

# Colonial Perspective and Nationalism(s) in Ethiopia in the Context of African Decolonization

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## Introduction: Colonial Perspective in Retrospect

In historical perspective and retrospect, one crucial question regarding the Horn of Africa<sup>1</sup> comes back over and over again: was Ethiopia really a colonial empire and was it really so different from the rest of Africa? To answer these questions we have to distinguish our present knowledge from that of the past. Baz Lecocq put it rightly in his recent monograph when he asked: “*How does historical discourse influence the present, and how does the present influence historical discourse?*”<sup>2</sup> These are questions which necessarily entered any kind of historical research in regard to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in general. Probably anywhere else has been the historical discourse so much politicized and ethnicized as in Ethiopia which has a long history of nationalisms, conflicts, civil wars and political tensions and turmoil where ethnicity and religion usually play a remarkable role of mobilizing factors. Ethiopian history has been a very complex and complicated, multi-faceted and dynamic process which cannot be put into a few simplifying statements and categories. So is the historiography which corresponds in its width to the broad and all-encompassing nature of the history of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The article is part of SGS-2014-005 research grant.

<sup>2</sup> B. LECOCQ, *Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, Leiden 2010, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> D. CRUMMEY, *Society, State and Nationality in the Recent Historiography of Ethiopia*, in:

From the present point of view, Ethiopia is by many authors depicted as a colonial power which colonized and subjugated a wide range of minorities inhabiting mainly the southern, eastern and western fringes of the Ethiopian Highlands.<sup>4</sup> Such simplifying notions usually narrow the studied subject on ethnic or racial issues while they rather neglect many other factors which are even more important including land, societies, social changes, classes, power relations, military, international dimensions and many others. States and societies undergo perpetual changes and progresses in a context of wide range of factors, both internal and external. Proper understanding of (in this case) African past needs to put all these aspects into the context of the time which we study and not to put our current images and concepts or prefabricated ideas of our past into it. Contrasting discourses on history of Ethiopia have filled recent debates among academics, political activists and general public but have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

One of the perspectives which has become popular is the colonial perspective which is usually promoted by various Oromo scholars in the diaspora while some other authors have a little reserved opinion to this. Recently, plenty of materials have been written on “conquest, exploitation, and deculturation”<sup>6</sup> “control and dominance”,<sup>7</sup> or “genocide”.<sup>8</sup> Ethiopia has been depicted as a colonial power which conquered territories inhabited by many different societies that were forcefully incorporated to the Empire and

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Journal of African History, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1990, pp. 103–119.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. A. JALATA, *Contending Nationalisms of Oromia and Ethiopia. Struggling for Statehood, Sovereignty, and Multinational Democracy*, Binghamton 2010.

<sup>5</sup> J. SORENSEN, *Imagining Ethiopia. Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*, New Jersey 1995, pp. 70–74.

<sup>6</sup> M. HASSEN, *Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo*, in: E. GEBISSA (ed.), *Contested Terrain. Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse, and Politically Engaged Scholarship*, Trenton 2009, pp. 23–65.

<sup>7</sup> G. BENTI, *A Blind without a Cane, A Nation without a City: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa*, in: E. GEBISSA (ed.), *Contested Terrain. Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse, and Politically Engaged Scholarship*, Trenton 2009, pp. 147–168.

<sup>8</sup> T. TRUEMAN, *Genocide against the Oromo People*, in: S. HAMESO – M. HASSEN (eds.), *Arrested Development in Ethiopia. Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy and Self-Determination*, Trenton 2006, pp. 133–148.

subjugated. One of the major disagreement concerning identity and nationalism in Ethiopia within academic public is the essentialist-social constructivist debate which has been profoundly discussed by Günther Schlee elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> It is not the aim of this article to discuss theoretical backgrounds of these disputes. On the other hand, any kind of debate concerning ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia, which seems to be very much politicized these years, needs to take a look back in history and analyze complex historical processes without recent lenses influenced by abovementioned academic disputes.

### **Ethiopia, Historiography and Nationalism**

Ethiopia, despite being ruled by the Solomonic dynasty for many centuries based on the three “powers” – the Emperor, the Orthodox Church, and Amharic language – was not a “one-way” street or “black and white” state as it would seem from today’s point of view. The Shawan kingdom, which stood at the forefront of the socio-political dynamics of modern Ethiopian state in the nineteenth century, was a culturally diverse, cosmopolitan and prosperous territory with international trade links and local or regional blood connections.<sup>10</sup> Three historical stages – Imperial, socialist, federal – through which Ethiopia has undergone gave rise to many different perspectives on its history by both Ethiopian and foreign scholars, historians, anthropologists, political scientists and quite recently, political activists. These new waves of scholarship have brought not only new perspectives on relations between various ethnic groups as they simply put ethnicity to the forefront of research, but based their assumptions and writings on subjectivity, emotions, and simplified statements.<sup>11</sup> It is very striking that many of recent debates concerning ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia completely ignore some crucial factors of

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<sup>9</sup> G. SCHLEE, *Redrawing the Map of the Horn: The Politics of Difference*, in: Africa, Vol. 73, No. 3, 2003, pp. 343–368.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. McCANN, *An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800–1990*, London 1995, p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> A. TRIULZI, *Battling with the Past. New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography*, in W. JAMES – D. L. DONHAM – E. KURIMOTO et. al. (eds.), *Remapping Ethiopia. Socialism and After*, Oxford 2002, p. 280.

socio-political development in Ethiopia such as religion, regional competition and balance, and cross-border as well as international and transnational issues. Tadesse Tamrat, for instance, wrote about the rise of religious nationalism in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a significant sign of territorial expansion and wars with neighboring (mostly but not only) Muslim regions.<sup>12</sup> The rise of religious nationalism among Muslim populations is also challenging “traditional” views on Ethiopian history as strictly “ethnic-based”.<sup>13</sup>

Before getting to a deconstruction of nationalisms in Ethiopia in historical perspectives we should put Ethiopia in a broader context of Africa. Due to the absence of European colonialism in Ethiopia, this country has often been excluded from larger comparative studies concerning decolonization and thus nationalism which in Africa aroused as a necessary consequence of colonialism. Colonial state and later the independent nation-state have largely contributed to the emergence of “*modern conception of ethnic identity*”.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the rest of Africa (except of Liberia), Ethiopia has been mythicized as an independent Empire living in relative isolation, peace, unity and civilization. These myths were completely broken in 1974 and until nowadays, Ethiopia shows a remarkably high level of internal as well as external tensions, conflicts, instability.

For many recent authors, Ethiopia is a colonial state of the Amharas that colonized dozens of ethnic groups as Oromos or Somalis in what is now known as Ethiopia but before 1855 these were independent territories. Such a statement is partly true but needs to be examined in a broader perspective. At the end of the nineteenth century, Ethiopia was one of a few African states that had a capability to defeat a European army (comparably to the Zulu victory at Isandlwana over the British in 1879). Due to growing European presence in the Horn of Africa that included French interests in Bab-al-Mandeb, British

<sup>12</sup> T. TAMRAT, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*, Oxford 1972, pp. 206–247.

<sup>13</sup> One of the best accounts on Islam in Ethiopia is T. ØSTEBO, *Localising Salafism: Religious Change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia*, Leiden 2012.

<sup>14</sup> E. J. KELLER, *Ethiopia: Revolution, Class and the National Question*, in: *African Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 321, 1988, p. 520.

securitization of trade routes in Yemen and British Somaliland, Mahdist expansion in the Sudan, and primarily the Italian colonial ambitions in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, Ethiopia had the only chance to secure its territory by militarization and expansionism.

Why are we putting these facts into a broader comparative study? Because what characterizes recent Ethiopian historiography is the lack of complexity and comparison and abundance of ethnicized histories and “*historical narratives based on each group’s collective memory*” which were mostly “*constructed along nationalist lines*”.<sup>15</sup> These views usually lack any kind of comparative methods or broader insights that would put the studied problem into a context of that time. Such a situation may lead to creation of a *parallel history* based on personal emotions, assumptions and subjective feelings. The aim of this article is thus to contextualize the process of development of nationalisms in Ethiopia in a broader context of colonial and postcolonial Africa and to analyze it in certain stages as it developed through last sixty years.

Political scientists and anthropologists have published plenty of articles and material on nationalism, ethnic conflict and identity issues in Ethiopia but perhaps surprisingly there exist rather minimal examination of these issues in historical research, let alone comparative history. This is maybe one of the reasons why the study of nationalisms in Ethiopia is so much politicized and ethnicized. What I aim to reach in this article is to differentiate and contextualize four stages of nationalisms in Ethiopia. First, we have to take into account a simple fact that despite its oppressive nature, the Ethiopian state successfully kept its territorial integrity untouched and protected it against foreign invaders. Without this success, there would be no Ethiopia and the development of nationalist movements would look very different when facing a foreign (European) colonial power.

The very first stage of the rise of nationalism in Ethiopia was that of the 1896 victory at Adowa over the Italian forces. The image of Ethiopia

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<sup>15</sup> TRIULZI, p. 280.

as a unique African power that was able to defeat a European power had been created. Historically, the battle of Adowa sheltered the centuries-long process of “unification” of Ethiopia. The concept of Ethiopian unity, on the other hand, was challenged by the Italian acquisition of the colony of Eritrea in 1890 and had significant consequences for further development of Ethiopia. The Italian presence in Eritrea weakened the hegemony of Tigray and approved the rise of Shawa as the dominant core of Ethiopian expansionism.<sup>16</sup> These two centers of power have had a long history of rivalry at least since the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> The second phase of the rise of nationalism in Ethiopia is related to the Eritrean and Somali issues, the incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopian federation and unification of the state, and the issue of Ogaden which challenged the Pan-Somali ideology. The third phase of nationalism is related to civil unrest and protests against the centralized power of Imperial Ethiopia and the rise of various associations and Marxist ideology. The last phase is characterized by ethno-nationalist movement throughout Ethiopia which emerged as a response to the Derg military socialist regime.

In all these cases which will be discussed below in a deeper comparative perspective we can find several historical paradoxes which are not reflected in contemporary literature on the history of Ethiopia. First of all, we have to ask where the sources of the rise of ethno-national identities that filled the research on Ethiopia so much in last couple of decades are? It has been claimed that social change tends to produce stronger communal identities,<sup>18</sup> and this argument can stand at the core of this article, because recently it seems that the role of social and cultural factors have been rather downplayed

<sup>16</sup> T. NEGASH, *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890–1940*, Uppsala 1986, pp. 39–41.

<sup>17</sup> M. ABIR, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea. The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European Rivalry in the Region*, London 1980, pp. 154–157.

<sup>18</sup> H. S. LEWIS, *The Development of Oromo Political Consciousness from 1958 to 1994*, in: P. T. W. BAXTER – J. HULTIN – A. TRIULZI (eds.), *Being and Becoming Oromo. Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*, Uppsala 1996, p. 38.

by many authors dealing with ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia which only contributes to politicization of discourse on modern and contemporary history of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

### **Africa in the Era of Decolonization**

Decolonization in Africa, by its nature, was a social change leading to emancipation of Africans and social and cultural transformation as a necessary alternative to colonial rule. Pan-Africanism, which once hailed Ethiopia as a symbol of African purity and independence, failed to create a unified and homogenous continent which was rather an illusion from its very beginning.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, Pan-Africanism played a remarkable role in the decolonization period and had a great impact on nationalist movements in Africa although the ideology of Pan-Africanism was in sharp contrast with nationalist movements in African colonies seeking for independence and not any kind of federation with other former colonies. That is why so many federal projects failed (e.g. Mali and Senegal, or Ghana and Guinea) because they were unable to overcome the historical, linguistic and territorial heritage of European colonialism.

In the era of decolonization, Africa witnessed a genuine and newborn, in a certain sense virgin waves of nationalist movements which were characterized by the efforts of colonized nations to proclaim independence or at least to gain greater autonomy. It was the World War II that served as accelerator of emancipation and independence thought and ambitions. Nationalism in Africa after the World War II can be divided in several groups dependent on the political and social environment in which it was rooted. The main nationalist sources were Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, and Ethno-nationalism. These were not necessarily in opposition but could be compatible, at least in some cases. On the other hand, it is clear that, for instance, Pan-Arabism did not coincide very well with Pan-Africanism and both ideologies had quite divergent trajectories of political goals and

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<sup>19</sup> M. O. EZE, *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa*, New York 2010, p. 125.

ambitions. The oldest nationalist movements of these are Pan-Africanism and Pan-Islamism whose first rise to political and social significance took place already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite many differences between Ethiopia and the rest of Africa under colonial rule, we can find some general similarities between these two entities in the process of the development of nationalist movements and social transformations. As suggested by Crawford Young, the era of decolonization was the “golden age” of associational life and thus the rise of civil society.<sup>20</sup> In the 1950s in many corners of Africa including Ethiopia we can see the rise of various associations including trade unions, student associations, ethno-regional political parties (mainly in countries like Congo, Nigeria) and the growth of state bureaucracy as well as private business. Many perspectives have been “invented” in terms of evaluating the colonial and postcolonial state in Africa ranging from optimistic hopes dedicated to the independence of African states and societies in the early stage of 1960s through dependency theories in 1970s and 80s until pessimistic approach considering a postcolonial state in Africa as an “*alien model of a nation-state*”.<sup>21</sup>

With no surprise, many of the African states ended up very soon in some form of authoritarian rule ranging from those who were supported by former colonial power to those more radical in terms of dealing with historical/colonial heritage. Due to the lack of contact and understanding between states and societies we have to distinguish an official nationalism (state nationalism) from other types of nationalism (ethno-nationalism) which were created as the result of failed hopes and dreams of early generations of intellectual elites. Not surprisingly either, socialist and Marxist tendencies became popular among African (including Ethiopian) intelligentsia and students as well as trade unions and workers because of its alternative against European capitalism which was necessarily associated with colonialism.

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<sup>20</sup> C. YOUNG, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, New Haven 1994, p. 237.

<sup>21</sup> P. NUGENT, *Africa since Independence*, New York 2004, p. 8.

Pan-Arabism, together with Pan-Africanism, served as the most important accelerator of nationalism in North Africa shortly after the end of the World War II. In 1952, Egypt proclaimed independence, only a year after Libya. But Egypt's case was more important because of its historical significance, and because Egypt has traditionally been a centre of Arab and Islamic world. Moreover, its geographical position connected Egypt with African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean environments. Pan-Islamism as a powerful means of social mobilization played a significant role since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially Egypt served as a centre of reformist Islamic thinking. But due to more or less secular character of African nationalism before and after the World War II, the importance of Pan-Islamism gained momentum mainly in the era of independence when secular states in North Africa witnessed first serious socio-political crisis. Iranian revolution in 1979 was a heyday for most of the Islamic movements in North, West, and East Africa, and since that period we can see the rise of various movements inspired by the events in Iran. Moreover, as a reaction to the rise of Shi'ism, Wahhabist Saudi Arabia strengthened its efforts to export its ideology and to stop the influence of Iran in Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, ethno-nationalism was a major challenge to Pan-Africanism, because, unlike Pan-Africanism, ethno-nationalism was aimed to serve various nationalities to proclaim independent states, and thus fragment already existing states into smaller territories. From the very beginning of the formation of political parties in many of the African states, ethno-nationalism served as major means of social mobilization and people were instructed to vote for their ethnic parties and representatives. In countries like Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, or Kenya, there was a lack of national identity feeling and political parties had very serious ethnic and regional attachments thus making it impossible to reach a national consensus. With no surprise, Nigeria and Congo ended up in years of conflicts which up to date have been uneasy to completely overcome.

Fragmentation of Nigeria and Congo, two very important states in Africa, was the biggest obstacle for Pan-Africanist dreams of African unity, common

African government, parliament, and currency. If these countries were unable to reach consensus, how then all more than fifty states were supposed to reach the goal of unity? Disunity did not reach only these ethnically diverse states but was a case of much smaller and relatively homogeneous countries like Rwanda or Burundi. From the very beginning of the decolonization process, it was clear that both countries could not reach any national unity.

After new independent states were created, the international community including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) did everything it could to maintain the integrity of African states. It was clear that any disintegration in one part of Africa could inspire other emancipation, or separatist movements in other parts of the continent.

### Ethiopia under Imperial Rule

Modern history of Ethiopia has been in official historiography presented through eyes of the ruling circles mostly ignoring the fact that outside what was called Abyssinia there existed a number of political units with their own political, religious, and social systems that contributed to the diversity of Ethiopia in many ways. That is also why there is no agreement between scholars on whether we should talk about unification or re-unification, the process that took place in 1855 and continued until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Ethiopia gained more or less the shape we can see today.

The expansion of Ethiopian state into the Oromo speaking areas was not a task of subjugation and domination, as everything in history, all expansions and intercultural contacts bring not only disasters and conflicts, but also new opportunities and development. Moreover, during the era of the Princes (*zemane mesafint*), territory of what is now Ethiopia was challenged by Egyptian influence which even counted with the conception of the province of *al Habasha* and by perpetual wars between various Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan and other principalities.<sup>22</sup> This was, for instance, the case of Jimma town, the

<sup>22</sup> M. ABIR, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes. The Challenge of Islam and the Re-Unification of the Christian Empire 1769–1855*, London 1968, pp. 136–137.

most important Oromo trading area in South-west Ethiopia (ca. 375km from Addis Ababa). In the nineteenth century the town was known for its slave trade as the slaves were taken mostly from the Omo river areas.<sup>23</sup> After the Menelik II rise to power the town was incorporated into the Ethiopian state structures but remained largely intact by any significant influences coming from the north. Rās Gobenā, on behalf of Menelik II, signed an agreement with Abbā Jifār II in which Menelik agreed to respect the full internal autonomy of Jimma kingdom, not to station troops, and not to construct churches there. Abbā Jifār II recognized Menelik II as his overlord, agreed to pay annual tribute and assist and even accompany Menelik's army in the military campaigns.<sup>24</sup>

Both before and during the state formation in Ethiopia, in every region one could see plenty of local clashes between various clans or powerful individuals who were able to command strong private armies. Several studies have shown that this was also the case of Wällagga region in Western Ethiopia, claimed to be one of the centers of Oromo nationalism. Unlike some recent studies which try to depict the Oromo unity and national identity as a historical, centuries-long fact, Wällagga region, just like any other place in what is now Ethiopia, witnessed clan clashes and land disputes between powerful individuals which simply lacked any kind of "ethnic" dimension because ethnic identities as we know them today were not yet articulated.<sup>25</sup> Another important factor that contributed to the ever-changing dynamic development in Ethiopia was migration and marriage politics which is known also from European history as an important tool by which powerful elites were able to extend their territories or secure their independence. Such was a case of both the Imperial court in Shawa as well as local and regional political units including Jimma, Enarea,

<sup>23</sup> T. WOLDEMARIAM, *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Kingdom of Jimma (ca. 1800–1935)*, MA Thesis, Addis Ababa 1984, pp. 53–58.

<sup>24</sup> T. SEMMA, *Origin and Development of Jimma Town to 1942*, MA Thesis, Addis Ababa 2007, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> T. TA'A, *The Political Economy of West Central Ethiopia: From the Mid-16<sup>th</sup> to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Ph.D. Thesis, East Lansing 1986; O. TUJUBA, *Oromo-Amhara Relations in Horro Guduru Awraja (Northwestern Wallaga), c. 1840s–1941*, MA Thesis, Addis Ababa 1994.

Kaffa and many others.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as is shown on many examples from the nineteenth century, not only Shawa, but simply all political units (no matter whether we call them states, kingdoms or tribes) tended to extend their control over trade routes and slave routes. This was the case of Jimma, Limmu-Enarea (the so-called Gibe states), Shawa and plenty of smaller clan units of which, by supreme military power and a number of coincidences Menelik II became the most successful.<sup>27</sup>

Reasons of Menelik's success are multiple and correspond to various structural changes including a growing market, introduction of a standing army, growth of infrastructure and incorporation of various subjects into the economy of Shawa. For instance, the long-distance trade was dominantly a matter of the Oromo and Afar Muslims, who were able to trade with neighboring Muslim territories. By prohibiting them to own the land and practice agriculture, Muslims turned to trade and have become the dominant aspect of all-Ethiopian trade.<sup>28</sup>

Hostilities which recent authors attribute to Amhara and Oromo struggle were common in all areas where territorial expansion took place. The same expansion which the Ethiopian state underwent in the second half of the nineteenth century was done by many of the Oromo clans in peripheral regions of what is now Ethiopia. At the Ethio-Sudanese borders, for instance, the Oromo clan led by Jotee Tullu of Leeqa Qellem invaded the Goma territory and established his rule over the Goma before the rise of Menelik II.<sup>29</sup> Another strategy or practice aimed at gaining social, political or religious benefits was the practice of *mogaasa* (adoption) based on assimilating alien individuals

<sup>26</sup> H. SEREKET-BRHAN, *Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: Elite Marriages, Politics and Ethnicity in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Imperial Ethiopia*, Ph.D. Thesis, East Lansing 2002.

<sup>27</sup> T. D. FERNYHOUGH, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta. Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa 2010, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup> R. H. K. DARKWAH, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire 1813–1889*, London 1975, pp. 152–157.

<sup>29</sup> T. TA'A, *A Brief Historical Account of the Goma of the Ethio-Sudanese Frontier (ca. 1880s–1950s)*, in: B. ZEWDE (ed.), *Land, Gender and the Periphery. Themes in the History of Eastern and Southern Africa*, Addis Ababa 2003, p. 172.

to the Oromo nation.<sup>30</sup> Assimilation was not only an official practice of the Imperial court but a natural process of expansion (both in territorial and political or economic senses) of the Oromo people and many other groups in the Horn of Africa. That power struggles were never a one-way process is shown by Triulzi on the example of Kumsa Moroda, who, as a ruler of Nekemte, achieved a relatively great autonomy and power to expand to Western peripheries.<sup>31</sup>

From regional and historical perspectives, there were many differences among various Oromo-speaking regions in Ethiopia in terms of access to land and administrative within state structures. While in eastern Wällaggaa, for instance, landlords and governors were dominantly Amharic speaking “outsiders” from Addis Ababa, in western part of the region, as well as in Jimma, many local Oromo leaders took part in state structures and cooperated with Imperial court and only a few Amhara civil servants worked there mostly as teachers and policemen.<sup>32</sup> Ethnicity was not an important issue during the early days of the twentieth century. As a country with strong and vivid religiosity, Islam and Christianity played more significant role and so did the regional aspect dividing the population between “locals” and “outsiders” without direct ethnic connotations. By “outsiders” we mean landlords and usurpers of land which created a gap between the society and state in Ethiopia and contributed to the development of what is called “moral ethnicity”.<sup>33</sup>

Two aspects played an important role in “nation-building” and “state-building” process in Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century. These were the struggle against foreign invaders and threats (Mahdists, Egyptians, European powers) and internal challenges that included primarily Muslims who were mainly for Tewodros II and Yohannes IV the archenemies. While the main aim

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<sup>30</sup> A. HAILE, *Gada System. The Politics of Tulama Oromo*, Addis Ababa 2009, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> A. TRIULZI, *Nekemte and Addis Abeba: dilemmas of provincial rule*, in: D. L. DONHAM – W. JAMES (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, Oxford 2002, pp. 54–55.

<sup>32</sup> J. HULTIN, *Rebounding Nationalism: State and Ethnicity in Wollega 1968–1976*, in: Africa, Vol. 73, No. 3, 2003, p. 410.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, 404.

of the emperors was to keep the Christian identity of Ethiopia, for Muslims, the primary aim was the survival of their faith.<sup>34</sup> Religious expansion during the heyday of the Imperial regime was accompanied by perpetual changes in religious settings. Not only by the rise of Orthodox Christianity which formed the core element of the Solomonic dynasty but also due to the response of local people which brought many religious alternatives. For instance, people of the Gamo Highlands partly accepted the Orthodox Christianity but on the other hand, the expansion of Northerners gave opportunity to the rise of local cult called *Essa Woga* whose central point was “*the abolition of sacrifices and sacrificers*”.<sup>35</sup> Protestant churches played a remarkable role especially in Ethiopia’s Western and South-western territories. It is observable that in many corners of Ethiopia, like Dembi Dollo in Western Wällagga, the significance of foreign churches is of no doubt as it has contributed to the development of these areas in terms of education and health care.

### **Colonialism and the Emperor**

Emperor Haile Selassie was usually portrayed as a modernizer of Ethiopia which partly is true but can be attributed only to the first years of his power during which the first constitution came into being (1931), or completely new elite of government officials and “*urban plutocrats has taken place beside the old*”.<sup>36</sup> But the true modernization was limited by enormous centralization, bureaucracy, poverty, lack of infrastructure, and censorship.<sup>37</sup> The basic network of towns and generally the level of urbanization was still very low at the beginning of Haile Selassie’s rule as the country was traditionally based on small villages and isolated homesteads.<sup>38</sup> Probably the most non-modern

<sup>34</sup> D. ROBINSON, *Muslim Societies in African History*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 116–119.

<sup>35</sup> D. FREEMAN, *Initiating Change in Highland Ethiopia. Causes and Consequences of Cultural Transformation*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 33–34.

<sup>36</sup> D. N. LEVINE, *Wax and Gold. Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, Chicago 1965, p. 150.

<sup>37</sup> R. K. MOLVAER, *Black Lions. The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia’s Literary Giants and Pioneers*, Lawrenceville 1997, pp. xv–xvi.

<sup>38</sup> R. PANKHURST, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800–1935*, Addis Ababa 1968, p. 689.

aspect of Haile Selassie's rule was the extreme centralization which affected many levels of administration and daily lives of ordinary Ethiopians. The Emperor appointed all governors down to the *woreda* level, except for Wollo and Hararghe provinces where governors were appointed by Crown Prince. Such an arrangement gave rise to a strong patronage system in which "*each official at the higher rung used his influence to promote his men at the lower rung*".<sup>39</sup>

Despite the ethnic and regional aspects that come into play in regard to Eritrean nationalism and the struggle for self-determination, a historical and colonial heritage should be taken into account as well. As rightly pointed by Tekeste Negash, Eritrea was a result of the Italian colonialism which was responsible for the economic infrastructure and Mediterranean life style, and the British administration which gave the country "*political freedom and democratic practices*"<sup>40</sup> unknown in Ethiopia to which Eritrea was incorporated.

Bulcha pointed at the discrepancy between usual persuasion of politicians, according to whom a language homogenization is a necessary step towards social and economic development, and the case of Ethiopia, which tells us that the opposite is true. The policy of "*one language one nation*" became an obstacle to socio-economic development, because insistence on the use of a single language prevented vital information from reaching the majority of the population. Radio Ethiopia, for instance, broadcasted all information regarding health, agriculture, or education only in Amharic. This means that the "*Amharic only*" education and administration hampered Oromo education for decades.<sup>41</sup>

Colonial perspective which is one of the perspectives we can use when considering the modern history of Ethiopia cannot be simplified as a colonial conquest of Amharas against Oromo and other Southern peoples. Moreover,

<sup>39</sup> D. RAHMATO, *The Peasant and the State. Studies in Agrarian Change in Ethiopia 1950s–2000s*, Addis Ababa 2009, pp. 115–116.

<sup>40</sup> T. NEGASH, *Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Federal Experience*, Uppsala 1997, p. 144.

<sup>41</sup> M. BULCHA, *The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of Afaan Oromo*, in: African Affairs, Vol. 96, 1997, p. 336.

simplifications never help any serious research and understanding of the problem of study. Amharic speaking people in general have never formed any privileged class or group inside Ethiopia. Power relations in Ethiopia were formed, just like in Rwanda or Burundi or some other “traditional” kingdoms or units in Africa on the basis of regional and social relations and status. Since 1855, it was mainly Shawa and politicians from Shawa (who were not only Amharas) that dominated the political scene in Ethiopia and were responsible for further expansion southwards. Siegfried Pausewang, for instance, was one of those who claimed that there does not exist an “Amhara” identity but at least two different Amhara identities meaning “rural” and “urban” (ethnically mixed) assimilated cultural Amhara *“who understand themselves as Ethiopians with an Amhara language”*.<sup>42</sup> Especially in the countryside among peasants, no matter in which part of today’s Ethiopia, people used to identify themselves regionally as Gondare, Gojjame, just like Oromo speaking people used to identify themselves along clan-lines (Borana, Guji, Arssi, Macha, etc.).<sup>43</sup> John Markakis talks about provincialism in this regard as the main feature of traditional Ethiopia. When it comes to Shawa he says that *“this province lacks a distinct identity and provincial consciousness”* as it is composed of “Shawa Amhara” and “Shawa Oromo” societies while Tigray region in the northern part of Ethiopia *“is the most self-conscious province of Ethiopia”*.<sup>44</sup>

Such a regional focus is supported by a historical course of revolution leading to the fall of Haile Selassie regime. Beside clearly territorial and to a certain sense “anti-colonial” struggle in Eritrea, other uprisings had specific local and regional roots which had little to do with ethnic sentiments but rather with socio-economic factors and situation. The Wäyane rebellion, Bale rebellion or the uprising in Gojjam at the end of 1960s aroused as a combination of various factors including religious rights, agricultural taxes

<sup>42</sup> S. PAUSEWANG, *The Two-Faced Amhara Identity*, in: *Scrinium. Revue de patrologie, d’hagiographie critique et d’histoire ecclésiastique, Tome 1, Varia Aethiopica In Memory of Sevîr B. Chernetsov*, 2005, p. 274.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> J. MARKAKIS, *Ethiopia. Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, Addis Ababa 2006, pp. 66–67.

and others.<sup>45</sup> Beside spatial differences social ones need to be taken into consideration as well. Revolution was, as will be discussed later, a matter of urban intelligentsia, mainly students, who within the so-called *zemecha* campaign had a direct impact on revolutionary climate in the countryside, as shown by Donald Donham on the example of Maale in southern Ethiopia.<sup>46</sup>

Any colonial perspective thus needs to be looked upon as a historical process of regional power relations and has to be distinguished between various types of colonial perspective. The first one is obvious; the Eritrean struggle of independence after Eritrea was fully incorporated into the Ethiopian state in 1962. Somali inhabited Ogaden region can be put into the same category as the Somali speaking people tend to have only a minimal attachment to the Ethiopian state, no matter which historical period we are dealing with. Up to 1957, there were, for instance, no schools in the Ogaden despite many promises given by Haile Selassie. Outbreak of secessionist attempts in Ogaden gained momentum in 1963 after the imposition of the tax by the court and more openly in 1969 after Siad Barre's accession to power in Somalia.<sup>47</sup> At the very local level, there remained rivalry between Ogaden pastoralists and Ishaq clan which diversifies our understanding of the Somali nationalism.<sup>48</sup>

More important for the rise of nationalist movements was the regional rivalry inside Ethiopia alienating Shawa and Tigray regions.<sup>49</sup> Gebru Tareke has rightly stated that there exist two historical heritages in Ethiopia and two

<sup>45</sup> D. CRUMMEY, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia. From the Thirteenth to Twentieth Century*, Urbana, Chicago 2000, pp. 242–244.

<sup>46</sup> D. DONHAM, *Marxist Modern. An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*, Oxford 1999, pp. 45–49.

<sup>47</sup> Somali nationalism became an important mobilization factor for Somali speaking Issa clan in Djibouti. For further information see e.g. K. SHEHIM – J. SEARLING, *Djibouti and the Question of Afar Nationalism*, in: African Affairs, Vol. 79, 1980, p. 212.

<sup>48</sup> S. NEGASH, *Colonial Legacy, State Intervention and Secessionism: Paradoxical National Identities of the Ogaden and the Ishaq Clans in Ethiopia*, in: B. ZEWDE (ed.), *Society, State and Identity in African History*, Addis Ababa 2008, pp. 283–285.

<sup>49</sup> Similarly to this, some authors distinguish between more individualistic Amhara sub-culture and Tigray associated with group orientation. See e.g. T. NEGUSSIE and his article in Addis Standard, Vol. 2, No. 19, 2012, pp. 22–23.

historical narratives. The first one is related to Axum whose direct successor is said to be Tigray. The second heritage is connected with the unification of Ethiopia and the Shewan expansion. During the twentieth century, Tigray was always an economic backwater in Ethiopia, similar to many other regions. In other words, the Tigray-Shewan rivalry had a great impact on the development of various movements in Ethiopia and Eritrea including the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).<sup>50</sup>

### **Marxism as an Alternative**

Marxism was a powerful, and to a certain extent a logical response to European colonialism as it rhetorically gave space and accent to solidarity and equality to the people. The period of 1950s and 1960s was the heyday of Marxist and generally anti-colonial and leftist ideologies for the former colonial world in Africa and Asia. From a political point of view, Marxist regimes have never been the same and their main characteristic was – especially in Africa – eclecticism both in ideological interpretation or policy practice.<sup>51</sup> The rise of Marxism coincides with the development of nationalist movements in Africa, including Ethiopia, where the circumstances for the development of such movements and ideologies were little different. Still, we can find several similarities. Many of the nationalist movements in Africa began as student movements or were created around the workers' and trade unions, teachers and student associations, etc. In many parts of Africa, the situation after the Second World War led to a continuous development of the Middle class, educated elites, allowed young generation to study in Europe and gain education outside the country in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of its homeland after their return. For France, for instance, the main idea after the war was to create a “Europeanized” Africa under colonial rule with a modern

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<sup>50</sup> G. TAREKE, *The Ethiopian Revolution. War in the Horn of Africa*, New Haven 2009, pp. 76–79.

<sup>51</sup> C. YOUNG, *Ideology and Development in Africa*, New Haven 1982, pp. 26–27.

African working class as a crucial element.<sup>52</sup> Before 1941, education in Ethiopia was conducted in French language and many Ethiopians studied in France and thus it was no surprise that for many young Marxist intellectuals in Ethiopia, the French Revolution was the model. Marxism was by these elites viewed as an unchallengeable truth, representing “*a principled way to reject the West that had supported Haile Selassie and hence Ethiopia’s backwardness*”<sup>53</sup>.

Due to the cold war context and the fear of outside interference, many of the African governments preferred single party politics which was meant to keep integrity of states. What was common to almost all regimes in Africa, was a high level of centralization of administration which had to deal with many different demands of class, ethnic, and regional entities.<sup>54</sup>

Despite being out of the “colonial” Africa, Ethiopia was not an isolated island, and to a certain extent was influenced by global and continental changes. The same can be said about Ethiopia’s role in the development of nationalism in many African countries for which Ethiopia served as an independent symbol of African purity. Under the influence of external dynamics of the early 1960s, Ethiopia witnessed the creation of Confederation of Labor Unions in 1962 followed by the rise of student and teachers associations. This alone was not the most crucial aspect leading towards the development of nationalist movements in Ethiopia. Two factors need to be mentioned first. Primarily, the preferential treatment of the military forces from the Imperial court leading to pay increases alienated other actors including civil servants and trade unions whose demands were not met with such a success. Second factor was the rise of external influence coming from Marxist students. It has been documented that in 1974 shortly before the fall of Haile Selassie, of 4,500 university

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<sup>52</sup> T. CHAFER, *The End of Empire in French West Africa. France’s Successful Decolonization?*, Oxford 2002, pp. 119–120.

<sup>53</sup> M. ASRAT, *Modernity and Change in Ethiopia: 1941–1991. From feudalism to ethnic federalism (A Fifty years of Political and Historical Portrait of Ethiopia). A Participant-Observer Perspective*, Ph.D. Thesis, Troy 2003, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> P. MANNING, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880–1995*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 152–153.

graduate students in Ethiopia, 1,000 of them gained their education abroad.<sup>55</sup> Already in mid-1960s, the Ethiopian Student Movement came into being with branches in Addis Ababa, Western Europe and North America. These were the early days of active Marxist-Leninist student groups formulating ideology directed against the archaic feudal and capitalist order.

The early protests of Ethiopian students did not take place in Ethiopia that much but were rather a matter of several hundred students living in the United States of America during the 1960s who accused Haile Selassie of repression, torturing and any opposition voices, massacring peasants and called for the dismantling of the feudal regime with slogans like "*Feudalism no, people's democracy yes*".<sup>56</sup> Although ethnic issues had been probably in the minds of some of the intellectuals of that time, no one mentioned them directly.<sup>57</sup>

The power of Marxism as a mobilizing power has been experienced in many corners of the Third World and the Horn of Africa was no exception. From a broader perspective, the revolution in Ethiopia was seen by many Marxists as inspirational and for Fidel Castro the success of the Ethiopian revolution later in 1974 was "*of enormous importance for Africa*".<sup>58</sup> As admitted by a Pan-African activist Bereket Habte Selassie: "*Its appeal consists in the promise that it offers to the larger mass of populations that their lives would be better off after they shake off the shackles of oppression of the dominant classes, be they feudal lords or exploiting merchant classes.*"<sup>59</sup>

Ethiopia had long been seen as an island in Africa due to the lack of communication between the country and rest of the continent. This situation changed dramatically after the Second World War as Ethiopia became an active

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<sup>55</sup> A. TIRUNEH, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974–1987. A transformation from an aristocratic to a totalitarian autocracy*, Cambridge 1993, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> T. M. VESTAL, *The Lion of Judah. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the Shaping of Americans Attitudes Toward Africa*, Santa Barbara 2011, pp. 162–163.

<sup>57</sup> B. PRAEG, *Ethiopia and Political Renaissance in Africa*, New York 2006, p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> S. MALLEY – F. CASTRO, *Fidel Castro Interviewed on Ethiopia*, in: MERIP Reports, Vol. 62, 1977, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> B. HABTE SELASSIE, *Wounded Nation. How a Once Promising Eritrea was Betrayed and in Future compromised*, Trenton 2011, pp. 44–45.

member of Pan-African initiatives and Haile Selassie himself was seen as a noble man with a great reputation as the leader of a great African nation that survived the European colonialism and defeated one of the colonial powers. Beside Haile Selassie and other members of the government and diplomacy, it was the student exchange that enabled the spread of Pan-African and Marxist ideas into Ethiopia. At the end of 1950s with the coming of several hundred African students to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia was still perceived by its own citizens as a little different as found out by Balsvik.<sup>60</sup> But the decolonization period brought several changes into Ethiopia as well. With its aspirations to become the headquarters of African integration process resulting in the creation of the Organization of African Unity, Ethiopian intellectuals and students began to emphasize the African part of Ethiopia's history. Ethiopian students already in 1957 took part in Pan-African student conference in Kampala and although it is dubitable how much influence it had on the development of Pan-African ideology inside Ethiopia, it is clear that through these networks Ethiopian students became aware of foreign ideologies and foreign problems that other African societies had to deal with in regard to decolonization. And through these networks, many Ethiopian students came into contact with some radical Marxist theories presented for instance by Kwame Nkrumah.<sup>61</sup> This Pan-African leader visited Ethiopia in 1957. The year of Ghana's independence, which has a significant impact on formation of anti-colonial thinking among the younger generation of educated intellectuals.<sup>62</sup>

The rise of Marxism in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa can be observed in the same trajectories. At the end of colonial rule, almost all European powers allowed larger numbers of students to acquire higher education and generally the conditions for African colonial subjects were developing and improving. In Ethiopia, some reforms took place especially after the abortive coup on

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<sup>60</sup> R. R. BALSVIK, *Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952–1974*, Addis Ababa 2005, p. 206.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, pp. 206–209.

<sup>62</sup> ASRAT, pp. 78–79.

1960 and during the 1960s and early seventies the number of students as well as teachers grew rapidly. This helped a middle class to be developed mainly in bigger towns while the peasants lived in the same conditions as at the beginning of the twentieth century.

During the Derg regime, the Imperial policy of appointing officials from the center to the regions and local levels continued and the scenario remained the same, local officials had to be loyal only upward. Such a system again bypassed “*the indigenous structures of decision-making and identity formation*”.<sup>63</sup> Centralization remained in the hand of a narrow elite, this time the military forces which despite being supported at the beginning by student movements largely ignored what teachers and students thought. Already at the end of 1974, the military forces were looked upon as “*dishonorable replacement of the Imperial regime*”.<sup>64</sup>

Marxism influenced Ethiopia and especially its younger generation of students with the same intensity as it was in the rest of Africa during the time of decolonization. The rise of the Derg regime gave opportunity for many (not only) Oromo cadres to become a part of the ruling class while the regime itself fought against any kind of ethnic nationalism which emerged in the mid-1970s. Thus the Oromo society itself was polarized between supporters of the Derg military regime and those who stood against it and wished to reach a higher level of self-determination resulting in an independent Oromia which would give the region more stability, according to some.<sup>65</sup> It was during the Derg regime, and especially at the end of its existence when the colonial perspective began to be accented from the Oromo part of society. While the military junta lost the war in 1991 after a coordinated struggle of major liberation fronts, the colonial perspective prevailed with the unresolved social

<sup>63</sup> J. ABBINK, *Local Leadership and State Governance in Southern Ethiopia: From Charisma to Bureaucracy*, in: O. VAUGHAN (ed.), *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance in Africa*, Ibadan 2003, p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> R. R. BALSVIK, *The Quest for Expression: State and the University in Ethiopia under three regimes, 1952–2005*, Addis Ababa 2007, pp. 48–49.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with a political activist, Addis Ababa, 9 September 2009.

and ethnic disputes over the structure and shape of the Ethiopian state and the right to self-determination. On the other hand, Ethiopian state and its territory have been redefined by the independence of Eritrea which came into being in 1993.

The military regime of the Derg had a great impact on social relations in Ethiopia. Not only it established the land reform under the slogan “land to the tiller”, but due to its authoritarian and centralizing character, suspicious of any kind of opposition, it divided families and drastically changed collective relations in villages at any local level. Proponents of Marxism were privileged while those who remained “inactive” or “silent” could be imprisoned with no accusation. Such examples were not unique but counted thousands of innocent people.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1970s during the era of the rise of the so-called ethno-nationalist movements, many of these groupings were inspired by Marxism-Leninism, although we may expect a certain amount of eclecticism in ideological and practical issues. Pragmatic approach to reality and ethnic/national questions of Ethiopian regimes can be well observable on Gerard Chaliand’s note: “*Yesterday when the world was apparently simple and straightforward, it was reassuring to see the United States backing Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, who was in turn fighting against a liberation movement backed by ‘progressive’ countries. Today we have the reverse pattern: a regime in Ethiopia claiming to be Marxist-Leninist suppressing liberation movements in Eritrea and the Ogaden, and behaving imperially.*”<sup>67</sup>

Eritrean nationalism, then represented by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), although based in the “Semitic-speaking” areas, felt the “*necessity to create a disciplined nationalist liberation army impervious to social, ethnic, regional, tribal, religious and ideological divisions*”.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Personal communication with a former political prisoner, Addis Ababa, 7 September 2012.

<sup>67</sup> G. CHALIAND, *The Guerilla Struggle*, in: B. DAVIDSON (ed.), *Behind the War in Eritrea*, Nottingham 1980, p. 53.

<sup>68</sup> D. POOL, *From Guerillas to Government. The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front*, Oxford 2001, p. 35.

Not only these internal aspects could shape the face of nationalism in Eritrea, but also external forces usually came into play especially during the Cold war. African conflicts were thus largely prolonged and influenced by foreign and global dynamics. In Eritrea, EPLF sought to isolate itself from these processes and external links, be they through an exile leadership or supportive regional states.<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What we can see nowadays is also a part of rediscovering of its “glorious” past through publications usually written by foreign observers about Ethiopia, the court, daily life, diversity there and so on.<sup>70</sup> The same can be said about a perpetual reprinting and reexamining of the Adowa victory in 1896 as there are plenty of materials written in any form or shape, including version for children, which reproduce one of the most important sources of Ethiopian nationalism and integrity.<sup>71</sup>

One of the major problems of the study of nationalism in Ethiopia is that it to a certain extent uses the same stereotypes as earlier European historiography and anthropology which created the dichotomy between “Us” and “Them”. Thus the accent of local and regional histories, instead of ethnic histories, is needed in order to understand the complexity and diversity of modern and contemporary history of Ethiopia without preconceived notions and continuous stereotypes. The effort to accent difference without a proper understanding of Ethiopian history in its local, regional, religious and socio-economic colors can only bring negative results contributing to further politicization of history and relations between major groups in the country.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, 55–56.

<sup>70</sup> See e.g. S. JOHNSON, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, Addis Ababa 2012, first published 1759; M. de Salviac, *An Ancient People. Great African Nation The Oromo*, Addis Ababa 2008, first published 1901.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. J. FRANCIS, *The Battle of Adwa*, Addis Ababa 2002; L. G. DILEBO, *The Italo-Ethiopian War of 1887–1896. From Dogali to Adwa*, Addis Ababa 1996.

<sup>72</sup> Personal communication with Tesema Ta'a, Addis Ababa, 4 September 2009.

Politicization of history as well as politicization of ethnicity and ethnic histories can also be seen as a part of yet undeveloped political system of contemporary Ethiopia lacking any significant signs of civil society which allows politicized narratives of any kind to be reproduced without any critical understanding or without “ethnic lenses”. As stated by a scholar from the Addis Ababa University: *“We have adopted the hardware of a political system, but have not adopted the software, and that is how it goes from Haile Selassie through the Derg until nowadays.”*<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary for future generations of Ethiopian and Ethopianist scholars, and generally Africanists to examine and perceive history without those lenses that on one hand glorify certain events of the big history while ignoring local histories and narratives, and on the other hand those lenses that bring into the forefront rather dubious and undeveloped issues of controversial local histories putting ethnicity and ethnic narratives as the basis for historical as well as contemporary understanding. The debate over “colonial” history of Ethiopia can be seen as a part of these issues and needs to be examined properly without giving advantage or preference to only one of the studied issues, whether it is ethnic, economic, social, religious, or political one, and thus to “decolonize” academic debates in regard to modern history of Ethiopia.

### Abstract

Ethiopia has never been colonized except for a short period of Italian occupation in 1930s. It would seem that the absence of European colonialism contributed to a rather different development of nationalism due to many different historical factors and experiences. However, since 1950s, and more openly from the 1960s we can see the rise of nationalism in Ethiopia which used the same “colonial” perspectives as their other African counterparts. When civil war broke out in 1962 and Eritrea began to struggle for independence, it had a direct impact on other nationalist movements in Ethiopia itself, namely the

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<sup>73</sup> Interview, Addis Ababa, 6 September 2012.

Oromo nationalism. Moreover, in the era of decolonization, Marxism played a role of an inspirational revolutionary ideology in many corners of Africa. The same can be said about the Oromo nationalism, as it was the main bearer of Marxism which then resulted in series of uprising leading to the deposition of Haile Sellassie. Suddenly, demands on democratization, self-determination, equality, and human rights began to be articulated with the same intensity as, for instance, in Rwanda. Later on, demands on “decolonization”, i.e. dismantling of “traditional” Imperial régime formed a part of the “social revolution”. Haile Sellassie’s regime, once hailed as modernizing, began to be seen as backward and in many senses “colonizing” type of rule. It had also a direct impact on national identity and/or identities, because the nationalist movements redefined centuries long “map” of Ethiopia by giving accent to the diverse nature of Ethiopia’s population.

**Keywords**

Africa; Ethiopia; Colonialism; Decolonization; Marxism; Ethnicity