends that it is this mistrust and suspicion that constrained the government from inviting the people to be represented by genuine and *bona fide* peoples' representative to participate in the deliberation and ratification of the Constitution it authored when the Constituent Assembly met in 1994. As indicated in the African Elections Database, Elections in Ethiopia (2002) which was also corroborated by the government's 1995-2005 statistics, of the 547 representatives, 484 belonged to the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF). Edmond J. Keller sarcastically remarked:

Elections for a constituent assembly to approve a new democratic constitution took place in 1994. All registered political parties could participate and, indeed, 39 did participate. However, the outcome could have been predicted. Member organizations of the EPRDF won 484 of 547 seats. The EPRDF had the advantage of incumbency and a wealth of resources at its disposal, including patronage with which it could co-opt opposition leaders (Keller 2002, 30).

This action by the government might have, perhaps, reinforced the people's doubt about its motives, sincerity, and vision. Why in the world would a government that purports to establish a federal, democratic and representative form of government exclude the people from participation? Should not the people be allowed to have an input in what the government should look like before they agree to its establishment and become bounded by a constitutional document? Why should a government that declares that "sovereignty resides in the nation, nationality, and peoples of Ethiopia" (Article 8, section 1 of the Constitution) prevent the supposed owners and beneficiaries of the would-be government from participating in its conception and birth, so to speak? Were the authors of the constitution afraid that they would encounter difficulty in convincing the people that they, the people, are not Ethiopians first but rather Amharas, Oromos, Tigreans, Gurages first and Ethiopians second?

If this supposition were to be true and if that was what the founding members of the FDRE were afraid of, then it might be logical to assume that it would also be difficult to convince the people of the need to include Article 39 of the Constitution, which guarantees every nation, nationality, or people in the country "the unrestricted right to self determination up to secession." Assuming that this supposition is true and that secession is what the authors of the constitution had wanted, then it would also be logical to assume that the people would have had difficulty in conceding to Article 46, section 2 of the constitution that delineates the boundaries of the states

taking language as the main criterion.

### **The Questionable Premise**

The “self-determination including secession” premise upon which the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is founded is fallacious. It is modeled on Lenin’s and Stalin’s work on how to resolve the national question of Czarist Russia. The Ethiopian Marxist Leninists (EMLs here after) never took time to ask a very pertinent question. That is, if Lenin and Stalin were genuinely interested in resolving the national question of Russia, why had they not live up to their promise and allow the various oppressed nationalities in Czarist Russia to self-determine and secede instead of establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and force them to be part of ? It is the contention of many that the lives of the various nationalities under Stalin had continued to be as hellish as they had ever been under Czarist Russia (Kowalski 2008).

It has been pointed out that the constructive policies adopted by Lenin towards the various nationalities in 1920s, allowing them to develop their own cultures, religions, and languages, were reversed by Stalin. These policies toward the nationalities were reversed in the 1930s when Stalin achieved dictatorial control of the Soviet Union. Stalin’s watchwords regarding nationalities were centralism and conformity. Although Georgian, Stalin pursued a policy of drawing other nationalities closer to the Russian nationality. He looked toward Russian culture and language as the links that would bind different nations together, creating in the process a single Soviet people who would not only speak Russian but also for all intents and purposes be Russian. Native communist elites were purged and replaced with Russians or thoroughly Russified persons. Teaching the Russian language in all schools became mandatory... self-governing powers of the republics were curtailed. Nationalities were brutally suppressed by such means as the forced famine of 1932-33 in the Ukrainian Republic and the northern Caucasus and the wholesale deportations of nationalities during World War II, against their constitutional rights (Zickel 1989, 1-2).

This part needed a long quotation because the EMLs were oblivious to this dark history of the various nationalities under the person “who promised them heaven and gave them hell.” It appears that the finding of the Leninist-Stalinist “method of solving the nationalities problem” a la “self-determination including secession” was, to the EMLs, their “*eureka moment*.” They hoped and believed that this would be the “silver bullet” that would relieve Ethiopia of its long standing problem. Another problem that was overlooked by the EMLs was that by championing the nationalities questions, the Bolsheviks would not only hasten the demise of the regime of the Czar but also ingratiate themselves with the various nationalities. And it had worked. Again the ramification of this tactic was not given serious thought by the EMLs.

Among the core of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninists (EMLs), Walleign was one of them. He was not only the first to define what a nation is, in the Ethiopian context, but also the first to articulate and categorically state that Ethiopia is composed of many nationalities. He asserted that Ethiopia is, contrary to traditional belief, composed of many national groupings with their own peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. He contended that these nations should be given not only the right to participate in state affairs, but also the right to develop their language, music, and history and secede if they so

desire, provided they are led by peasants and workers who are conscious of their historic internationalist obligations. It was his firm belief that socialist movements will, in the long run, remain faithful to their internationalism and unite with other nations of the same conviction led by their peasants and workers (Van der Beken 1996, 5).

However, the pertinent question to ask is the motivation behind Walleign's radical pronouncement and call for the destruction of Ethiopia as we know it. It is based on the conviction, I dare to opine, that the nations, as he likes to refer to them, were oppressed and exploited by the ruling nation and that their redemption could only be obtained by turning Ethiopia into a socialist society that will respect and protect their rights. Following Walleign's daring contention, many scholars, Marxist Leninists and otherwise, began not only to echo and amplify his call but also to use it as a paradigm in their study of Ethiopian politics. This became the norm both in the 1960s' student movement and in the works and speeches of several Ethiopian political observers (Van der Beken 1996; Gudina 2002; Habtu 2003 and Hameso 2001).

Chris Van der Beken holds Emperor Menelik, a Shoan Amhara and an Orthodox Christian, who assumed the throne in 1889, responsible for expanding the Abyssinian/Ethiopian heartland to the South, East, and West. The conquered people not only lost their land and political power, but also their culture, language, religion, traditions, history, and way of life. It goes without saying therefore that the unequivocal assimilation of the conquered people in terms of their culture, religion, and language into the Amhara culture became the required path to develop career within the state. Van der Beken also suggests that the independence struggle that began in Eritrea in 1960s and the rebellion in the south-eastern province of Bale where Somali and nascent Oromo nationalism were observed were all the result of dissatisfaction with Amhara domination (Van der Beken 1996, 2-3).

The EMLs used the above argument as justification for advocating Lenin's and Stalin's method of resolving the nationalities question. However, the dysfunctional nature of the institutions of the imperial government and their failure to attend to people's needs and the revolt of the people against these anachronistic and ill equipped institutions had been misconstrued by the EMLs as having to do with the national question. The principle of intellectual courage would have demanded from these EMLs and their foreign intellectual and/or ideological collaborators to offer a realistic assessment of Ethiopian conditions devoid of Marxist-Leninist dogmas. For instance, they labeled the Bale and Ethiopian Somales' uprisings during the 1960s as nascent nationalism when it was simply an opposition to taxation. The late Harold Marcus, perhaps one of the most respected American historians on Ethiopia, narrates the uprising as follows:

The government also used force in Bale and Sidamo between 1963 and 1970 to put down arebellion among Oromo farmers and Somali herders. Their struggle against new land and animal taxes inevitably became involved with the politics of Greater Somalia, a circumstance that caused the government in late 1966 to order the army to intervene. By then, the rebels controlled southern Bale and southeastern Sidamo and were attacking northern districts at will, though the Somalis and Oromo were disunited and did not even attempt coordination. Broadcasting to both groups, Radio Mogadishu stressed the need for Muslim unity against the Amhara, including the Oromo in the framework of Somali nationalism. The Oromo remained unconvinced, and in early 1967 the army, now two brigades strong, had little

difficulty in pacifying the rebellion in Sidamo....By early 1970, the rebellion sputtered out, and the emperor visited the region to inform the people that their taxes would henceforth be invested in development projects.

....The Eritrean and Bale challenges revealed that the Ethiopian government had not undertaken social and economic programs sufficient to win the allegiance of the people. There were no political parties that could generate competing agenda for action, and parliament remained very much under the control of landlords. It was impossible for the institution seriously to consider bills that reformed land tenure, controlled rents, or levied taxes on the rich. By default, therefore, force became the only tool of social control, partly because the emperor had grown reliant on the military but also because his government was inherently weak (Marcus 1994 178-179).

It is obvious that most of the countries in the world are multinational. They are composed of different peoples with different languages, cultures, values, histories etc. The paramount and very pertinent question in this connection is how did these multinational countries come into being? This question goes to the essence of the debate here. What is clear is that no supernatural being had any say or a hand in the creation of the United States of America, Brazil, China, Ethiopia, Nigeria, India, the former Soviet Union, Switzerland, et cetera. These countries are the result of the dialectical development of human progress. Wars of expansion and annexation, colonialism and imperialism are all part and parcel of this dialectical development of human progress. Most of the European countries with their clearly defined boundaries are product of the Thirty Years War and the Treaty of Westphalia (1618-1648). The countries of Africa are also, in most part, the creation of colonial powers. Martin Meredith in his book, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, succinctly describes Africa's territorial makeup as nation states or multinational entities as follows:

During the Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, European powers staked claims to virtually the entire continent. At meetings in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals, European statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of interest they intended to establish....The maps used to carve up the African continent were mostly inaccurate; large areas were described as *terra incognita*. When marking out the boundaries of their new territories, European negotiators frequently resorted to drawing straight lines on the map, taking little or no account of the myriad of traditional monarchies, chiefdoms and other African societies that existed on the ground. Nearly one half of the new frontiers imposed on Africa were geometric lines, lines of latitude and longitude, other straight lines or arcs of circles. In some cases, African societies were rent apart....In all the new boundaries cut through some 190 culture groups. In other cases, Europe's new colonial territories enclosed hundreds of diverse and independent groups, with no common history, culture, language or religion. Nigeria, for example, contained as many as 250 ethno linguistic groups (Meredith 2005, 1-2).

Then the question to the EMLs and their foreign collaborators is that what international law did Ethiopia's Emperor Menilek break in expanding the country's territories to the south and south east? Any objective narration and analysis of the history and politics of the region and that of Menilek's

expansion should be discussed within contexts and perspectives, that is, the scramble for Africa and the threat it posed to the sovereignty and independence of Ethiopia. It should take the colonial ambition of Britain, France, and Italy in the region into consideration. Harold Marcus observed:

From 1896 to 1907, Menilek directed Ethiopia's return into southern and western regions abandoned in the seventeenth century and into areas never before under his rule....The European threat to the Ethiopian periphery worried Menilek enough to order Ras Makonnen westward into Beni (or Bela) Shangu country. The imminence of British rule in Sudan gave urgency to the acquisition of the gold producing area....Meanwhile, Menilek had ordered forces to move into what were to become the empire's extreme peripheries, especially Borena, directly in the path of British expansion northward from Kenya....Between 1896 and 1906, Ethiopia expanded to its present size, comprising the highlands, the key river systems, and a borderland buffer zone in low-lying, arid, or tropical zones to protect the state's central core (Marcus 1994, 104-105).

Historically, conquest and annexation were the norm upon which multinational states were created. The founders of the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union, upon establishing their organization in 1963 were cognizant of this complex and very intricate nature of the colonial boundaries that created the African countries. They therefore agreed to include a provision in their Charter that called for all nations to accept territorial boundaries drawn by the colonial powers.

It is reasonable to assume that Walleign and all his EML comrades were fully aware of this world and African historical facts. If this assumption is correct, then why could they not be critical and consider the ramifications of imposing foreign ideology and paradigm to solve a problem they created in their own minds? The principle of intellectual courage requires that researchers be objective in their analysis. Unfortunately, this was not case with the EMLs. The paradigm they prescribed for Ethiopia is intellectually lazy and hence indefensible. It lacked rigor and originality. It encouraged mechanically transplanting a deceitful and disingenuous policy that has no relevance to the Ethiopian situation. It is deceitful because it does mean what it says.

An objective assessment and analysis of Ethiopia's socio-political situation would have shown that a large majority of Ethiopians were proud of to Ethiopians. A 1992 survey conducted among 650 university and high school students from eight different regions of the country: Addis Ababa, Bale, Gojjam, Gidole, Kembata, Arssi, Wolaita, and Gamu Gofa (Terfa 1993, 5-21), not only illustrates this very vividly, but also contradicts Prime Minister Meles' contention that ethnic federalism is "the only solution to the century old oppression under centralist government and one ethnic domination of culture, language, politics and economy" (Zenawi 2009, 6).

Eighty percent of the respondents consider themselves primarily Ethiopians and seventy five percent of them clearly expressed their opposition to taking language as a criterion to delineating the provinces of the federal state. In addition, sixty five percent of the respondents thought the absence of democracy and the political domination of the country by authoritarian leaders were the premier problems in Ethiopia rather than the national question as the drafters of the constitution asserted (Terfa 1993, 13). The study also unmasks the erroneous claim of the leaders of the ethnically based liberation movements that they represent the wishes of their people. Contrary to their belief, what is at the heart of Ethiopia's problem is the absence of political freedom and democracy. The national

question or the “ethnic disharmony” is rather the creation of the EPRDF and thus alien to Ethiopian politics. If at all, it was a hypothesis or a theoretical construct that had not been proven in the case of Ethiopia. The leaders of the liberation movements decided that it was a national issue and thus took up arms. However, it cannot be denied that there were culturally subjugated, politically oppressed and economically exploited people in the history of the country.

Yet the people have lived together long enough to enable them to transcend their ethnic consciousness and/or narrow nationalism and adopt Ethiopian way of life. Otherwise how would one explain the fact that eighty percent of the survey respondents say they are Ethiopians first? In addition, 80.9 percent of them said neither the government of Emperor Haile Sellasie nor that of Colonel Mengistu was exclusively dominated by the Amhara ethnic group (Terfa 1993, 9). Eighty six percent of them disagreed that the two governments were dominated by a coalition of Amhara-Tigre ethnic groups (Terfa 1993, 10). Seventy four percent of the respondents agreed on the inclusive nature of the two governments (Terfa 1993, 11).

The following two anecdotes clearly show the chasm between the ethnically based liberation movement leaders and the people. The first one is about Mr. Wondimu Tchebero, a person of Dorze ethnic background, one of the many ethnic groups that had been forcefully incorporated into the “Ethiopian empire” by Menilek, who lamented over the government’s policy that forced his children to learn in their mother tongue, namely Dorzigna. Mr. Wondimu narrated his complaint to Mr. Tesfaye Gebre Ab, who had once served in Prime Minister Meles’ administration as Department Head in the Ministry of Information. Mr. Wondimu began his complaint by criticizing the education policy of the government that perpetrated a double standard. He regretted the fact that the children of government officials, including that of the Prime Minister, are being taught in English while the children of the downtrodden are being taught in their mother tongue. Did Meles not claim, Mr. Wondimu recalled, that among his reasons for picking up arms and going to the bush was the fact that he was forced by the previous governments to be taught in Amharic? Was this not the claim of all of the current leaders? “Now that they have the power, why are they not making their children the beneficiaries of the fruit of their struggle?” he sarcastically asked (Gebre Ab 2009, 129).

As far as he is concerned, he wanted his children to be taught in Amharic so that they could find a job. He does not want, he continued to say, his children to be condemned to be *shemanewotch*, i.e., traditional weavers, a profession stereotypically and negatively associated with his ethnic group. This daring and public declaration of Mr. Wondimu had made him popular, almost an icon, amongst his people indicating the fact that his ethnic group does not share the claim of the former guerrillas who now find themselves in power (Gebre Ab 2009, 128-131).

The second anecdote is about Mr. Ephrem Boru, an Oromo from Wallega, and a member of another “oppressed ethnic group.” Mr. Ephrem was a very prominent Oromo who had served the government of Emperor Haile Selassie in various capacities in the 1960s. Among the position Boru served include plenipotentiary Ambassador to Ghana early in the 1960s when President was still the president of Ghana.

In the 1990s every Saturday my father used to pay a visit to his good friend to catch up and socialize. On one particular Saturday in 1991, I had to give my father a ride the Ambassador’s

residence before I could borrow his car. When we arrived at the residence, the Ambassador invited me in and I accepted the invitation thinking it would only be for a short while. That short while turned out to be three hours, almost as much time as Nkrumah had spent explaining his dream to him. At the outset, the Ambassador said to me that he had some important matter to share with me. It was about his disappointment in some of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaders who had sent his younger brother to invite him to attend their meetings. He expressed his disappointment on two grounds. First, he said that “he had lived all his life as an Ethiopian and now the OLF wanted him to renounce this identity.” Second, he said “it was his understanding that the OLF consider Amharic as a colonial language.” Amharic then and still is government sanctioned national language.

The anguish on his face was visible when he continued to say “I just could not reconcile this with Nkrumah’s dream of making Amharic the language of Africa.” Although he was stoically fighting his tears, the lump in his throat betrayed him. His voice began to crack. He began to stutter and stammer. I could also see the anguished pain in my father’s face. It was a “hell” of a scene for me watching these two Oromo gentlemen in their 80s and late 70s respectively being tormented by Oromo children who took the liberty to speak on behalf of all the Oromos. I sat there, for a while, speechless and contemplating what I should say or do. Then I asked the Ambassador if would be willing to come to the University of Addis Ababa, formerly Haile Selassie University, and share his story with my students. I informed him that I was the chairman of the department of Political Science and International Relations and that I could arrange for him to come and speak.

Unfortunately he said he could not come because of his heart problem. It then occurred to me that he had a heart pacer implant. Then I asked him what he wanted me to do with the information, he proceeded to tell me that “he did not want to take it to his grave with him.” It was clear to me that the Ambassador had wanted to keep his anecdote with President Nkrumah alive and be part of his legacy. I will, therefore, take the liberty to paraphrase it as follows. It is to be remembered that Nkrumah, a Pan-African in college, was one of the few and original advocates of African Unity. After his effort to establish the United States of Africa was torpedoed by the Casa Blanca and Monrovia groups, he settled for the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established in 1963 with the help of, among others, Emperor Haile Selassie.

On the day the Ambassador presented his appointment credential to President Nkrumah, the latter, taking almost three hours of his time, related to him his admiration of the Emperor, his contribution to the establishment of the OAU, and most importantly the significance of Ethiopia’s independence from colonial rule. Ethiopia, he noted, had been the symbol of black pride in Africa in particular and black people of the world in general. Nkrumah then told the Ambassador that Africa would need one common language. English and French were out of the question for him for they are colonial languages. Arabic was also out because did not think the Arabs consider themselves Africans. And then he thought of Swahili as a possible language, but then remembered that it did not have its own script.

Nkrumah, then enthusiastically, said that if the whole of Africa would begin teaching Amharic then, in fifteen to twenty years, he projected Africa might be able to develop a language that would help it fulfill its dream and establish the United States of Africa. Ambassador Boru told me that he was overwhelmed and humbled by Nkrumah’s dream. He said “that was one of the giants of

the Organization of African Unity.” The Ambassador then concluded his reminiscence by saying “he would never be able to reconcile Nkrumah’s dream of wanting Amharic to be the language of Africa and OLF’s contention that Amharic is a colonial language.”

I think it is a very opportune moment for me to share this with my readers. These two anecdotes and the responses of the 650 students that were surveyed profoundly express the bottled-up frustration of the people towards the so-called liberation front’s and by extension to those who have established the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia by superimposing it on a people whose socio-economic and political evolution is much different from that of Czarist Russia. This is why this writer argues that the ethno-linguistic federalism paradigm is fallacious.

### **Why the Constitution of the FDRE is a Hybrid of Marxism-Leninism and Liberal Democracy**

To those who read with thought and purpose the hybrid nature of the constitution is evident. The question then becomes why? The authors of the constitution are Marxist-Leninists. This is a given. It is also a given fact that among their intentions is the “liberation of oppressed nationalities” in the country. So why is the Marxist-Leninist aspect of the constitution, the most pertinent aspect of the document to the authors and power brokers, being intentionally subsumed within and/or camouflaged by the overwhelming liberal-democratic aspect of the constitution? The simple truth is, it is done to win the support of donor countries and institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and also the leaders of Western liberal democratic countries. No wonder, therefore, that the World Bank wrote the following in its 1999 report. It read:

Ethiopia has embarked on a bold and thoughtful process of decentralization, which has been supported by a widely shared consensus over both the development strategy and objectives and very large transfers of united resources from the federal government to the regions. It concluded by saying, ‘at this point the system is unquestionably working well’ (Keller 2002, 33).

Keller pointing out the short comings or gullible nature of organizations like the World Bank, donor institutions, and specialized agencies of the United Nations said:

By the standard of public administration, this would seem to be the case. However, there is a political dimension that organizations like the World Bank and other international development agencies seem to ignore or simply downplay. Ethnic federalism has not resulted in a widespread consensus in the general population of Ethiopia (Keller 2002, 33).

To the authors of the Ethiopian constitution, adherence to Marxism-Leninism is not only a question of practicality, but also of adherence, allegiance and loyalty. This is because the nuclei of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front were members of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, an exclusive club dominated by Meles and his close friends. It is this group that dominated not only the Transitional Government but also the constituent assembly that drafted the constitution. Aregawi Berhe, former member of the leadership of the TPLF, succinctly put it this way:

In 1985 a party, officially known as the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) was established within the TPLF, Meles Zenawi as its chief ideologue. In its constitution, this party declared that...MLLT, as the core of the future Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Party, is the

only correct party free from all sort of revisionism (Trotskyism, Maoism...) that could constitute a proletarian-peasant dictatorship to liberate the Ethiopian people (Berhe 2009, 5). In his April 3 and 5, 1990 interview with Paul B. Henze, Meles Zenawi tried to allay the fears of this former American government official and through him the then American administration and the Congress of the United States by saying the following:

We are not a Marxist-Leninist movement. We do not apply Marxism-Leninism in Tigray. The name of our organization does not include any reference to Marxism –Leninism. We do have Marxists in our movement. [*I acknowledge that. I, myself, was a convinced Marxist when I was a student at Haile Selassie Ist University] in the early 1970s and our movement was inspired by Marxism]. But we have learned that dogmatic Marxism-Leninism is not applicable in the field. We do not believe that any foreign system can be imposed on a country (Henze 1990, 3; emphasis mine).*

What else would he say on the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe? He was fully aware that communism was being eclipsed by liberal democracy and capitalism and that the balance of power was shifting in favor of the United States and its allies. Hence, in order to obtain the uncritical support of the United States, the sole superpower, and also its Western allies, Meles had to say exactly that. Henze, therefore, did not hesitate to give Meles a piece of his mind. He noted: “Because you have called yourselves Marxists so often.... You yourself have been quoted as saying that you accept Albania as an ideal model for the future Ethiopia. There have been numerous reports of praise of Stalin...but it has caused great disquiet among serious people who are concerned about Ethiopia.”

When Henze pressed him on his admiration of Albania, Meles had no compunction about denying. He said...“We are not trying to apply an Albanian system. We are not trying to apply a Soviet system or a Chinese system. *We know the Albanians are also changing some features of their system*” (Henze 1990. *ibid*, *emphasis mines*).

Meles may want to deny but his pronouncement are on paper and, therefore, cannot be wished away. What exactly did he say in 1989? His former friend in the TPLF Aregawi Berhe wrote:

In an interview with *The Independent*, at the end of 1989, the present Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, asserted that the ‘Soviet Union and other Eastern Europe bloc countries have never been truly socialist. The nearest any country comes to being socialist as far as we are concerned is Albania...To him, as was clearly maintained in the same interview, only his party could lead to a fully democratic state. Aregawi continued

The officially published program and declarations of the MLLT and TPLF are no longer visible since Zenawi joined the camp of the US....*Eclectic as it appears, Zenawi’s policies have drawn the whole country into a state of chaos and confusion, because of the incompatibility between what he thinks and what he does (Berhe 2009, 5, emphasis mine).*

It is therefore evident that Meles has tried to marry two diametrically opposed philosophies, Marxism-Leninism and liberal democracy, in the constitution of the FDRE. It should be stated that these two philosophies provide different approaches to solving problems between people and also between the people and governments.

For liberal democracy, the right of the individual is paramount and, therefore, should not be

subordinated to the right of a group or a collective. In a liberal democracy, the problem of the individual or groups of individuals will be solved within the framework of democratic governance where the rights, privileges, responsibilities and obligations of the individual are enshrined in the constitution. If and when there is a discrepancy or inconsistencies or even contradictions between what the constitution promises or offers and how the government of the time interprets the constitution, designs and implements its policies to favor one person over another or one group of people over the other, then the aggrieved person or groups of persons can address their grievances to the courts.

In this connection, the dialectical development of the political history of the African Americans in the United States is an eloquent testimony of how far they have come within the framework of a liberal democracy. It is a vivid and painful memory that the Constitution of the United States had once regarded them as slaves, and therefore property (Dye and Zeigler, 2009, 32) then 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a human being before it granted them full citizenship (Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution). I hasten to add that the passage of the various Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of the 1950s and 1960s, have contributed either to consolidating and/or expanding the gains that had been made. It is also a historical fact that the founders of the constitution did not initially allow suffrage to women (Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution) and property-less white men (Dye and Zeigler 2009, 55). All these have been corrected and rectified by constitutional amendment and/or taking it to the courts for their rulings.

How about the Civil War in the United States? Was it not a question of secession, one may ask? The Civil War of 1860 was a lot different from this. The ten states that opted for secession and took up arms were not willing to deal with the problem through legal or constitutional means. The issue that led to their would-be secession was what to make of the western states. That was the bone of contention between the northern states and the southern states. The southern states wanted the western states to be their replica: cotton growers with slave culture, while the northern states preferred them to be producers of raw materials and market for their products. These were two diametrically opposed positions that could not be reconciled (Dye and Zeigler 2009, 56-57). The position taken by President Abraham Lincoln, a man who was not known as an abolitionist was, however, against its expansion to the western states. He said:

The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories. We want them for homes and free white people. This they cannot be, to any considerable extent, if slavery shall be planted within them (ibid).

Hence, Lincoln's decision to go to war against the secessionist states was primarily to keep the Union. It goes without saying that this is a responsibility that is bestowed upon the president by the constitution. Marxism-Leninism, on the other hand, is a philosophy or an ideology that gives primacy or precedence to groups or classes in Marxist parlance. The rights and demands of the individual have to be subordinated to the interest of the class. Hence the division of society into classes. In the slave society, the contradiction is between the slaves and the slave owners. In a feudal society, it is between feudal lords and serfs. In the capitalist society, it is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or the working class. In a multinational empire, it is between the oppressor nation and the

oppressed nations and/or nationalities. All these contradictions are resolved through class struggle with the proletariat as the vanguard.

It is this approach to solving the problem of nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia that is contained in Article 39 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It is to be remembered that Meles had claimed that he was not a Marxist. He had also asserted that they do not apply Marxism-Leninism in Tigray. So, where did Article 39 come from? The Article did not somehow, by some inexplicable miracle or divine intervention, incorporate itself into the constitution and/or insist and plead to be incorporated. It is in Lenin's thesis that one will find not only the application of the concept of "self-determination that includes secession" but also the delineation of boundaries respecting national composition.

It was an open secret that Lenin regarded Czarist Russia as a "prison house of nations." As a Marxist, he was convinced that the liberation of these nations and nationalities had to be tied and linked to the struggle and liberation of the proletariat. Rob Sewell in his article entitled "Lenin on the National Question" observed:

Following on from Marx, Lenin took up the national question as a means of arming the revolutionary social democracy in Russia and uniting the oppressed nationalities under the banner of the working class. In answer to national oppression, the Russian Marxists... called for the right of nations to self-determination, that is, to complete separation as states. This was particularly relevant to tsarist Russia, whose empire constituted a 'prison house of nationalities.' Such was the make-up of the empire that the Great Russians, the ruling nationality, only constituted 48% of the whole. Those under domination (Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, Letts, Ukrainians, and so on), deprived of their rights, were systematically oppressed by tsarism. It was this that gave the national question in Russia such an explosive force (Sewell 2004, 2).

This inevitably brought objections from Rosa Luxemburg, Bukharin and others who felt that Lenin was abandoning and forgoing the natural alliance of the working class of the different nationalities and advocating secession for its own sake. Lenin's advocacy for the right of the various nationalities was, however, intended to weaken "...bourgeois nationalism and winning the confidence of the workers of the oppressed nation..." (ibid). Otherwise he had emphatically argued that Marxists do not support every call for self-determination unless and until it is believed that it will advance the struggle for socialism and the liberation of the proletariat. In his *Collected Works*, Lenin declared:

However our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any way commits us to supporting every demand for national self-determination. As the party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations. We must always and unreservedly work for the very closest unity of the proletariat of all nationalities (Lenin 1903, 243-251).

Hence it is in the above quotation that one finds the answer to why Meles is waging a war against the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden Liberation Front, two organizations whose leaders had long left the government of Prime Minister Meles' after accusing it of not being any different from the

Haile Selassie's autocratic regime or from the Stalinist military junta of Colonel Mengistu, and demanding that their people be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination as guaranteed to them by Article 39 of the constitution.

Meles' idea of delineating the boundaries and apportioning territories to the various nationalities is derived from Lenin's suggestion. Lenin said:

The proletariat cannot achieve freedom other than by revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy and its replacement by a democratic republic. The tsarist monarchy precludes liberty and equal rights for nationalities... This monarchy can be overthrown only by the united proletariat of all the nations of Russia... *Social-Democrats demand the abolition of the old administrative divisions of Russia established by the feudal landowners and the civil servants of the autocratic feudal state and their replacement by divisions based on the requirements of present-day economic life in accordance, as far as possible, with the national composition of the population.* All areas of the state that are distinguished by social peculiarities or by the national composition of the population, must enjoy wide self-government and autonomy, with institutions organized on the basis of universal, equal and secret voting. Social-Democrats demand the promulgation of a law, operative throughout the state, protecting the rights of every national minority in no matter what part of the state. This law should declare inoperative any measure by means of which the national majority might attempt to establish privileges for itself or restrict the rights of a national minority (in the sphere of education, in the use of any specific language, in budget affairs, etc.), and forbid the implementation of any such measure by making it a punishable offense (Lenin 1977, 243-251; *emphasis mine*).

Meles, having created this political structure, believes that all of those who harbor secessionist intentions need to be happy, settle down and embark on developing their ethnic fiefdom. He seems to suggest that "the prison house of nations" as Lenin used to refer to Czarist Russia, and Meles himself uses it to amplify and describe Haile Selassie's and Mengistu's Ethiopia, has been destroyed. He goes on to assume that the hitherto "prisoners" have all been liberated and are allowed to live within their geographically defined territories that has allowed them to establish their respective government, develop their culture, speak, teach, learn, and conduct their courts in their respective languages. Consistent with this, he would argue, is they have come together and established a federal government that has given them equal voice in how it is run. Hence, he seems to conclude, they should seize this moment and forge ahead.

### **The Domination of the Country by the TPLF**

But the question then becomes, has Meles created the federal democratic republic that guarantees the protection and advancement of all the rights and privileges of every nation and nationality? During his interview with Paul B. Henze, in April 1990, Meles proclaimed:

The system the Derg has established must be destroyed or it will destroy the country. All the resistance movements must come together and decide what the future of (the) country should be. We propose a provisional government made up of all factions and parties and movements, right

as well as left. Nobody should be left out. The provisional government should develop a plan for a constituent assembly that will write a new constitution. *The country will have to be federation and there will have to be recognition of the right of every people in it to have autonomy. We can no longer have Amhara domination....When we talk about Amhara domination, we mean the Amhara of Shoa and the habit of Shoaan supremacy that became established in Addis Ababa during the last hundred years. This system has to change. The people who think they have a right to dominate in Addis Ababa have to change their mentality. This is the mentality the Derg adopted from the very beginning. No people of Ethiopia have the right to dominate any other* (Henze 1990, 5; *emphasis mine*).

Various scholars of the Ethiopian politics seem to agree that Ethiopia is a long way away from Meles' declarations. In fact the hitherto elections and their result incontrovertibly show that Ethiopia is and has been under the domination of a single ethnic group, the Tigreans who constitute only 6 percent of the population (Habtu 2003, 7) for the last eighteen years. Table 1 below shows the 1995, 2000, and 2005 parliamentary election results and seat allocations to the EPRDF, where the TPLF's number screams out for attention.

**Table 1: Ethiopian Parliamentary Election Results 1995-2005**

Party/Coalition	2005	2000	1995
Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO)	110	183	182
Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)	87	146	144
Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM)	92	112	125
Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)	38	40	40
Total	327/547*	481/547*	491/547*

**Source:** Ethiopian Parliament (2005).

\* indicates, of the 547 total seats, EPRDF had "won" 327, 481, and 491 seats for the years shown above.

Browyn E. Bruton, International Affairs Fellow in Residence, in her article written on August 6, 2009, warns the Obama administration about possible catastrophic crisis that is brewing in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia. She urges President Obama's administration to seize the moment and avert the impending crisis. Bruton also reminds the administration of the shrinking democratic space and the domination of the political sphere in Ethiopia by the Tigrean minority that has alienated the majority thereby aggravating the whole situation. She observed that "...The government's ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), is perceived by many Ethiopians to be dominated by a single minority ethnic faction, the Tigre, and its

consolidation of political power may be read as an assault on the majority ethnic Amhara and Oromo population” (Bruton 2009, 2-3).

Professor Marina Ottaway wrote:

In 1991 the TPLF had power based on its military superiority over the other movements. It could not transform such power into political authority without dealing with the ethnic problems. As a Tigrean nationalist movement, it had no support in other regions, nor could it hope to gain it—Oromos and Amharas could never vote for a party dedicated to the cause of Tigrean liberation. In the last period of the war against Mengistu, when the fighting started spreading from Tigray to other regions, the TPLF took the first step to address the problem, promoting the formation of ethnic movements in other regions and of an umbrella organization, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to bring them together. But in 1991 these EPRDF-aligned parties were perceived as tools of the TPLF and thus had little legitimacy (Ottaway 2009, 2).

In organizing the umbrella organization known as the EPRDF, the TPLF formed various satellite parties to represent their respective national and regional groups: the EPDM (Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement) represents the Amhara nationality; the OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization) represents the Oromo nationality; and the SEPDM (Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement) represents the peoples of the southern region of Ethiopia. It would not be far from the truth to assert that these satellite parties could all be regarded as *Trojan horses*. They were created by the TPLF to help it to mollify the peoples of their respective regions, to have access to the natural resources of these same regions and to use them to achieve eventually the political domination of the country. Hence I argue here that this could be the very reason why Meles and company chose the parliamentary form of government with Prime Minister as head of the government and a figurehead president as head of state and not the presidential form that could be both the head of government and of state.

The burden of winning the premiership in the former form of government is, for the would be prime minister, only to win his/her constituency and hope or help others in his/her party win theirs so as to secure the majority seat in the parliament. The latter form of government, however, requires that the would-be president compete in all the ethnic territories and win a clear majority. With the presidential form of government no Tigrean could have won the presidency. It is a simple arithmetic. The numbers are not there. Remember, this is an ethnic based federalism. An Oromo or an Amhara or a coalition of Oromo-Amhara will dominate the political scene. The two ethnic groups constitute better than “62 per cent of the population” (Quoted in Alem Habtu 7). Meles would not allow this to happen. He has unconsciously admitted his intention for the ethnically based federalism.

*...this policy serves many interests including equitable distribution of wealth, empowerment of ethnicities, and since this was how the nationalities were before colonization, as ethnicity was the language they understood best. (He continued to say) ethnic basis of Ethiopia’s democracy stemmed from the government’s fight against poverty and the need for an equitable distribution of the nation’s wealth: peasants must be enabled to make their own decisions in terms of their own culture. Power must be devolved to them in ways that they understand, and they understand ethnicity. . . . Other*

approaches to development had been hegemonic and exploitative and had led to internecine strife and civil war (Zenawi 2009, 6; *emphasis mine*).

There are two interesting issues in this declaration that are of significant importance. First, Meles has not shown how the substitution of the exploitation of the various ethnic groups by the Shoa Amharas, an ethnic group he despises with passion, by the Tigreans, to which he belongs, is any different if not in form at least in substance? Or was it a *Freudian slip* that exposed the undercurrent? Whatever the motivation, it has been communicated very eloquently but, sadly, pungently.

The second issue is the absence of reasoned argument that explains what “equitable distribution of resources” means in the context of federalism. Does it mean that Oromia with its large population and significant amount of resources would share its resources equitably with the other regions? Should not distribution of resources and /or revenues be contingent upon population and other criteria that should not disadvantage the territories that have large population and territory to develop? As a unique form of federalism, it is incumbent upon the government to explain what it means.

Professor Keller who had done an in-depth study of how the federal government in Ethiopia is managing its affairs differently from other federal countries seems to suggest that federalism in Ethiopia’s case is a misnomer. He said:

Also, like central governments in all federal states, it is responsible for the conduct of foreign policy, insuring national defense, monetary policy, and setting policy relating to inter-regional state transportation and commerce. In spite of the fact that the Constitution gives a great deal of power and administrative authority to regional states, the overwhelming amount of political power in this system rests with the central government. Because of this, in practice, *Ethiopia operates more like a unitary state, with regional states closely following the policy lead of the center, mainly as represented in the TPLF’s Five year Program rather than asserting their policy independence* ( Keller 2002, 34, *emphasis mine*).

Theodore Vestal, a very distinguished scholar describing Oromo People’s Democratic Organization and the other appendages observed:

In every regional government, a shadow party organization operated as a disciplined phalanx to carry out the will of the EPRDF leadership...Important decisions are made by party leaders behind closed doors. Not a single important political or organizational question is decided by government officials or mass organizations without guiding direction from the party. The Front (TPLF) stands above all, and the leaders do not test their policies in a forum of free speech and fair elections. Instead they mobilize and enforce consent (Vestal 2009, quoted in the US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 4-5).

Another scholar, Dr. Seyoum Hameso, after having critically assessed the situation, contended that even though the TPLF promised and championed collective rights, the use of one’s language, the decentralization of power and the provision of regional autonomy, the promise and hope was short lived as the TPLF wanted to entrench itself as an Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Front (Hameso 2001, 1). Dr. Berhanu G. Balcha, on writing about the shortcoming of the Meles regime, seems to suggest that because the TPLF represents a minority ethnic group in the Ethiopian polity, it would

not of necessity establish a democratic federal government. To do so, he seems to argue, would be tantamount to committing suicide. He said that the TPLF is aware that Tigreans constitute only 6 percent of the Ethiopian people as compared to the Oromos and Amhars who constitute 35 percent and 30 percent respectively (Balcha 2009, 3). Balcha continued to argue that this reality has compelled the TPLF to devise another route.

Instead of establishing genuine ethnic federal arrangement and genuine ethnic coalition government, it has opted to join forces with sycophants that have no legitimacy in their ethnic communities and establish its hegemony (Balcha 2009, 3). In order to guarantee the domination of Ethiopia by the TPLF, a front of a minority ethnic group, it appears that Meles has devised a unique form of government machinery. It is a government that appeals and entices the intellectuals of various ethnic groups who have no qualm of not only accepting to play a secondary role but also to permanently relegating the rights, privileges and aspirations of “their people” to a secondary and possibly tertiary importance.

The statute of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front approved by the Sixth Congress of the EPRDF declares that “EPRDF is a Front founded by the union of revolutionary democratic organizations. It is not a Front (that is) organized by recruiting individuals” (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Statute, Art. 7, Sect.1a). The Statute in its introduction declares the importance of establishing multi-national organization as follows: Since Ethiopia is a multi-national country, the way to guide its different nationalities and peoples together for the struggle should be through a Front made up of multi-national member organizations, and not in an *organizational framework of individuals*. Because the Front consisting of multi-national organizations will fulfill two basic questions:

- a. Ethiopian nations and nationalities by forming an organization based upon nations and nationalities of their own are practically showing the will their rights and benefits be protected in a fundamental way. *The current situation indicates that nations and nationalities could secure a better organizational leadership and political participation when they are in struggle under the leadership of nations and nationality organizations of their own.* As thus each nationality, under a respective national organization will improve the condition for the respect of their rights and benefits. EPRDF, being an organization of nations and nationalities and dedicated to the respect of rights and values of Ethiopian nations and nationalities, should embrace organizations that are formed on the basis of nations and nationalities to protect the rights and benefits of nations and nationalities.
- b. *National organizations are organizations that are formed in order to protect the rights and benefits of their nations and nationalities under the revolutionary democratic program.* Keeping this in mind, the formation of organizations of nations and nationalities that are governed by the democratic objectives which foster fraternity and unity among different organizations is fundamental. *The formation of nations and nationality organizations under one revolutionary democratic Front will be the better choice to realize this objective. So, as EPRDF is an organization which stands to secure equality and unity among the peoples of Ethiopia, it realizes the objective by embracing member organizations that are dedicated to*

*protect the rights and also gain support from their people easily (ibid, Sections 2a and b, emphasis mine).*

One may ask what EPRDF's assumption was when it authored its statute? What have these authors taken for granted? The assumption is, it is obvious, that EPRDF is the sole representative of all of the nations and peoples of Ethiopia. They have also taken for granted that EPRDF's power cannot be curtailed or questioned by any governmental body or organ including the High Court of the country. Consciously and/or unconsciously the authors have also assumed that the statute could trample not only the constitution of the country but also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with impunity. However, according to international law, if a country is a party to an international law, treaty or agreement, which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is, then, the government that is a signatory party to the law has the obligation to make sure that all the provisions in its constitution pertaining to human rights should be consistent with or be complementary to the former. If and when there is any contradiction or inconsistency between the two, then the government is required to amend its laws accordingly.

Now then, it is clear that the statute of the EPRDF does not only negate Article 31 of its own constitution, the provision that guarantees the right of everyone to form an association for whatever purpose, but also Article 21 sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Section 1 guarantees everyone

...the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives, section two guarantees everyone the right to equal access to public service in his country, and section three declares the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures (Carter and Trimble 1991, 877-878).

Now the question is, if the government, in this case EPRDF, circumscribes and limits the right of the Ethiopian people, through proclamation, how then will they exercise their "free choice," have "equal access to public service in their country" and express their will periodically in a genuine election, as demanded by sections 1, 2, and 3 of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? It is evident that the government has infringed upon their right by restricting them to vote to organizations they had no say in their creation. How could this system of voting be regarded as free and democratic and be the basis upon which the authority and legitimacy of the government rests? Simply put, because the government has taken the liberty and the power to dictate to the people, it has robbed them of their sovereign right and power to be the foundation of democratic governance.

The statute is also in contradiction with Article 25 section "A" of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that encourages everyone "to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives." Here again, the same problem comes to light. There cannot be free choice as long as the government circumscribes how the people are to be organized and *ipso facto* negate their right to free choice. The statute, the working and guiding principle of the EPRDF, has given the government the power to promulgate all laws and policies that protect and advance its narrow interests. No wonder why the Parliament adopted a very controversial decree that robbed

nongovernmental organizations, including political organizations, the right to receive financial assistance or contributions from foreign sources.

By emphatically and categorically stating that "...it is not the job of NGOs to protect the rights of citizens," the government is unabashedly saying its power over its people has no bound. Peter Heinlein of the Voice of America observed that the Ethiopian Parliament approved a law on January 6, 2009, that criminalizes many NGO activities. He wrote:

Ethiopia's parliament has overwhelmingly approved a law that will sharply restrict the activities of most civil society groups. The law has been the target of scathing criticism from opposition parties, rights groups and many foreign governments, including the United States. The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party used its massive parliamentary majority to push through a law that gives the government broad powers over foreign funded nongovernmental organizations. The so-called Charities and Societies Proclamation prohibits any group receiving at least 10 percent of its funds from abroad from promoting democratic or human rights, the rights of children, or equality of gender or religion. Violators could face stiff fines and sentences of up to 15 years in prison (Heinlein 2009, 1-2).

Among the NGOs that are targeted by this law is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Its declared function is to:

...strengthen the capacity and role of civil society, improve independent human rights monitoring, investigation, and reporting, and work to improve the respect the judiciary and police have for international, national, and institutional human rights regulations...also strengthen the federal and regional parliaments operating in the new, multiparty environment, and build the capacity of national and regional judicial training centers and select law schools (USAID Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia 2009, 2).

As it has been noted above, the "constitution" has all the rights, including the bill of rights and is supposed to protect and guard against governmental excesses and violation rights. The record of the FDRE regarding the violation of human rights is well-documented. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and all other advocates of human rights have incessantly produced evidence to this effect.

### **Authoritarianism of the TPLF/EPRDF**

How does Ethiopia fare in its peacefulness and protection of human rights among the community of nations? This is no longer left to an individual subjective evaluation or whims. The Global Peace Index has tried to scientifically and objectively measure not only nations' relative peacefulness but also their adherence to the protection of human rights by critically examining and assessing issues that are pertinent to the topic. In this connection, Global Peace Index ranks Ethiopia 121<sup>st</sup> out of 144 countries for the year 2009; and 121<sup>st</sup> out of 140 countries for the year of 2008; and 103<sup>rd</sup> out of 121 countries for the year of 2007 (Global Peace Index 2009, 5). As Table 2 below indicates, amongst the many indicators GPI used, I have taken the liberty to select the most pertinent ones for this purpose. Is there any wonder, therefore, that Prime Minister Meles is ranked seventeenth amongst world's worst dictators? (Parade 2007, 1).

**Table 2: The Global Peace Index**

(Peace Index scores from 1 to 5 where 1= most peaceful)

Indicators	2009	2008	2007
Political Instability	3.5	3.25	3.25
Respect for Human Rights	4	3	4
Political Participation	5	5	5
Civil Liberties	4.41	4.4	4.4
Political Democracy Index	4.52	4.5	4.7
Likelihood of Violent Demonstration	4	4	4
Electoral Process	3	3	4
Functioning of Government	3.93	3.9	3.9
Level of Organized Conflict Internal	3.5	3.5	3.5
Relations with neighboring countries	3	3	

**Source:** Global Peace Index, 2009. 1-2.

Due to the fact that 85 percent of Ethiopia's population is rural whose livelihood is based on subsistence farming, their ability to contribute financial assistance and/or pay monthly dues to a political party of their choice is very limited if not impossible. The relatively small percent of the middle class not only has been eroded and reduced through forced and/or voluntary exile, but also has been impoverished due to inflation, unemployment and under-employment. Hence it cannot be a reliable source of financial contributions.

This, therefore, means that the organizations will be, *ipso facto*, dependent on Ethiopian *Diasporas* for their financial support. It goes without saying therefore that, to criminalize financial assistance or contributions from foreign sources, as the Parliament has done, and eloquently discussed by Peter Heinlein of the Voice America above, is, in the opinion of many, tantamount to condemning the country to one party domination and dictatorship. It is obvious that this will only serve the interest of the government whose party has not only had absolute control of the country, but also the unique opportunity of safeguarding the treasury of the same.

As argued above, the EPRDF statute contradicts Article 25 section "A" of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that guarantees the rights of individuals or groups of individuals to establish an organization of their choosing. By so doing, it, in-effect, restricts their right to vote for an organization composed of groups of individuals that are motivated by common ideals, goals, aspirations, dreams and visions for their country. In other words, groups and individuals that want to transcend narrow nationalism or parochialism and establish organizations based on other metrics or priorities will not be able to do so.

It is possible to postulate that if and when organizations are ethnically based and are represented in parliament accordingly; their working relationship would be one of competition. The fact that they have been forced to organize themselves ethnically means that there will be suspicion and mistrust amongst them. The ethnic groups that constitute the absolute majority in the parliament, in this case

the elements that constitute the EPRDF will not have the incentive or the desire to want to cooperate and work with the other ethnically organized parties. This is exactly what is happening in the EPRDF dominated parliament in Ethiopia. The relationship that obtains between the various ethnic groups in the parliament is antagonistic. This *modus operandi* will contribute to undermining Ethiopians, thereby weakening national consciousness. TPLF dominated EPRDF has not created a government that ended ethnic domination as Meles had pledged to Paul Henze.

### Conclusion

As this study shows, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was born out of mistrust and suspicion between the people and the TPLF led government. Although the TPLF/EPRDF has tried to get legitimacy for its constitution, it has not materialized as of yet. The course of action that is needed is for the TPLF to make serious assessment and soul searching. The leadership needs to summon its genuine courage and consider earnestly the extent to which its biases, prejudices, and worldview have played a role in its decision to superimpose an ethno-linguistic federal paradigm on the Ethiopian people.

It has always been the contention of the TPLF, according to Berhe, that the effort of the Tigrean people to form its national state has been frustrated by the dominant Amhara nation (Berhe, 1981, 4). By holding the “Amhara nation,” primarily the Shoan Amhara, as the culprit for the oppression of all “nations and nationalities” in the “empire,” the TPLF has embarked on a systematic destruction of the national consciousness, sowing the seed of discord amongst people who have lived for centuries in relative harmony intermingling and intermarrying between and across ethnic lines.

Meles needs to be true to his own constitution and empower the Ethiopian people by vesting them with their inalienable right to sovereignty. This demand is both legitimate and democratic. The call for this demand transcends nationality and/or ethnicity. All peace loving and democratic forces can rally around this call. The May 2005 election and its aftermath had exposed the brute, callous, and authoritarian nature of the TPLF regime. The TPLF cannot claim to have established the “Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia when, in fact, it is neither democratic nor republic in substance.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in its Human Development Report 2002, under the subheading “Deepening democracy in a Fragmented world” contend that the central challenges for deepening democracy is building the key institutions of democratic governance. They include:

- the existence of a well functioning political parties and interest associations,
- a system of checks and balances based on the separation of powers with independent judicial and legislative branches,
- a vibrant civil society able to monitor government and private business,
- a free and independent media, and
- effective civilian control over the military and other security forces (UNDP 2002, 4).

The above prerequisites are either non-existent or are under very close supervision and surveillance by the FDRE. The authoritarian nature of the TPLF/EPRDF has been discussed earlier in this analysis. Human Rights Watch in 2009, under the heading “*Ethiopia: Events of 2009*” contend that the Meles’ government has continued to shrink the space within which the independent civil society was operating thereby affecting its activities. This measure, according to HRW, has made it the most restrictive of any comparable law anywhere in the world. Continuing with its censorship of the government, Human Rights Watch said that the new media law it passed in 2008 not only restricts the space but also constrains the activities of journalists. It also lampoons the government for continuing the lengthy periods of pretrial and pre-charge detention to punish critics and opposition activists and also for torturing and abusing the same (Human Rights Watch 2009, 1-2). It is therefore evident that TPLF/EPRDF is far away from being democratic. Unless and until aid donors make their development assistance to Ethiopia contingent on the building of the key institutions of democratic governance, the Millennium Development Goals, as will be discussed below, will not be met by the FDRE. Tom Porteous the Human Rights Watch, in his article under the heading *Ethiopia: the Aid-Politics Trap* wrote:

Ethiopia is the largest recipient of western development assistance in Africa. In 2005-08, aid to Ethiopia more than doubled—from \$1.9 billion to \$3.4 billion. Yet the country’s domestic politics are becoming less democratic and more repressive. Could there be a link between aid and repression? ... Ethiopia is a *de facto* one-party state masquerading as a democracy. Its ruling party, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), permeates the state and goes to great lengths to ensure citizens’ political loyalty. In parliamentary elections in May 2010, the EPRDF won 99.6% of the seats. In local elections in 2008 it won more than 99% .... Now, HRW’s research indicates that the coercive mechanisms by which the EPRDF maintains control of the country have come to include the politicization and manipulation of aid. The report documents numerous instances of government officials distributing and withholding the benefits of donor-funded programmes—such as fertilizers, agricultural seeds, food, microcredit, and job and training opportunities—on the basis of party affiliation (Porteous 2010, 1-2).

With all the political problems that have been bedeviling the country for the last eighteen years, it would be extremely difficult for the government of Prime Minister Meles to be able to discharge its obligations and responsibilities as outlined by the heads of state and government of members of the United Nations in their Millennium Development Goals in 2000 (UNDP 2002, 17). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in their Plan for the 2009-2010 have the following to say about the dire situation that faces Ethiopia.

Currently ranking 169 out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index, Ethiopia is facing complex challenges ranging from a huge population growth (resulting in a very young population with 44 percent being under 15 years) high illiteracy rates, and tremendous health challenges with malaria, meningitis, and HIV and AIDS being the major killers. Access to clean water and sanitation facilities are severely limited, with 78 percent of the total population not having access to safe drinking water. In addition, Ethiopia is among the most disaster prone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa regularly affected by severe drought, floods, as well as political unrests and

tribal conflicts.

Due to a high population density and the repeated exposure to natural disasters, Ethiopia chronically suffers from food insecurity. Environmental degradation and severe effects of climate change make food security one of the main priorities for humanitarian assistance in the country (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, Plan 2009-2010, Ethiopia, 1). Mark Malloch Brown, the administrator of the UNDP, on writing the forward to the Human Development Report, stresses the importance of political empowerment of the people to economic development. In his words:

This *Human Development Report* is first and foremost about the idea that politics is as important to successful development as economics. Sustained poverty reduction requires equitable growth—but it also requires that poor people have political power. And the best way to achieve that in a manner consistent with human development objectives is by building strong and deep forms of democratic governance at all levels of society (Human Development Report 2002 UNDP, V).

What any serious statesman and astute student of politics can learn from peoples uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and possibly Syria is that no matter how long the peoples' yearning for liberty, respect, and dignity are suppressed, the time will come when the internal conditions and the external environment will allow them to decide the measure they need to take. What were considered as suppression were in fact smoldering until the time was ripe for a small provocation to ignite them into a burning flame. In this connection, the dreams and aspirations of the Ethiopian people are not any different from the people of the countries referenced earlier. But will they take the same route? That is for the future to determine.

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**Solomon Terfa**, PhD, is an associate professor of political science at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU). Before joining the MVSU, he taught at Alcorn State University from 1994 to 2004. He also taught and served as the chairman of the Department of Political science and International Relations at the Addis Ababa University from 1989 to 1993. Prior to embarking in the teaching profession, Dr. Terfa had the unique opportunity of serving his country Ethiopia, as a second secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Relations from 1979 to 1981, and as a Senior Expert in the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations from 1987 to 1989. During his services in these two governmental institutions, he represented his country as a member of the Ethiopian delegation to various bilateral and multilateral meetings that included the 1979 UN General Assembly and the Coordinating Bureau of the Non Aligned Movement in New York and Sri Lanka, respectively.